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For King and Country: Reconsidering the Great War Soldier in Britain, 1914-1945

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FOR KING AND COUNTRY: RECONSIDERING THE GREAT WAR SOLDIER IN
BRITAIN, 1914-1945

by

Nicholas John Schaefer

A Thesis
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August 2017

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BRITAIN, 1914-1945

by Nicholas John Schaefer

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ABSTRACT

FOR KING AND COUNTRY: RECONSIDERING THE GREAT WAR SOLDIER IN BRITAIN, 1914-1945

by Nicholas John Schaefer

August 2017

In the postwar period historians argued that the horrors of the First World War created an irreparable disconnect between soldiers' pre and postwar lives. Scholars led by Paul Fussell and Eric Leed presented the Great War as a futile waste of life for a meaningless cause. This historiography argues that the generation which survived the Western Front returned to Britain as jaded shells of their former selves unable to relate to their old lives and families. Bitterness and apathy replaced belief in cause and country. In contrast, recent historiography asserts that British soldiers maintained belief in their country's cause and adjusted normally to civilian life. This project expands on the ideas and themes found in these works by analyzing British soldiers who served in both World Wars. Rather than being a generation of detached cynics who lost faith in fighting for king and country, many veterans actively sought ways to contribute when their country was once again at war.

This study examines soldiers who served on the Western Front in the Great War and went on to serve their country in some capacity during the Second World War. The soldiers examined in this study experienced the full extent of the horrors of World War I, yet still felt compelled to offer their services. Using soldiers' personal papers located in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives in London and literary sources this thesis

argues that soldiers' experiences of the Second World War were influenced by their First World War service.

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DEDICATION

This thesis would not have happened without my awesome support system. Thank you to Olivia and Anna Rikki for being a constant beacon of positivity amidst this daunting challenge and believing in my ability to accomplish this. Thank you to Ryan and Will for being a source of stability and sanity amidst this crazy thing known as “life.” Special thanks to Rachel for being a great friend, confidante, and motivational speaker. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to Cindy, Chelsea, and Nick. My summer in the U.K. would not have been the same without you guys. I’m ready for our next adventure. “Photo, Photo!”

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

The view of the First World War represented by the famous British “War Poets” continues to influence and drive popular discussion of the conflict. The dark and brooding works of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Robert Graves have become synonymous with the British experience of the war. In his seminal work, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell remarked, “A poet, we remember Aristotle saying, is one who has mastered the art of telling lies successfully, that is, dramatically, interestingly. And what is a Graves? A Graves is a tongue-in-cheek neurasthenic farceur whose material is ‘facts.’”¹ This passage is part of Fussell’s description of Graves’ overly dramatic and fictionalized war memoir, *Goodbye to All That*. Graves admitted in 1931 that *Goodbye to All That* was written explicitly to entertain and to generate wealth.² Graves’ memoir is one of the key works that has influenced the popular perception of the First World War. Yet, the story does not end there. For all of his writings depicting the horrors of war, desensitization to violence, growing feelings of dissent and bitterness; Graves tried to volunteer and reenlist in the military when the Second World War broke out in 1939 and ultimately served his country as an Air Raid Warden. There is a distinct disconnect here between Graves’ words in *Good-Bye to All That* and his later actions. Yet, he is remembered for the former rather than the latter.

Scholars led by Eric Leed and Paul Fussell have argued the generation that survived the catastrophe on the Western Front returned to Britain as cynical, bitter, and jaded shells of their former selves unable to relate to their old lives and their families.

¹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: NY, Oxford University Press, 1975), 222.

² Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 220.

Recent historiography has challenged the dark “War Poet” view of the First World War asserting that British soldiers maintained belief in their country’s cause and adjusted normally back to civilian life. This project expands on these revisionist arguments by analyzing British soldiers who served in both World Wars. Rather than being a generation of detached cynics that lost faith in fighting for king and country, many veterans actively volunteered to defend Great Britain during the Second World War.

As a recent historian has remarked, “Rightly or wrongly, and to varying degrees, the vast majority of the British people, soldiers and civilians alike, came to believe in 1914 that... domination by Germany would be a disaster. Most still believed it in 1918 and many would continue to believe it for their entire lives.”³ The generation which returned home from World War I believed in the importance of their service and continued to do so for the rest of their lives. Later, these veterans also sought ways to participate in the Second World War. Some men returned to the field and fought for their country directly on the battlefield. However, many veterans also took on important roles in Civil Defense working for Air Raid Precautions (ARP), working as fire watchers, or serving with the Home Guard to protect Britain from the horrors of the Blitz. The exact number of veterans involved in Civil Defense is unknown. However, historian Jessica Hammett notes, “We do not know how many of these were ex-servicemen but anecdotal evidence suggests that they were numerous: at a wardens’ post in Kilburn, London, out of seven full-time male wardens four were veterans; in Greenwich one warden wrote that

³ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (New York: NY, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

the ‘old timers’ of civil defence were ‘mostly veterans of 1914-18’; while another stressed that in Wembly the ‘old soldiers are sorted out to do their share.’”⁴

Focusing on several case studies, this thesis builds on the recent historiography which argues that British soldiers remained committed to fighting for king and country in the face of the horrors of total war. All of the subjects analyzed in this study volunteered in either 1914 or 1915, before Britain enacted a draft to increase the number of soldiers on the Western Front. These men all actively served in the trenches of the Western Front, most were wounded at some point during the war, and they experienced the horrific Battle of the Somme in the summer of 1916. The men discussed in this study should therefore in theory conform to the popular tragicized view of the war, yet they returned home to their families after the Great War and sought to serve their country again during World War II.

This thesis is rooted in the revisionist historiography of British soldiers’ experiences during the First World War. The first major work on combat and morale for World War I soldiers was Eric J. Leed’s *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*.⁵ Leed argues that the First World War fundamentally changed the lives of those that fought in it and that their wartime experience was irreconcilable with the lives they left behind. He argues that, “Few, if any veterans considered their war experience even comparable to their lives before or after the war. Many spoke of having inhabited two

⁴ Jessica Hammett, “‘It’s in the Blood Isn’t It?’ The Contested Status of First World War Veterans in Second World War Civil Defence,” *Cultural and Social History* (April 10, 2017): 2-3.

⁵ Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

distinct worlds, of having seemed two distinct persons.”⁶ Leed’s argument about soldiers’ pursuits to inscribe meaning to their war experience are drawn from Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*.⁷ Fussell’s work argued that the war shattered those who had fought from their prewar lives and that the horrors of the war were so unprecedented that soldiers had to create new cultural forms of expression to cope and communicate.

Paul Fussell’s work is a literary critique and historical study based around an analysis of the War Poets of the Great War. This group was comprised of junior officers who served in the trenches and came predominantly from the middle and upper echelons of British society. Leed’s and Fussell’s view of the Great War is the popular view of World War I that still persists outside of academic circles. However, scholars have refuted their arguments through careful reevaluation of the historical evidence. This thesis uses a similar source base as Fussell’s, looking at the young junior officers in the trenches, while building on the current historiography that has challenged his representation of the war.

The most important book to challenge Leed’s thesis is J. G. Fuller’s *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918*.⁸ This book serves as the foundation for the most recent scholarship on morale in the British Army

⁶ Leed, *No Man’s Land*, 2.

⁷ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: NY, Oxford University Press, 1975).

⁸ J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991). Recent historians have also expanded greatly on Fuller’s work and reached similar conclusions. See also Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale, and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, UK: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

during the First World War. In addition to refuting many of the conclusions in their works, Fuller argues that scholars such as Fussell and Leed could only paint a partial picture of the soldiers' wartime experience due to their overemphasis of life in the trenches.⁹ Soldiers did not spend the entirety of the war in the cold, earthy mud. Instead, soldiers rotated between the trenches of the Western Front and the basecamps behind the lines where they spent the majority of their time.¹⁰ He argues that, "the phases of service life overseas were in fact so interlinked as to make it difficult to understand any part of the picture in isolation from the rest."¹¹ Any study of soldiers' experiences at the front thus must pay attention to life on the line and at camp.¹²

Leed argued that the experience of war shattered soldiers' prewar identities and forced them to create new ones rooted in their wartime lives as soldiers. Fuller vehemently disagrees with Leed's thesis and argues instead that identity for British soldiers was primarily rooted in their prewar lives and the continuities of British civilian life behind the lines. Rather than an entirely alien experience, Fuller's research shows that life behind the lines was full of connections to prewar British civilian life. Camp life was centered around canteens and other avenues for recreation. The prewar sensations of sports such as soccer, cricket, and rugby along with music hall culture created a certain continuity of life at home amidst the foreign hell of war. The encouragement and

⁹ Fuller also deeply engages with and disputes the claims made by Ashworth's work as well. Ashworth's work is part of the Fussell and Leed school of thought. See also Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980).

¹⁰ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, 58.

¹¹ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, 6.

¹² James McPherson asked very similar questions about Union and Confederate soldiers in his study of the American Civil War. See James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997).

promotion of recreation and sport arose naturally from both the trained military officers from the British public schools as well as from officers promoted from within the working-class infantry.¹³ Fuller ultimately concludes that, “The continuing strength of civilian cultural values, and the transfer of institutions which supported them, may have helped to diminish the sundering and to ease the assimilation of the soldiers back into the mainstream after the war.”¹⁴ Fuller’s conclusions are instrumental to this thesis. The soldiers analyzed in this study would not have volunteered to serve in the Second World War if they had felt disconnected from their home after their experiences in World War I.

Current scholarship also demonstrates that the war did not create a disconnect between the soldiers at the front and their families back home. Michael Roper’s work *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* argues that the war experience united families despite the physical separation.¹⁵ Roper directly challenges Paul Fussell and Eric Leed and argues that their analysis has created an artificial gap between soldiers and their “homes.” Roper notes, “When these historians mention ‘home,’ what they generally mean is the nation-state or civil society, not the family. The targets of veteran anger, says Leed, were ‘those in authority, the profiteer, the puffy generals and the politicians... ‘Home’ for these historians is primarily a *political entity* and not, as most veterans probably imagined it, a shorthand for loved ones, brick and mortar, a garden, or a

¹³ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, 117.

¹⁴ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, 176.

¹⁵ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (New York: NY, Palgrave, 2009).

neighborhood.”¹⁶ Roper uses this latter definition of “home” in the larger context of his work.¹⁷

Fussell argued that the frequency of mail on the Western Front actually added to the divide between soldiers and their families. It added to the divide between those in the warzone and those comfortable back home in Britain. Roper and other historians disagree. Roper asserts that, “The comparatively fast post between Britain and the Western Front allowed correspondents to establish reliable routines for keeping contact and similar time zones, weather, and seasons intensified the feeling of proximity.”¹⁸ These common factors aided in creating a special level of relatability.¹⁹

In addition to combatting Leed’s and Fussell’s understanding of soldiers, historians have reevaluated the First World War as a whole. World War II has been celebrated as the triumph of Western Democracy after the chaos of the first half of the twentieth century. In contrast, those who fought in and endured the Great War have become tragic figures that engaged in a futile effort over nothing. The memory of the First World War has been permanently tainted by the memory of the Second World War. Yet, those in 1918 did not feel as if they had just wasted their lives and precious economic resources for a wasted cause. The British citizens of 1918 believed they had just secured peace after the horrors of industrial total war. This shift in the historiography

¹⁶ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 13.

¹⁷ See also Ilana Bet-El, *Conscripts: Forgotten Men of the Great War* (New York, NY: The History Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 53.

¹⁹ Current historians also argue that civilians at home were able to relate to soldiers’ experiences quite well. German zeppelin raids on London provided an avenue for those at home to relate to the bombing on the Western Front. See Susan Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

is represented by the works of historians such as Adrian Gregory, Gary Sheffield, and Michael Neiberg.²⁰ Their works argue that British soldiers knew exactly why they were fighting the Great War and also argue that military tactics evolved and adapted effectively over the course of the war.

In particular, Adrian Gregory directly clashes with Eric Leed and Paul Fussell. Leed argued that the horror of the war made soldiers' prewar lives incomprehensible. What exactly was life like before the war? Gregory argues that the reality of the low living standards and abject poverty that the working class left behind was worse than what they experienced at the front. He illustrates this by looking at two different poor working-class areas of England. He analyzes a contemporary work written about the Lambeth neighborhood and compares it with wartime casualty rates. The families in this study were not the poorest of the poor and were not representative of the riff-raff of society. Gregory notes that for the families included in the study, "The death rate amongst the children of these sober, thrifty, and generally employed working-class families was one in four. This is roughly double the death rate of adult males in the armed forces."²¹ His ultimate conclusion is that the horror of prewar poverty enabled working-class soldiers to adapt to the conditions of the front. For many, the war provided the means of a better life and raised the standards of living due to the economic boom of the wartime economy and government rationing of food.

²⁰Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Gary Sheffield, *A Short History of the First World War* (Oneworld Publications, 2014); Michael Neiberg, *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2013).

²¹ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 278.

This thesis builds on the revisionist works that have reevaluated the Great War and carries this scholarship into the Second World War. Fuller, Roper, and other historians have successfully argued that the Great War did not create a desensitized generation of disillusioned soldiers. These men served and returned home to their communities. While they may have doubted certain aspects of the war and questioned the decisions of their government, they nevertheless remained largely committed to belief in the British cause. If the wartime generation returned home as bitter, cynical, and jaded while shunning any sense of British pride, why did so many of these men volunteer to serve in some capacity during the Second World War? The soldiers analyzed in this thesis serve as a foil to Fussell's War Poets. These soldiers are well-educated members of the middle and upper classes. This is important for two key reasons. First, the men used for this study are from the same socioeconomic and educational background as the War Poets. Second, they are representative of the types of recruits that volunteered for Kitchener's New Army. Their junior officer status placed them in dangerous situations and made them statistically more likely to die than working class soldiers.²²

As such, their letters, diaries, memoirs, poetry, and photographs are the key to understanding their experience. What scared them? What motivated them? What were they thinking about during their downtime? How did they respond to the challenges of war or deal with the challenges of peacetime during the interwar years? What role did family play? The answers to these questions are in their personal papers.

²² Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 289.

The majority of this project's research is from the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives housed at King's College in London. This archive contains numerous collections of personal papers and related documents. Most of the archives' records date from the late nineteenth century through the end of the twentieth century. This includes soldiers that served in both of the World Wars. Included with each collection is a detailed list of the contents within including short biographical details to help the researcher get a sense of what is contained in the soldiers' records. Many of the collections contain unpublished memoirs. These memoirs are crucial to this project. Memoirs written after the events contained within can be loaded with personal biases and judgments. However, these kinds of biases are not a problem. They reflect what the soldier thought of his experiences and are important for piecing together the larger picture of how the soldier processed his war. Several of the collections from this archive provide unique insight into the period of the World Wars.

The Lt. Gen. Sir Thomas Jacomb Hutton collection contains unpublished memoirs covering his experiences in both World Wars. His recollections discuss important issues including British determination, will and morale, desensitization to violence, and reflections on the onset of "peace" at the start of the interwar period. While many veterans wrote their memoirs of both wars later in life, Hutton's two memoirs were written directly after each conflict and provide his fresh insights on his recent experiences.

The Paul Lucien Maze collection contains numerous letters spanning across both World Wars. Most of the correspondence is from the Second World War and reflects Maze's time with the Home Guard. While working for the Home Guard during the Blitz,

Maze wrote extensively to soldiers out in the field providing moral support. The majority of the letters in this collection are letters of gratitude from soldiers abroad in thanks for Maze's words of encouragement and support. His letters provide an intriguing look into the various ways that men participated in the larger British national cause.

Another important collection for this thesis is the Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection. Spicer served as a junior officer on the Western Front during the Battle of the Somme in 1916. This collection contains the intimate correspondences between Spicer and his family during the war. More importantly, the collection also contains Spicer's postwar letters to his comrades. These letters contain reminiscences and memorials for their fallen fellows and shows the process by which these men made sense of their wartime experiences. Additionally, this collection also contains the letters from Spicer's son who served in the exact same unit during the Second World War.

The Col. Roderick MacLeod collection contains his extensively detailed memoirs of the First World War as well as his contributions to Operation Fortitude in World War II. There are multiple copies of his unpublished manuscript in the collection including his extensive handwritten notes.

The most peculiar collection utilized in this thesis is the Lt. Col. John Matthew Blakiston-Houston collection. Blakiston-Houston served in World War I as part of the tank corps in France. His World War II service was spent in Africa. His celebratory account of both wars is his unpublished memoir, "I'd Live It Again."

To demonstrate how and why these Great War veterans sought service in World War II, this thesis opens with the chapter, "Stupidity Plus Tragedy Equals Futility": Reevaluating the First World War and the War Poets. It explores the popular view of the

war and the historiographical debate of the classical Fussell and Leed interpretation of the war. This chapter then focuses on a reevaluation of the War Poets themselves. One of the main tenets of Fussell's argument is that the poetry and darkness of the War Poets translated into a cynical detachment that the soldiers brought home with them after the war. This chapter argues that dark poetry and angry letters expressing dissenting opinions about the war effort do not necessarily correlate to disconnect with the home front or even lasting anti-British or patriotic sentiment. To do so, the chapter provides an analysis of two of Fussell's key subjects: Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon. Both of these men lived long lives after the Great War. Their later actions and experiences of the Second World War reflect men who came to terms with their First World trauma and made peace with their wartime service.

After exploring the famous War Poets, the thesis then moves to explore the lives and experiences of other British soldiers. The next chapter focuses on exploring the World War I service of these men and considers the factors which united them to each other and to their home country through common shared experiences. This chapter examines the importance of communal relationships reflected in the personal letters during the war and their postwar correspondence. This chapter also analyzes the role of veteran interaction in processing their wartime experiences. Analysis of these soldiers' letters from the 1960s and 1970s shows the ways in which Great War veterans took personal ownership of their war experiences and the way that they shaped their own memory of the war.

The final chapter explores veterans' response to World War II. Veterans of World War I volunteered for their country in various capacities during the Second World War.

Some veterans served in abroad in combat while others served in key military advisory roles. Others served by assisting in the various avenues of civil defense. Service to the Home Guard or serving as an ARP warden in defense against the Blitz provided the opportunity for veterans too old to serve in combat to actively contribute to the defense of their country in resistance against the Nazis. This chapter focuses on three different case studies: a prominent member of the Home Guard leadership, a career military officer, and a World War I veteran that offered his services, but was unable to serve. In addition to showing their ongoing commitment to service, the analysis reveals that these men's First World War experiences had a direct impact on their experience of the Second World War.

CHAPTER II - "STUPIDITY PLUS TRAGEDY EQUALS FUTILITY":

REEVALUATING THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE WAR POETS

Arguably the two most famous British poems from the First World War are Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" and Wilfred Owen's "*Dulce et Decorum Est.*" Brooke's work is held up as an example of the naiveté of the early days of the war which cherished notions of fighting for king and country. His work patriotically proclaimed, "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field that is forever England. There shall be / In that rich earth a richer dust concealed... / A body of England's, breathing English air, / Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home."²³ Brooke's work has been viewed at best as hopelessly foolish and at worst maligned for its patriotism and stern belief in a British cause.

Brooke's poem is juxtaposed with Owen's dark lament capturing the horrors of industrial warfare. Owen solemnly wrote, "My friend, you would not tell with such high zest / To children ardent for some desperate glory, / The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori.*"²⁴ It is easy to use these two individuals as case studies and argue that their poetry reflects their ultimate worldview and their final thoughts on the war. Their story ended with their deaths. However, what about the War Poets that survived the war? What legacy did they leave behind in their poetry and how reflective was this poetry of their post-war lives?

²³ Rupert Brooke, "The Soldier" in *Collected Poems* (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 2010), 139.

²⁴ Wilfred Owen, "*Dulce et Decorum Est*" in *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1965), 55.

The legacy of the British War Poets is inescapable in the study of the First World War. Their writings make up much of the popular memory and perception of the war. Early historians of the First World War such as literary scholar Paul Fussell and historian Eric J. Leed rooted their works in the view of the war from the trenches via the lens of the War Poets.²⁵ For these historians, World War I shattered the soldiers' lives and caused a drastic separation from their pre-war and post-war selves. They argued that the generation that returned from the Western Front no longer held dear the values of the Victorian and Edwardian years which placed a heavy emphasis on martial masculinity and the glorification of the British Empire.

This chapter reevaluates the War Poets who survived the First World War by looking at the life and works of the famous Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon, two poets synonymous with any discussion of the Great War, and argues that their war poetry does not reflect a lifelong disillusionment and disdain for their country and the war effort. It is possible to capture the accurate notion that war is hell on earth and produce dark cathartic writings and yet still find meaning and value in your national service. This chapter does this by looking at the later writings of Graves and Sassoon to show that they came to make sense of their First World War experiences and found a way to make peace with what they had lived through.

The view of World War I as a waste of time and effort took root in the post-World War II era. For many, the years spent in the muck and mire of the Western Front were rendered moot by the coming onset of the Second World War. The outbreak of World

²⁵ Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: NY, Oxford University Press, 1975).

War II within a few short decades of the Great War seemed to invalidate the First World War as a wasted effort which had solved nothing and had not brought lasting peace to Europe. World War II was viewed as the triumphant struggle against the evil Nazi regime contrasted with the seemingly unclear origins of the First World War. As the historian Adrian Gregory explains, “By a slow and hesitant process, the British came to renounce the war. They are still renouncing it. The verdict of popular culture is more or less unanimous. The First World War was stupid, tragic, and futile... Stupidity plus tragedy equals futility. Even academics can get in on the act here.”²⁶ However, as Gregory points out about the generation of 1914, “What the British have forgotten is that in 1914, throughout the First World War, and for some time afterwards the majority of the British people believed precisely the same thing about the Kaiser’s Germany.”²⁷ World War II does not invalidate or rob the First World War of its meaning. History is not lived in reverse. Nevertheless, the fatalist view of the First World War still predominates in the popular memory of the war.

The historian Eric J. Leed’s work, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, posits several of the main arguments that make up the popular perception of the First World War. He argues that the outbreak of war was greeted with enthusiasm as an escape from the problems of modernity, that the war caused an unbridgeable divide between those on the Western Front and those back home, and that the men who returned home were not able to adjust back to normal life after the war. Drawing on the psychologist Erik Erikson, he asserts, “In war men were ‘estranged’ from their societies,

²⁶ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (New York: NY, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

²⁷ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 5

and one must take this estrangement literally; they were ‘made’ strange to the men and things of their past and made strange to themselves.”²⁸ For Leed, the war separated the soldier from everything that was familiar about his previous life. The war separated him from those back homes while the horrors of war changed his personality and sense of identity. The perversion of the familiar such as technology by the war further disconnected the soldier from his old life. Leed argues that all of these issues combined to cause difficulty for veterans to readjust to life after the war.²⁹ This is the view of World War I as presented by the War Poets. Leed’s work is heavily indebted to Paul Fussell’s work on the British War Poets, *The Great War and Modern Memory*.

In Robert Graves’ own history of the interwar period, he described the First World War as having created “two Britains.” He claimed, “The two Britains were: The Fighting Forces, meaning literally the soldiers and sailors who had fought, as opposed to garrison and line-of-communication troops, and the Rest, including the Government. They talked such different languages that men home on leave after months on active service felt like visitors to a foreign country and often expressed great relief to be back on duty with their units.”³⁰

However, historians have greatly called into question the assertions by Graves and earlier scholars that there was an unbridgeable gap between the home front and the Western Front. In his work, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* historian Michael Roper builds on other historians such as Joanna Bourke and Ilana Bet-

²⁸ Leed, *No Man’s Land*, 4.

²⁹ Leed, *No Man’s Land*, 201-203.

³⁰ Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939*, Reissue edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 4.

El to argue that the gap between soldiers and the home front was not as extreme as previous historians have presented.³¹ Roper points out that the advances in technology and communication allowed for the rapid transmission of mail and care packages from the home front to the basecamps behind the trenches and enabled families to keep in touch relatively well. With the onset of German zeppelin attacks on London, civilians experienced the effects of total war in a significant way. As historian Suzan Grayzel notes in her work, “Even those at the ‘front’ expressed their concern; ‘British soldiers, nurses, and others in France’ felt real sympathy with Londoners... ‘We can dodge shells in dug-outs and so on... but in London it must be terrible.’”³² Even without a necessarily one-to-one correlation of experience, families back home could relate in their own way to the soldiers’ experience abroad.

Despite recent historiographical developments, the elephant in the room for any historian who studies the First World War is the persistent legacy of the dark and haunting works of the War Poets. How does one make sense of these writings in the context of the surrounding war? As historian Alexander Watson asserts, “The disgruntlement and war-weariness felt by soldiers, however, by no means automatically translated themselves into a rejection of the war.”³³ Yet, this is the popular view that continues to persist. Paul Fussell’s work has left his mark and influence upon the

³¹ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (New York: NY, Palgrave, 2009), 8. See also Ilana Bet-El, *Conscripts: Forgotten Men of the Great War* (New York, NY: The History Press, 2009).

³² Susan Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 41.

³³ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale, and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, UK: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 77.

profession. However, Fussell's work ignores the later careers of two of his most prominent subjects: Robert Graves, and Siegfried Sassoon. A study of these men's later lives and post-war careers does not find men that were permanently destroyed by their wartime experiences. Rather, both Graves and Sassoon were able to come to terms with and find meaning and closure in their experiences of the First World War.

Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon were two young officers who served in the British Army during the First World War. The two men were both part of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.³⁴ They formed a fierce friendship over the course of the war. Graves' poem "Two Fusiliers" captured this friendship. He wrote, "And there's no need of pledge or oath / To bind our lovely friendship fast, / By firmer stuff close bound enough." Graves connected their strong friendship to their war experiences. He concluded, "By friendship blossoming from mud, / By Death: we faced him, and we found / Beauty in Death, / In dead men, breath."³⁵

Sassoon was twenty-seven years old at the outbreak of the First World War. He viewed the war as an opportunity to make a life for himself. Prior to the war, Sassoon was trying to make ends meet as a writer.³⁶ Robert Graves was only nineteen when the war began. Forced into the life of a scholar by his family, Graves saw the outbreak of war as the opportunity to escape from his life of academia.³⁷ Graves noted, "I had just finished with Charterhouse and gone up to Harlech, when England declared war on

³⁴ Helen McPhail and Philip Guest, *Graves and Sassoon: On the Trail of the Poets of the Great War* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2009), 21.

³⁵ Robert Graves, "Two Fusiliers" in *Fairies and Fusiliers* (Folcroft Library Editions, 1919), 19.

³⁶ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 24.

³⁷ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 24.

Germany. A day or two later I decided to enlist. In the first place, though the papers predicted only a very short war – over by Christmas at the outside – I hoped that it might last long enough to delay my going to Oxford in October, which I dreaded.”³⁸

As the war progressed, Sassoon and Graves both experienced front-line combat conditions. Notably, both were both involved in the infamous Battle of the Somme. Graves was injured during the battle and was mistakenly pronounced dead as a result of his wounds.³⁹ Graves made light of the incident in his autobiography. He noted, “The only inconvenience that this death caused was that Cox’s Bank stopped my pay, and I had difficulty in persuading it to honour my cheques.”⁴⁰ *The Times* retraction of Graves’ death announcement noted, “Captain Robert Graves, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, officially reported died of wounds, wishes to inform his friends that is recovering from his wounds at Queen Alexandra’s Hospital, Highgate, N.”⁴¹ The initial news of Graves’ death also inspired Sassoon’s poem, “To His Dead Body.”⁴² Sassoon wrote, “Yet, though my dreams that throng the darkened stair / Can bring me no report of how you fare, / Safe quit of wars, I speed you on your way, / Up lonely, glimmering fields to find new day.”⁴³ Sassoon lamented his friend’s death, but took comfort in the fact that war had ended for the dead.

³⁸ Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That: An Autobiography* (New York: Vintage, 1958), 67.

³⁹ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 108-109.

⁴⁰ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 227.

⁴¹ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 227.

⁴² Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 232.

⁴³ Siegfried Sassoon, “To His Dead Body” in *War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (New York: Courier Corporation, 2004), 19.

As Sassoon's lament suggests, both he and Graves became disillusioned with the war as it stretched on far longer than either of them had initially expected it would. The death of close friends and fellow officers particularly impacted Graves and Sassoon over the course of the war. The death of David Thomas in 1916 had a profound effect on both of them.⁴⁴ Sassoon's poems "A Subaltern," "The Last Meeting," and "A Letter Home" were all written about David Thomas.⁴⁵ In 1917 Sassoon made a statement renouncing the war and accusing the British government of needlessly protracting the war. Rather than be court martialed, Sassoon went before a medical board and was sent to Craiglockhart Hospital in Scotland for neurasthenia, or shell shock.⁴⁶ While at Craiglockhart Sassoon, and later Graves, became friends with Wilfred Owen.⁴⁷ Sassoon returned to combat, but as a result of an injury in the summer of 1918 finished the war from a British hospital. The two friends grew apart in later years over Graves' sensationalist autobiography, *Good-Bye to All That*.⁴⁸

Siegfried Sassoon is famous for his poems from the First World War. His poetry reflects the steady growth of Sassoon's disillusionment over the course of the war. Some of his poems conveyed the reality of the everyday experience of trench warfare. An example of one of these types of poems is "Attack." Sassoon began the poem with a description of the ominous early hours of morning at the start of an assault. He wrote, "In the wild purple of the glow'ring sun / Smouldering through spouts of drifting smoke that shroud / The menacing scarred slope; and one by one, / Tanks creep and topple forward

⁴⁴ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 67.

⁴⁵ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 67.

⁴⁶ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 132-134.

⁴⁷ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 137.

⁴⁸ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, XI.; McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 184

to the wire.” The poem continues on to describe the men as they began the assault. He continued, “The barrage roars and lifts. Then, clumsily bowed / with bombs and guns and shovels and battle-gear, / Men jostle and climb to, meet the bristling fire / Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear.” He concluded the poem by noting the emotional and mental toil of the battle on these advancing soldiers. He concluded, “They leave their trenches, going over the top, / While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists, / and hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists, / Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!”⁴⁹ This poem captured the experience of battle on the Western Front. The poem describes the intense emotions involved when soldiers went over the top of the trenches and crossed into No Man’s Land to make their assault.

Sassoon is perhaps most remembered for his biting cynical poems that are full of disgust and vitriol for the high command of the British army, the British government, and the home front. Two of his most famous poems are “The General” and “Blighters.” Both of these poems provide a sardonic critique of the people that were in charge of managing the British war effort. “The General” is an attack on British military high command. Sassoon wrote, “‘Good-Morning, good-morning!’ the General said / When we met him last week on our way to the line. / Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of ‘em dead, / And we’re cursing his staff for incompetent swine.” The poem mocks the general and his staff with disdain. Sassoon continued, “‘He’s a cheery old car,’ grunted Harry to Jack / As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack. / But he did for them both by his plan of

⁴⁹ Siegfried Sassoon, “Attack” in *War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (New York: Courier Corporation, 2004), 52.

attack.”⁵⁰ This poem portrays the general and his command as incompetent men that wasted and threw away the lives of their soldiers.

British popular culture reflects the lasting impact of the imagery of this poem. For instance, the famed BBC sitcom *Blackadder Goes Forth* portrays the First World War as a futile effort led by incompetent generals of the like depicted by Sassoon’s poem. In one particularly mocking scene, the show depicts Field Marshall Douglas Haig planning an assault. In this scene Haig carefully sets up figures on the board to represent the units of the British army. He then proceeds to carelessly sweep the figures off of the table with a broom while callously talking on the phone with the officer in charge of leading the British troops in a planned attack set to take place during the following morning.⁵¹ This episode and season of the show holds fast to the popular image of the First World War as portrayed and depicted by the War Poets.

Sassoon’s poem “Blighters” is a critique of the British government. With its references to music hall culture, the poem also serves as an attack on the civilians at home that Sassoon viewed as not treating the war with the proper tone of respect and severity. Sassoon wrote, “The House is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin / And cackle at the Show, while prancing ranks / Of harlots shrill the chorus, drunk with din; / ‘We’re sure the Kaiser loves the dear old Tanks!’” Sassoon used this poem to depict the government as fools out of touch with the experience of the soldiers. Sassoon paints the government figures as people that see the war as a trifling game. He used the poem to

⁵⁰ Siegfried Sassoon, “The General” in *War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (New York: Courier Corporation, 2004), 59.

⁵¹ *Blackadder Goes Forth*, “Goodbye,” Directed by Richard Boden, Written by Richard Curtis and Ben Elton (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), November 2, 1989).

express dissent and dissatisfaction with these ‘blighters.’ He concluded, “I’d Like to see a Tank come down the stalls, / Lurching to rag-time tunes, or ‘Home, sweet Home,’ / And there’d be no more jokes in Music-halls / To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume.”⁵² Sassoon’s poetry also lashes out against women and civilians at home. A key example of this is Sassoon’s poem “Glory of Women.” “Glory of Women” depicts women as shrill frivolous fools that do not understand the reality of warfare. Sassoon wrote, “You love us when we’re heroes, home on leave... / You worship decorations; you believe / That chivalry redeems the war’s disgrace. / You make us shells.”⁵³

These poems express a disconnect between the soldiers and the British government, the British generals and their approach to the war, and with civilians on the home front. However, this is not the end of Sassoon’s story. Siegfried Sassoon lived a long life after the First World War. Yet, his life after the First World War and his later writings are largely ignored. Siegfried Sassoon’s battle with his World War I experiences did not end on the Western Front.

Sassoon greeted the outbreak of the Second World War with trepidation and sadness. However, as scholar Robert Hemmings notes, “When it was finally declared, Sassoon clung to patriotism as a rare certainty in a chaotic sea of conflict. His personal writings, as well as some of his public pronouncements on the war (which he made reluctantly), testify to both his commitment to the war as a just cause and a dismayed

⁵² Siegfried Sassoon, “Blighters” in *War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (New York: Courier Corporation, 2004), 17.

⁵³ Siegfried Sassoon, “The General” in *War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (New York: Courier Corporation, 2004), 65.

sense of the ‘evilness of the times’ that seemed to be making ‘lunatics of us all.’”⁵⁴ The Second World War served to provide closure for Sassoon and his pained memories of the First World War. In contrast to his poems from the latter conflict, Sassoon’s writings now took on a fiercely patriotic character. Where his iconic World War I poetry lambasted the British government and the home front, Sassoon’s World War II poetry proclaimed a staunchly firm belief in the British war effort and the necessity of fighting Nazi Germany.⁵⁵

Sassoon’s two most famous poems of the Second World War are “The English Spirit” and “Silent Service.”⁵⁶ “The English Spirit” directly invoked the images of the First World War in defiance against Nazi Germany. Sassoon wrote, “That every valued virtue and guarded joy / might grieve bewildered by a bombed abyss - / The ghosts of those who have wrought our English Past / Stand near us now in unimpassioned ranks / Til we have braved and broken and overcast / the cultural crusade of Teuton tanks.”⁵⁷

Sassoon saw the British cause as the need to persist and stand firm in the face of Nazi aggression as part of a duty to defend the legacy and cultural heritage of Britain. Robert Hemmings argues that Sassoon felt secure in Britain’s response to Hitler’s aggression. Hemmings notes, “He wrote to Blunden in the middle of the war: ‘I firmly believe that there was no alternative to resisting the German effort – except surrender without

⁵⁴ Robert Hemmings, *Modern Nostalgia: Siegfried Sassoon, Trauma and the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 85-86.

⁵⁵ Hemmings, *Modern Nostalgia*, 87.

⁵⁶ Hemmings, *Modern Nostalgia*, 88.

⁵⁷ Hemmings, *Modern Nostalgia*, 88.

resistance. We should have been next on Hitler's list for certain. The war was planned, prepared, and provoked by him. I regard this as beyond argument."⁵⁸

Sassoon's belief in the British cause was captured eloquently in his poem "Silent Service" which evoked the need to persevere and endure. He wrote, "None are exempt from service in this hour; / And vanquished in ourselves we dare not be. / Now, for a sunlit future, we can show / The clenched resolved endurance that defies / Daemons in dark. – and toward that future go / With earth's defended freedom in our eyes."⁵⁹ In this poem Britain is presented as the last bastion standing against Germany. Siegfried Sassoon saw the experience of the world wars as inseparable from one another. Sassoon's unpublished poem "1914-1945" traced the history of the World Wars and found closure. He remarked, "From a world that seems now half Elysian with peace long unbroken, / Young men went to war in their ardour, untried and untaught... / Through this the strength of England reinvigorated rose... the sequel no one knows."⁶⁰

These poems are a world away from Sassoon's writings pertaining to the First World War. Sassoon's poetry from the First World War is full of vivid images that convey disgust, disillusionment, and contempt. These poems instead are full of patriotic imagery that conveys a sense of purpose and belief in Britain and the Second World War. Sassoon's later writings reflect someone who was able to come to terms and make sense out of his previous experiences. Yet, the version of Sassoon articulated and presented by Paul Fussell and embodied in Sassoon's First World War poetry remains the popular

⁵⁸ Hemmings, *Modern Nostalgia*, 85.

⁵⁹ Hemmings, *Modern Nostalgia*, 89.

⁶⁰ Hemmings, *Modern Nostalgia*, 91.

understanding of Sassoon. Ending the story in 1918 only tells an incomplete summary of the experience of many who lived through the two World Wars.

Robert Graves' writing took a different path than Sassoon's in the postwar years. While Sassoon's writings were influenced by his wartime experiences, Graves delved into other diverse artistic topics such as the Ancient Romans.⁶¹ The most famous of Graves' works is his highly sensational and fictionalized autobiography, *Good-Bye to All That*. *Good-Bye to All That* paints the British experience in the First World War with sarcasm, irony, and humor to convey the futile nature of the British war effort. The book also serves as a larger critique of 20th century British society as a whole. Over the course of the work Graves uses himself as an example of how the war destroyed a generation of men by taking bright eyed youths and replacing their spirits with one of disillusionment and contempt. Graves wrote the book with the purpose of providing closure for himself as he left England, abandoning a nation that he felt had abandoned and turned its back on him. He concluded his autobiography, "And I went abroad, resolved never to make England my home again; which explains the 'Good-bye to All That' of this title."⁶²

However, Graves' story does not stop there. Just like Sassoon, there is evidence that Graves made peace with his experiences from the First World war and made a conscious effort to distance himself from his war-time poetry. In the 1940s Graves took measures to suppress the publication of his First World War poetry.⁶³

The original print of *Good-Bye to All That* was explicitly written to make Graves rich. It was meant to be a sensational read incorporating everything Graves thought

⁶¹ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 7.

⁶² Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 343.

⁶³ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 7.

would sell: battlefields, famous politicians, scandals, murders, ghost stories, and other common literary tropes.⁶⁴ His work was incendiary and controversial upon its release. Historian and literary scholar Paul Fussell notes, “[Siegfried] Sassoon and Edmund Blunden were so outraged that they set to work annotating a copy of the book, entering over five thousand words of corrections on two hundred and fifty pages... And the book appalled some readers not directly concerned with the dignity of the army. Graves had taken a broad aim.”⁶⁵ Friends, family, and war comrades all took offense at Graves’ portrayal of them. Sassoon and Blunden took personal offense at Graves’ inclusion of intimate personal secrets shared in confidence and his knack for playing fast and loose with the historical facts in order to create a more compelling narrative. Sassoon and Blunden both later admitted later in life that they felt they had reacted too harshly initially to *Good-Bye to All That*.⁶⁶

Graves later sought to rectify some of the damage caused by his work. The 1957 reissue of *Good-Bye to All That* was edited by Graves to tone down some of the extremes of his original work. He noted, “Reading *Good-Bye to All That* over again, for the first time since 1929, I wonder how my publishers escaped a libel action... A good many changes have been made in the text... If any passage still gives offense after all those years, I hope to be forgiven.”⁶⁷ Sassoon and Graves’ correspondence after the publication of this new edition indicates that the two men were able to repair their damaged relationship.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, VIII.

⁶⁵ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, XI.

⁶⁶ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 184.

⁶⁷ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, Prologue.

⁶⁸ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 184.

Graves' experience of the Second World War also indicates that he made peace with his disillusionment from World War I. After previously disavowing England and proclaiming, "Good-bye to all that!" Graves returned to Britain during the Second World War.⁶⁹ In the epilogue of a later edition to *Good-Bye to All That* Graves noted, "I volunteered for infantry service as soon as war broke out, but when informed that His Majesty could not employ me except in a sedentary appointment, I returned to work... on a book."⁷⁰ Unable to actively serve with the British army in France, Graves instead served his country as an Air Raid Warden. One of his sons joined the army while two of his daughters joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.⁷¹ Graves' son David served in the same unit as his father had served in the First World War, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.⁷² Reflecting on his old age and the radical technological change he had seen over the course of his years Graves solemnly declared, "And if condemned to relive those lost years I should probably behave again in very much the same way; a conditioning in the Protestant morality of the English governing classes, though qualified by mixed blood, a rebellious nature and an over-riding poetic obsession, is not safely outgrown."⁷³

Graves disavowed his old life in England and tried to flee from his past experiences, yet his later life indicates someone who was able to come to terms with the First World War. Wartime weariness did not translate into life-long disillusionment. Graves returned home to help and do his part to resist the Nazi onslaught. Declaring that

⁶⁹ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 344.

⁷⁰ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 345.

⁷¹ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 344-345.

⁷² McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 14.

⁷³ Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 347.

he would live his life the same as he had already lived it indicates someone that made peace with what he had seen and experienced.

World War I maintains a peculiar war in popular memory. Despite the work of recent historians, World War I is still viewed as futile. The popular imagery of the War Poets remains the public understanding of the war. McPhail and Guest argue that, “It is probably fair to say that more people have become familiar with events in the First World War through the books of Graves and Sassoon than from almost any other source.”⁷⁴ As this chapter has illustrated, stopping there only tells an incomplete story of both the war itself and the poets. Sassoon and Graves are best remembered for their war writings. Sassoon is famous for his poetry. Graves is most famous for his autobiography. Yet, both of these men lived very long lives. Their life story did not just encompass one world war. Their experiences during the Second World War provided an outlet for them to make peace with the trauma they experienced during the First World War. Historians have argued that disillusionment from war weariness and time spent in the trenches have been over emphasized and does not accurately reflect the larger experience of the First World War. If two of the most famous examples of disillusioned veterans could come to terms with their war experience as demonstrated in this chapter, surely others were able to as well. The lasting impact of the First World War on the men who fought is further examined in the following chapter which explores the untold stories of several veterans of the First World War and connects their war experiences with their lives after the World Wars.

⁷⁴ McPhail and Guest, *Graves and Sassoon*, 8.

CHAPTER III - WAR AND PEACE: FIRST WORLD WAR EXPERIENCES AND POSTWAR REMEMBRANCES

On August 11, 1975, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer reflected on the loss of one of his dearest friends and war companions, Brigadier General G. F. “Ellen” Ellenberger. Serving together in the 9th King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (K. O. Y. L. I.), the two men shared an intimate lifelong bond forged by the extremes of their experiences. Spicer and Ellenberger were part of a very small remnant of their unit that had survived the first assault during the Battle of the Somme. Spicer expressed, “He and I were brought together by our experiences in July – September 1916, and we have always kept in touch. He is the last of my officer comrades in World War I, and I shall miss him greatly.”⁷⁵ Bonded together by their war experiences, their friendship lasted long after the guns ceased firing on the Western Front. The men of the 9th K. O. Y. L. I. held onto their comrades and their shared experiences for the rest of their lives.

This chapter explores the lasting impact of the First World War on British soldiers and argues that World War I never ceased to have meaning and influence for this generation. World War I was preserved in their memoirs and letters to each other in the postwar years as they reflected on the importance of their wartime efforts. Like the famous War Poets discussed in the previous chapter, the soldiers analyzed in this chapter dealt with the reality of two global conflicts in their lifetime. This chapter deals with their World War I experiences. The young junior officers of the British Army analyzed in this chapter came from diverse walks of life. Lt. Col. J. M. Blakiston-Houston, came fresh out

⁷⁵ Letter in Remembrance of Brigadier G. F. Ellenberger, August 11, 1975, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King’s College.

of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. Capt. Spicer's comrade Brigadier General Ellenberger, Capt. Ralph Henry Covernton, and Brigadier General Noel Joseph Chamberlain volunteered and left behind their civilian lives and dreams to defend their country in the face of Kaiser Wilhelm II's Germany.⁷⁶ Professional military or civilian volunteer, all came together in the muck and mud of the Western Front.

These men represent the diversity present in the junior officers of the British Army who served in the Great War. Their memoirs and wartime correspondence reflect the commonalities which link their war memories. Fierce bonds were formed in the early years of the war as men connected through the shared experience of combat. As the war raged on far longer than they ever initially imagined, soldiers adapted to the ferocity of battle and became desensitized to the violence around them as the means of carrying on their soldierly duties with a sense of normalcy. This adaptation to the extremes of protracted battle was a hallmark of soldiers' experience in the Battle of the Somme. The end of the war brought its own unique set of challenges as soldiers mourned for their lost brothers in arms and wondered what kind of future was to be built in the aftermath of total war.

When the war erupted, some of the young officers left behind scholarly pursuits to join the army. Brigadier General Ellenberger from Winchester was on his way to becoming a scholar at Oxford when war erupted in the summer of 1914. Brigadier

⁷⁶ Letter in Remembrance of Brigadier G. F. Ellenberger; Lt. Col. J. M. Blakiston-Houston, 'I'd Live It Again,' 1947, Lt. Col. John Matthew Blakiston-Houston Collection, King's College, 9-10; Capt. Ralph H. Covernton M. C., 'Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,' Capt. Ralph Henry Covernton Collection, King's College, 1; Brigadier Noel Joseph Chamberlain, 'Oxford' in Untitled Memoirs, ca. 1960, Brig. Noel Joseph Chamberlain Collection, 6.

General Noel Joseph Chamberlain followed a similar path. Their lives took them away from a life of academia and into one of lifelong military service.

Chamberlain grew up in a loving and extremely tightknit family. As he cheerfully noted in his memoirs, “I was the sixth child and the fifth son in our family. We were all strongly attached to each other.”⁷⁷ Sibling rivalries and playful disputes were an important part of his childhood. Chamberlain captured his loving family environment with a particularly charming story. He wrote, “One dear old friend told me that when she was staying with us, a violent argument would suddenly flare up, usually during dinner when we were all together. Voices were raised, eyes flashed, and she would be apprehensive of a fierce free for all. Then someone would make a quiet remark, everyone laughed, and the tension subsided as rapidly as it had begun.”⁷⁸ The two benchmarks of his childhood and adolescence were a deep love of education and football. Chamberlain and his siblings were diehard supporters of the Everton Football Club. These childhood pursuits stuck with him throughout his life. Chamberlain reminisced, “Human beings retain early interests. I have not watched Everton play for over forty years, yet my first concern on a Saturday night is to find out how they have done.”⁷⁹

Despite his wishes, Chamberlain did not join the army until 1915 owing to a slow recovery from a pre-war illness.⁸⁰ This placed Chamberlain amongst the new recruits which filled the void created by the losses of 1914. He left behind his education and his family to join the volunteers needed on the Western Front.

⁷⁷ Chamberlain, ‘A United Family’ in *Untitled Memoirs*, 1.

⁷⁸ Chamberlain, ‘A United Family’ in *Untitled Memoirs*, 1.

⁷⁹ Chamberlain, ‘A United Family’ in *Untitled Memoirs*, 4.

⁸⁰ Chamberlain, ‘Oxford’ in *Untitled Memoirs*, 4.

In contrast, men like Capt. Ralph Covernton, left behind established careers for military service. Covernton spent his prewar years as an electrical engineer and a small farm owner.⁸¹ He had previously done service during the Boer War (the British conflict in South Africa) as an engineer, and he readily embraced the opportunity to turn his back on his civilian life in 1914 noting, “I had always made up my mind that in the event of another war I should do my utmost to get into it somehow, since I was never satisfied with my part in the Boer War and had always had a sort of inferiority complex when meeting men who had been through the whole of it and had seen so much more of the fighting.”⁸² Covernton was also quick to point out that he should not have felt these feelings of inadequacy. He served as an electrical engineer during the war on military orders. He remarked, “As I had been commandeered in 1900 by the British Military Authorities to go on with my civilian job there was really no need for this.”⁸³

Other officers serving in the trenches were career military men. Colonel Rory Macleod graduated from the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, and had served in the British Army. Macleod was involved in the Curragh incident in the spring of 1914 in which the British Army refused to be used to put down dissent over the pending implementation of the Home Rule Bill in Ireland. On March 20, 1914 Macleod and his fellow officers received cryptic orders stating, “There is the possibility of active operations in Ulster. All officers who are domiciled in Ulster will be allowed to ‘disappear’ from Ireland until the operations are over. Any officer who for conscientious or other reasons objects to taking part in the operations will be instantly be dismissed

⁸¹ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 69-70.

⁸² Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 69.

⁸³ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 69.

[from] the service.”⁸⁴ MacLeod and his fellow officers opted to hand in their resignations. These actions ultimately led to nothing as the troops were not used for military action against the Ulster counties and were not dismissed from the army.⁸⁵ Minor troubles in the summer were nothing compared to the turmoil in Ireland after the Easter Rising or in the post-war years.⁸⁶

Macleod saw extensive service throughout the First World War including serving at the battles of “Mons, La Cateau, Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Aubers Ridge, the Somme, Passchendaele... and, in Italy.”⁸⁷ For MacLeod, his service during the Great War was the key defining element of his life. He was shaped and molded by his experiences on the Western Front and by the men he served with. As he noted, “To the incomparable British soldier... I saw much of the British Soldier, both Regular and Territorial, and their great qualities filled me with admiration. They were wonderful men to serve with, and whatever I accomplished or the rewards I was given were mainly due to their efforts and support.”⁸⁸ MacLeod’s admiration and respect for his men is present throughout his narrative. His greatest lesson from training was, “The horses were to be looked after first, our men second, and officers last.”⁸⁹

Captain Lancelot Dykes Spicer graduated from Trinity College at the University of Cambridge before joining the BEF as a junior officer.⁹⁰ Capt. Spicer was a prolific

⁸⁴ Colonel Roderick Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 1965, Col. Roderick ‘Rory’ Macleod Collection, King’s College, 29.

⁸⁵ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 33-37.

⁸⁶ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 40.

⁸⁷ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 4.

⁸⁸ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 4.

⁸⁹ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 14.

⁹⁰ Access Catalog, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King’s College.

writer who wrote to his family consistently over the course of the First World War. His letters reflect the ease with which soldiers were able to keep up to date with incidents at home as well as inform their families to the best of their ability what was going on in their own lives on the Western Front. His letters also reveal the ways in which soldiers shifted their writings for their audience. Spicer's letters to his father reflect a very different tone than his letters to his mother. Alexander Watson explains, "Letters were often tailored for their audiences; predictably, soldiers were most likely to be frank about their feelings and experiences when the recipient was male and least likely to when writing to a child. Female addressees stood in between... More often, disturbing events might be excluded or a cheerful tone adopted in order to spare loved ones from worry."⁹¹ Watson's observations hold true for Spicer's letters. Spicer's letters to his father are blunt and directly address Spicer's frustrations with army life. On the other hand, Spicer's letters to his mother use humor and sarcasm to direct attention away from his situation and mask his war weariness.

In some cases, his sarcasm was not hidden or left to the imagination. One particular letter began, "'Here we are, here we are, here we are again' – up to the trenches in mud and water, with the same lovely and same happy view!!"⁹² Other letters to his mother are comprised of requests to help relieve discomfort out in the field. Spicer asked his mother to send the comforts of home to the Western Front. He requested weekly packages containing toilet paper, a handkerchief, socks, and cigarettes with the

⁹¹ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale, and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8.

⁹² Lancelot Spicer to his Mother, February 12, 1916, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King's College. Punctuation emphasized in the original letter.

occasional shipment of homemade sweets and shirts.⁹³ Spicer also made requests for his men. In one letter he remarked, "Cigarettes are always appreciated by them and their letters which I censor contain nothing but request for cigarettes. Sometime if you would send also a large cake for them as I know it would be very popular."⁹⁴ Communication between the Western Front and England was incredibly rapid often only taking a few short days. Spicer noted, "I have just received letters from you... dated the 14th which is not bad giving consideration it is only the 16th now."⁹⁵

Spicer's letters with his father were much more blunt and dealt with his frustrations and aggravations. Spicer wrote, "I am somewhat fed up with life, chiefly caused by the fact that I dislike my C. O. [commanding officer] most intensely. He is an utter scoundrel and extraordinarily underhanded."⁹⁶ Spicer's blatant disgust for his commanding officer continued even further. Spicer told his father, "In many ways I would very much like to transfer to some other regiment, but I know he would block my transfer (as he has done others), and unfortunately it is necessary for him to give his consent to my transfer."⁹⁷ The C.O.'s abuse of the men bothered Spicer more than the C.O.'s actions towards himself.⁹⁸ Spicer decried, "I do not want to be in the army one

⁹³ Lancelot Spicer to his Mother, September 12, 1915, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King's College.

⁹⁴ Lancelot Spicer to his Mother, September 16, 1915, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King's College.

⁹⁵ Lancelot Spicer to his Mother, September 16, 1915, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King's College.

⁹⁶ Lancelot Spicer to his Father, March 15, 1916, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King's College.

⁹⁷ Lancelot Spicer to his Father, March 15, 1916, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King's College.

⁹⁸ Lancelot Spicer to his Father, March 15, 1916, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King's College.

moment longer than I can help!!!”⁹⁹ This level of honest venting occasionally trickled into Spicer’s letters to his mother as well.¹⁰⁰ Importantly, despite Spicer’s frustrations, there is nothing in his papers that suggest that he was disgusted with the British war effort itself. His complaints are directed towards specific individuals and conditions, but do not question the British cause.

The catastrophic and unprecedented levels of violence of the First World War were present from the earliest days of the conflict. For MacLeod and the members of the 5th Division of the Royal Artillery, the battle of Le Cateau in late August 1914 was horrific. The British army held its position, but suffered incredible casualties, including MacLeod.¹⁰¹ MacLeod’s experience back home in England during his recovery showed the community involvement in this new form of total war. MacLeod and his fellow wounded were even visited by the king and queen during their hospital furlough.¹⁰² MacLeod was used as part of the local recruitment process. He recounted, “I was brought in to make speeches, generally having to submit to a bandage round (sic) my head and with my arm in a sling, I suppose to make it more interesting. Names were taken after each meeting, and many likely men signed up. Their patriotism was admirable.”¹⁰³ This war required the involvement of all levels of British society. Despite his wishes, MacLeod did not return to his former battery when he returned to the Western Front.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Lancelot Spicer to his Father, March 15, 1916, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King’s College. Punctuation is the author’s own emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ Lancelot Spicer to his Mother, March 22, 1916, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King’s College.

¹⁰¹ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 95-99.

¹⁰² Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 100.

¹⁰³ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 101-102.

¹⁰⁴ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 105.

The first phase of the war was marked by traditional open warfare. This changed as the armies entrenched along the Western Front during the winter of 1914. A new form of impersonal combat developed as a result of trench warfare. Historians argue that trench warfare created a sense of anonymity which did not instill soldiers with hatred for their enemy in the same way as traditional open conflict.¹⁰⁵ Instead, soldiers viewed their enemies with a sense of detachment. Col. MacLeod asserted, “The old time Regular felt no hatred for his enemy. His enemy always became a ‘Target’ and was usually referred to as Jerry. The hate was whipped up by Politicians and Press.”¹⁰⁶ Hatred and malice are absent from the diaries and memoirs utilized for this project. Any references to the enemy are more “matter of fact” than aggressively fueled by hatred.¹⁰⁷ Alexander Watson notes, “The description of killing in soldiers’ letters rarely identify the enemy as a fellow human being.”¹⁰⁸ Historian J.G. Fuller asserts that soldiers’ writings do not reflect the same intense German hatreds found in propaganda and other materials from the home front.¹⁰⁹ He argues that British soldiers, “fought not from hatred or vengeance, but from the more usual other motives: because their living comrades expected it of them, or because they felt that it was a necessary war for their way of life.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 70.

¹⁰⁶ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 386.

¹⁰⁷ For more on the minimal role of pre-war hatred and lack of pro-war/jingoist attitudes in Europe prior to the outbreak of World War I see Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Michael S. Neiberg, *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁸ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 70.

¹⁰⁹ J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 39.

¹¹⁰ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, 66.

Losses on all sides during the first phases of the war in 1914 were staggering. The loss of troops had a particularly large impact for the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). As MacLeod noted, “The battles in 1914 – Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne, the Aisne, and First Ypres – practically wiped out the men of the original Expeditionary Forces.”¹¹¹ New recruits came in to face the roughs of the trenches. Veteran and new recruit alike were shaken and shaped by the violence which followed.

The unprecedented scale of the violence of 1914 brought numerous struggles for all sides of the war by depleting the meager supplies from the pre-war years and troop numbers. New recruits were brought in to replenish those lost as the army sought to regroup. As MacLeod put it, “The Old Regular Army practically ceased to exist as an army in being in November, 1914. Those left alive were used to train new troops and helped to infuse the Regimental spirit into them.”¹¹² Those who were left remained to dig in on the Western Front and prepare for the arrival of Kitchener’s Army.

As a predominantly naval power, Britain did not have a strong army tradition and did not have a conscript army at the outbreak of the war. Thus, the very small Regular Divisions of the peacetime standing army were supplemented in 1915 and 1916 by Britons who viewed themselves as citizens first, soldiers second.¹¹³ The call to arms to serve with the British Expeditionary Force was directly connected to the necessity to defend their homeland from the German threat.¹¹⁴ The historian Alexander Watson links this civilian-soldier mentality as one of the factors that sustained morale in the British

¹¹¹ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 107-108.

¹¹² Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 387.

¹¹³ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, 32

¹¹⁴ Michael S. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War: A Global History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), Kindle Location 759.

Army over the course of the war. Watson asserts, “In the First World War, acceptance of armies’ authority as legitimate derived primarily from citizen-soldiers’ attachment to civilian role and loyalties, which prompted them to recognize a duty to defend their communities in time of national emergency.”¹¹⁵

These new volunteers, known as Kitchener’s Army or the New Army, were different from the men that comprised the peace-time army. These recruits were largely well educated members of the middle class. Alexander Watson describes them as, “the best fed, best educated, probably most intelligent and therefore most resilient members of British Society.”¹¹⁶ The largest number of volunteers signed up in the spring of 1915. Historian Adrian Gregory notes, “In fast succession, the use by the German Army of chlorine gas at the battle of Ypres, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, air raids by Zeppelins on British towns and the publication of the Bryce Report into German atrocities in Belgium, established the image of Germany as having thrown aside civilized norms entirely.”¹¹⁷ People volunteered to serve because they perceived Germany as a direct threat to Britain and to their families.¹¹⁸ Recruitment for the New Armies far exceeded expectations. Kitchener was hoping to recruit 100,000 troops for the New Armies. In less than six months 1,186,000 had volunteered. There were almost 2,466,719 volunteers by the close of 1915.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 61

¹¹⁶ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 149.

¹¹⁷ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 46.

¹¹⁸ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 69.

¹¹⁹ Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, Kindle Location 753-755.

Noel Joseph Chamberlain was one of these new recruits. Chamberlain and his fellow volunteers joined the West Lancashire Brigade in the early spring of 1915. His comrades were “young business or professional men... tough, shrewd, enterprising, very good potential soldiers, especially if things went wrong.”¹²⁰ Chamberlain’s account of his earliest days in the army are particularly telling. His account of basic training reflects the instability and uncertainty of the time. He recounted, “We arrived with about 20 old horses and saddlery. We had no guns, no small arms, no ammunition, no harnesses, virtually no equipment of any sort. Worst of all, we had no qualified instructors.”¹²¹ These were the attributes of an army in transition. These New Army groups spent approximately nine months together in Britain before spending six months training on a quiet portion of the Western Front.¹²² These units were heavily involved during the Battle of the Somme in 1916, Passchendaele in 1917, and the German offensive in 1918.¹²³ Historians argue that the ultimate success of these new recruits is the result of the work of the junior officers that worked with their men in the field while also taking care of and looking out for their wellbeing behind the lines.¹²⁴

For many veterans, the Battle of the Somme in 1916 was the defining moment of their wartime service. The first day of the Battle of the Somme is referred to by many historians as the greatest disaster in British military history. The approximately 100,000 man force that charged across No Man’s Land on July 1, 1916 suffered almost 58,000

¹²⁰ Chamberlain, ‘Early Days in the Army’ in *Untitled Memoirs*, 2.

¹²¹ Chamberlain, ‘Early Days in the Army’ in *Untitled Memoirs*, 2.

¹²² Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 149.

¹²³ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 148.

¹²⁴ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, 57; Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 234.

casualties with slightly over 19,000 of those casualties as deaths.¹²⁵ The Battle of the Somme was planned to be the decisive breakthrough on the Western Front. It was going to end the long stalemate of trench warfare and end the war. A weeklong shelling campaign was supposed to destroy the German guns and defenses to allow the British forces to easily cross into No Man's Land and seize large amounts of the German line. Historian Alexander Watson argues, "Not naivety, but rather the long training and high quality of the volunteers account for the high level of confidence many evinced at the opening of the Somme Battle."¹²⁶

The shelling campaign was highly ineffective and caused minimal problems for the German army. Trench fortifications made it extremely difficult for either side to gain a significant advantage. Alexander Watson explains, "When troops lay protected in trenches, it took 329 shells to hit one German soldier and approximately four times that number to kill him... The 1.5 million shells fired during the seven-day bombardment preceding the opening of the Somme Offensive on 1 July 1916, for example, inflicted less than 7,000 casualties."¹²⁷

Many British soldiers believed that the push at the Somme was going to successfully end the war. The preceding shelling campaign was awe-inspiring. Covernton recounted, "During the week of intensive bombardment of the enemy front line as a preliminary to our July 1st attack I could often go up to a high point on the chalk plateau and watch the rain of shell pitching the enemy's front line. Great things were expected from all this, and

¹²⁵ Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 1909.

¹²⁶ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 149.

¹²⁷ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 30.

an easy breakthrough was spoken of.”¹²⁸ Other officers near the front like the young Capt. G. Haswell, were reluctant and deemed this another lost cause.¹²⁹

Ellenberger captured this sentiment the night before the battle in a description of Haswell’s eloquent but somber toast. As Ellenberger recalled, “Haswell stepped forward and raising his glass said, ‘Gentlemen, I give you the toast of the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, and in particular the 9th Battalion of the Regiment... Gentlemen, when the barrage lifts.’ Glasses were emptied and all were silent.”¹³⁰ Haswell was one of many who perished the following morning. The shelling campaign was unsuccessful and on the morning of July 1, 1916, thousands of British troops charged across the battlefield to their deaths. The decisive strike turned into a protracted meat grinder as each side hurled men and material into the abyss of the Western Front from July to November.¹³¹

It was apparent from the very beginning that things had not gone as planned. As Spicer recounted, “At last 7:30 came. Almost simultaneously we could distinguish the ‘patter-patter’ of the machine guns and rifle fire. It did not seem very intense fire, but the sound was unmistakable. It did not last long and we hoped for the best; but somehow or other the sound had seemed very ominous.”¹³² Despite the intense shelling campaign of the previous week, the German lines and arms remained largely undamaged.

¹²⁸ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 102-103.

¹²⁹ Ellenberger’s Commemoration of the Somme, June 3, 1966, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King’s College.

¹³⁰ Ellenberger’s Commemoration of the Somme.

¹³¹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13; Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2009), Kindle Location 4052.

¹³² Capt. Lancelot Spicer, Account of Somme Battle, July 1916, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King’s College.

Massive casualties destroyed entire units forcing them to completely regroup. Capt. Lancelot Spicer described the catastrophe of the Somme on his battalion noting, “Our casualties were very heavy. Of the twenty-three officers who went into action on the first day only two were still going strong when I came up in the evening and one of these was slightly wounded. All the rest were either killed or wounded. Of the other ranks we had more than four hundred casualties.”¹³³ The first day of the battle decimated officer and infantryman alike drastically altering the makeup of different units.

For Lancelot Spicer and his fellow officers, the Somme, “meant the death of the Battalion as we had known it. We had been together for almost two years, and we had gotten to know each other well. Now we had to start again, make fresh friends, and build up an entirely fresh battalion.”¹³⁴ He further reflected, “In ordinary times it would have been an almost heart-rending and impossible task. But that was one of the curious things about the war, that without losing any of one’s finer instincts, one was able to harden one’s heart and treat as part of the day’s work things which in normal times would have been almost unbearable.”¹³⁵ Spicer’s words reflect the normalization of violence on the Western Front as troops adapted to loss around them. Lt. Gen. Sir Thomas Jacomb Hutton noted this trend in his own men, observing that continuous bombardments “had ceased to be a novelty in our ears and... it passed almost unheeded by the majority... To most it meant nothing save when the enemy’s retaliatory shells came unpleasantly near.”¹³⁶

¹³³ Capt. Lancelot Spicer, Second Account of the Somme, May 10, 1926, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King’s College.

¹³⁴ Spicer, Second Account of the Somme.

¹³⁵ Spicer, Second Account of the Somme.

¹³⁶ Hutton, ‘A Silence’ in Untitled Memoir of the First World War, King’s College.

The chaos of the Somme and the horrors of total industrial war became normalized as the men sought to carry on with their normal wartime lives. Normalization and adaptation were necessary for enduring the war. Historian Alexander Watson explains, “The human capacity for hope, optimism, and not least, self-deception made the war subjectively less threatening and lent men peculiar powers of resilience.”¹³⁷ Contemporary psychiatrist Frederick Dillon noted, “It was an impressive fact in the great war [sic] to note the extent to which the ordinary man was capable of adapting himself to active war conditions.”¹³⁸

In his extensive memoirs Capt. Covernton recounts that only several moments from the Somme stick out in his memory. One of these is an example of the normalization and mundanity of life during the months long battle. He shared this intimate story:

On another morning, returning with a party from some work we came alongside a Howitzer Battery keeping up a continuously heavy fire at the enemy trenches. As shell were pitching about pretty close, I sent the men into a nearby wood for cover while they had a haversack lunch, but I remained outside watching the firing from our Howitzers, being interested to note that I could see each shell emerge from the gun as a black silhouette against the flame. Sitting on the grass watching all this I suddenly discovered that I was sitting on a huge bed of wild strawberries which I quickly tucked into. But it struck me as so incongruous that I should be enjoying this pleasant peace time occupation in the middle of all this intense gunfire and battle.¹³⁹

Amidst the chaos of constant shelling, Covernton’s soldiers were enjoying their lunch while out on patrol. Covernton’s adventure into the blossoming strawberry patch sticks out like a sore thumb amidst the brutality of his surroundings. This story is a brilliant example of how soldiers adapted to the conditions around them in the midst of trench warfare.

¹³⁷ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 234.

¹³⁸ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 85.

¹³⁹ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 102-103.

The Somme was a literal baptism by fire for many of the new recruits who had joined the British Army in 1915 and 1916. In his late reflections Colonel MacLeod recounted, “I consider that the troops used, and sacrificed on the Somme were some of the finest ever put into the Field by this country. They were mostly well educated, and joined for patriotic reasons. They lacked training, but were as brave as lions.”¹⁴⁰

The Somme experience – in all its chaos and destruction – remained a significant and powerful memory for the men who survived. For some veterans, service at the Somme was used as the standard of military service. Many years later, Ellenberger wrote, “My main criticism is the B.B.C.’s constant reference to ‘veterans.’ Our only veterans were the survivors of and the recuperated from the Somme and the Hindenburg Line.”¹⁴¹ These reflections from fifty years after the war reflect the bitterness that some such as Ellenberger viewed soldiers that did not experience the intensity of the Somme nor the assault on the Hindenburg Line in 1918. The Somme – and the men who died there – also lived on in private and popular memory long after the guns fell silent. On the fiftieth anniversary of the Somme, Ellenberger recalled the famous toast noting, “This toast, for such it was, has ended the In Memoriam notice of the 9th and 10th Battalions of the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in the Times on July 1st every year since 1921.”¹⁴²

Even before the end of the war was in sight, the men pondered what the end of the war would bring. A letter from one soldier in June 1918 captured his ominous feelings, “I must say when one seriously looks at the future and the way our present government are

¹⁴⁰ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 388.

¹⁴¹ General Ellenberger to Basil Liddell Hart, September 21, 1964, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King’s College.

¹⁴² “Gentlemen, When the Barrage Lifts,” June 3, 1966, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King’s College.

preparing for it, it fills one with anxiety.”¹⁴³ Another letter from this same soldier in August of 1918 to his comrade pondered even further, “When do you think the war will end? This year? – or will the battle go on another year or ten?”¹⁴⁴ The onset of peace was thus greeted with a certain degree of uncertainty as the soldiers sought to make sense of what they had just experienced. Further still, the men had to grapple with what peace would look like in the aftermath of total industrial war. Demobilization was first and foremost designed to ease soldiers back into civilian life. MacLeod explained, “The first essential was to send back men who had been in key industries to start the industrial life of the nation going. Then students and teachers were to go... The men to go home first, after [these]...should be those who had been out longest, and married men with the largest families, then the remainder of the married men.”¹⁴⁵

Returning society to “normal” and demobilizing was not the only concern of these men. They grappled with the legacy of the war and questioned what the future would look like. For MacLeod and his men, the immediate end of combat brought uncertainty and worry. He noted, “There was little elation at the armistice. After all, it was only a cessation of hostilities. The German army was defeated but not destroyed, and fighting might start again if the peace terms could not be agreed.”¹⁴⁶ MacLeod also expressed doubt over the proposed peace agreements and the League of Nations. He bluntly stated, “I certainly distrust the idea of a League of Nations. If two nations, ourselves and the French, could not agree, what chance was there of agreement between 52? The League

¹⁴³ Letter to Paul Maze, June 21, 1918, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, Kings College.

¹⁴⁴ Letter to Paul Maze, August 3, 1918, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁴⁵ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 374-375.

¹⁴⁶ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 379.

had no military power to enforce its decisions, and some important nations were outside it.”¹⁴⁷

MacLeod was not alone in his thoughts. Lt. Gen. Hutton’s words echo a similar foreboding reflection. What would this new world look like? Would their efforts during the war pay off? He speculated, “Our principles, our sense of justice, our league of nations; do they mean anything or are they nothing but the cry of the politician or the propaganda of a great statesman?”¹⁴⁸ Yet, for all his pensive speculation, Hutton did not cease to grasp the immediate importance of his wartime service. Hutton viewed the interwar period as the time to reflect on what had been lost and to look forward to the uncertain future. Hutton pondered, “Are we to set to work to build up a new future on the ruins of the old, if so for what? ... The end is not the end, it is only a new beginning, a beginning of something that must be worth doing. Perhaps in time there may be something to strive for... For the moment, we can only look backward and feel as perhaps we shall always feel that the great adventure is ended.”¹⁴⁹

MacLeod, and Hutton both expressed strong feelings about sustaining the military. Faced with an uncertain future, they did not think that the military needed to be reduced in size. They were not the only men to feel this way. Capt. Covernton was ordered to give a training exercise in England at the Staff College, Camberley shortly before the Armistice. He noted the breakdown in discipline in light of the armistice. He recalled, “Before we were ready Armistice came about... our date for entraining became November 13th. Of course, at Armistice all discipline went to blazes and everybody that

¹⁴⁷ Macleod, ‘An Artillery Officer in the First World War,’ 379.

¹⁴⁸ Hutton in Untitled Memoirs of the First World War.

¹⁴⁹ Hutton in Untitled Memoirs of the First World War.

could dashed off to London to take part in the festivities, but with this business coming off I felt I could not go and must keep the men together to carry out this order, hoping that it would now be cancelled, but it was not.”¹⁵⁰ The training exercise proceeded anyway. Nothing was certain about the onset of peace in the aftermath of the war.

One of the chief legacies of the war was the enduring, powerful friendships cultivated amongst the soldiers. Friendships forged in combat stood the test of time as the men remained lifelong friends. A visible and physical embodiment of this enduring legacy are the numerous letters that soldiers exchanged with one another, both during war time and in the late years of their lives.

Soldier Paul Lucien Maze left behind extensive letters documenting his friendship with his World War I comrades. These letters range from the war years and up into the 1970s. Several letters stand out for their intimate details. Their wartime correspondence reflects the fiercely powerful bonds which were forged. In one poignant letter his comrade wrote, “Fellows like you are worth their weight in gold in this war. I hope someday again to have the pleasure of having you again in the mess or if the war is over before you are able to do so, that you will come to stay with me when you are in England.”¹⁵¹

Veterans held onto their wartime friendships corresponding about the mundanity of everyday life and also reflected upon their war experiences. They also engaged with each other in discussion of academic work done on the war. Paul Maze gave book recommendations to his comrade Edward Grissett noting, “The fact of being in bed has

¹⁵⁰ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 126-127.

¹⁵¹ Letter to Paul Maze, June 10, 1918, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

its compensations, one of which was to read an excellent book on de Gaulle by Aidan Crawley. If you have not read it I strongly advise you to do so – it’s a very good explanation, I feel, of a great man missing being really great by having a one track mind which completely ignores other people and cannot understand even that they exist.”¹⁵² Maze continued on to engage in a historiographical discussion about relationships between the French and British armies during World War I and questioned interpretations of the final offensive in 1918. Maze quoted the book, “At a critical moment in the Great German Offensive of 1918 when it looked as if the British Line might break, [Gough] was able to send Haig reinforcements and to take over a sector of the front. He repaid the debt he owed to Haig for the part the British had played the year before.”¹⁵³ Maze then interjected, “What is interesting about the... statement is this: It gives to history a statement which does not correspond with the truth as far as the situation then is concerned. Gough took over more line from the French pressed to do so by Haig.”¹⁵⁴ After a lengthy discussion Maze remarked, “My dear Grasset, I hope all this is not boring you but I can’t help noticing and judging that history is not always written with full knowledge of facts and it is really the people who lived certain situations who do.”¹⁵⁵ This particular episode is revelatory on several fronts. It shows a clear case in which veterans took personal ownership of their wartime experiences. It also illustrates veterans

¹⁵² Paul Maze to Edward Grasset, March 1, 1970, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁵³ Paul Maze to Edward Grasset, March 1, 1970, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁵⁴ Paul Maze to Edward Grasset, March 1, 1970, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁵⁵ Paul Maze to Edward Grasset, March 1, 1970, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

engaging in discussion of the public memory and perception of the Great War. Similarly, in his letters to Liddell Hart and Lancelot Spicer, Ellenberger critiqued a film about the Battle of Passchendaele and sought his comrades' opinions on the accuracy of the film as well.¹⁵⁶

Another enduring legacy of the war was the veterans' understanding that they had lived through a transformative period of technological innovation. This legacy is at the center of Lt. Col. John Matthew Blakiston-Houston's memoirs. Blakiston-Houston was astounded by just how rapidly technology had changed over the course of his lifetime. The rapid expanse of technology coupled with and witnessed via his war experience was something that he passionately wanted to pass on for future generations. In the preface to his unpublished memoir, 'I'd Live It Again,' Blakiston-Houston addressed his grandchildren noting, "I wrote these notes on my life, as I feel certain you and your generation could not possibly realize how our world has changed in the last 80 years. It must be incredible for you to realize that I actually witnessed the arrival of the first aeroplane ever to fly across the English Channel. Two world wars in my lifetime have speeded up the march of scientific inventions in all directions."¹⁵⁷ This sense of awe and appreciation for man's technological prowess is present throughout the entirety of Blakiston-Houston's reminiscences of the World Wars.

Blakiston-Houston's World War I service placed him on the front lines of technological innovation. Blakiston-Houston was a nineteen-year-old graduate from the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, when he volunteered for the Heavy Branch,

¹⁵⁶ G. F. Ellenberger to Basil Liddell Hart, September 21, 1964, Capt. Lancelot Dykes Spicer Collection, King's College.

¹⁵⁷ Blakiston-Houston, 'I'd Live It Again,' preface.

Machine Gun Corps in 1917. This branch evolved into the Tank Corps. Blakiston-Houston and his fellows in the 13th Battalion of the Tank Corps were on the cutting edge of this new technology. Tanks were designed to overcome the problems of trench warfare as well as solve the problems of the effectiveness cavalry units on the Western Front. He remarked, “Horsed Cavalry at this period of the war was not a very satisfactory arm of the service to belong to. Trench lines and barbed wire entanglements made their employment in their true role virtually impossible and more often than not they were employed dismounted.”¹⁵⁸

Blakiston-Houston’s first engagement was a disaster. A surprise attack from the Germans at Vimy Ridge in 1918 prompted orders for his unit to retreat. The tanks that were present were not meant for use in combat. He recounted, “The tanks were really only training models and made of soft boiler plate which was not bullet-proof.”¹⁵⁹ His writing reflects the frustration and complications from adapting to the new technology. Nevertheless, he was aware of the importance of this new military vehicle. He humorously noted, “It was not easy to control a section of tanks without wireless as we had to in those days, and all we could attempt to do was to launch them forth to their allotted task and to follow on foot, because the section leader had no transport... I remember trying to catch my section by running after them.”¹⁶⁰ This legacy of World War I was the beginning of the numerous technological advances that Blakiston-Houston encountered over the course of his life.

¹⁵⁸ Blakiston-Houston, ‘I’d Live It Again,’ 9.

¹⁵⁹ Blakiston-Houston, ‘I’d Live It Again,’ 10.

¹⁶⁰ Blakiston-Houston, ‘I’d Live It Again,’ 13.

The World War I veterans discussed and analyzed in this chapter took different paths after the Great War ended. Some continued in active military service during the interwar period. Others returned to their civilian lives and fulfilled their academic and civilian dreams. However, one common thread unites them, World War I was never something that they viewed as pointless or a waste. It was something that shaped the rest of their lives. They deemed it something worthy of preserving in memory and discussion. Their memoirs reflect people who were proud of their cause and who believed that regardless of the fact that the Great War was not the end of all conflict, and that a Second World War followed in their very lifetimes, it had been worth fighting.

Veterans of the First World War viewed their wartime experiences as important and memorable. Indeed, for Capt. Covernton, World War I was the single most important event in his life. He deemed it the only part worth discussing and sharing in detail with outside readers. In the end of this section of his memoirs he emphasized that this was the only thing he felt worth writing about. He noted, “It is not necessary to go into the post-war years... Since then, although I have been able to make several globe-trotting trips, there has been nothing of sufficient interest to continue these memoirs.”¹⁶¹ His memoirs do not end here, but the remainder is preceded by a telling disclaimer: “The following few notes are connected with my war experiences during 1939-1945, but are not of any special interest except perhaps to myself.”¹⁶² Despite not deeming his World War II experiences of interest to anyone except himself, Covernton, like numerous other veterans, did live through and experience the Second World War. The following chapter

¹⁶¹ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 133.

¹⁶² Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 134.

explores the various ways that veterans of the First World War sought to serve their country in the later war while also analyzing the impact that their veteran status had on their experience of the Second World war.

CHAPTER IV – “FOR THE SECOND TIME IN THE LIVES OF MOST OF US: FIRST WORLD WAR VETERANS’ EXPERIENCES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

On September 1, 1939, the Nazi war machine raged across the Polish border and engulfed Europe in the fierce tide of total war. On September 3, Britain responded to this aggressive action and declared war on Germany. King George VI, a First World War veteran who had served with the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, solemnly proclaimed, “For the second time in the lives of most of us, we are at war.”¹⁶³ His words note the preposterous and unimaginable horror many felt over the renewal of global war. What did the King’s words really mean to the rest of the generation of 1914? This generation of soldiers and civilians had already experienced the raw ferocity of modern warfare. Yet many veterans of the First World War were still active participants in Britain’s World War II effort.

This chapter explores the World War II experiences of men who devoted their lives to service of king and country by serving in World War I and volunteering in some capacity during the Second World War. The definition of national service utilized for this chapter includes any contribution to the British war effort at home and abroad such as service with the Home Guard, Air Raid Precautions (ARP) wardens, firewatchers, and the other civil defense organizations. Veterans of the First World War actively sought ways to be involved in the Second World War, yet their stories have largely gone untold and unexplored. As historian Jessica Hammett notes, “Scholarship on veterans during the Second World War has rarely moved beyond passing references to ex-servicemen in the

¹⁶³ Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2009), 12.

Home Guard.”¹⁶⁴ This chapter will show that veterans of the First World War did not see World War I as a stupid or futile waste of time and resources by exploring the lives and experiences of several men who again offered their services during Britain’s new crisis. Rather than being jaded veterans, the generation of 1914 still sought to do their part to support their country. This chapter traces several individual case studies to explore the different avenues of national service. It looks at both men that volunteered in World War I and offered their time and service for a second time as well as career military men who served through the entirety of the era of the World Wars. It also explores the challenges that veterans overcame in their pursuits to serve. This chapter argues that their World War I service was a crucial influence on their experience of the Second World War.

Traditional military service was far from the only service opportunity available to the British during the Second World War. During the interwar period, fears of the horrific destruction to civilian life prompted the British government to prepare for gas attacks and bombing raids. As historian Agnus Calder notes about the interwar period, “When the intelligent citizen thought about the war, he saw in his mind’s eye, not the noble if heart-rending scenes of 1915, not the flower of the nation marching away to fight in a foreign land, but his own living-room smashed, his mother crushed, his children maimed, corpses in familiar streets, a sky black with bombers, the air itself poisoned with gas.”¹⁶⁵

The British public was frightened by the horrors of total war that threatened civilian lives and blurred the lines between the home front and the battlefield.

¹⁶⁴ Jessica Hammett, “‘It’s in the Blood Isn’t It?’ The Contested Status of First World War Veterans in Second World War Civil Defence,” *Cultural and Social History* (April 10, 2017): 3.

¹⁶⁵ Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 22.

Immediately following the end of World War I, monuments were constructed in memory of the British citizens that had perished during the zeppelin bombing raids of the First World War.¹⁶⁶ In 1924 the government began drafting the plans for Air Raid Precautions (ARP) via the Committee of Imperial Defense's Sub-Committee on Air Raid Precautions. Preparations included discussions about the importance of keeping up civilian morale as well as practical concerns of handling the logistics of damage and destruction to the home front.¹⁶⁷ Concrete plans for the hypothetical scenarios concerning the inevitable destruction that a future war would bring began to take shape in 1937 and 1938.¹⁶⁸ In the spring of 1939 the government began to place plans in motion for conscription in the event of a new war.¹⁶⁹

Preparations for a future war were of great concern to First World War veterans. Veterans were attracted to the growing avenues available in civil defense. Veterans faced several key challenges in their attempts to serve in the Second World War. One of the biggest obstacles to service was age. Different branches of civil defense were more relaxed than others in enforcing age requirements, but age was always a major challenge for veterans.¹⁷⁰ Veterans did not want to be perceived as inept relics of an out of touch past and wanted their service to be viewed as useful.¹⁷¹ Veterans were involved in all aspects of civil defense and served as fire watchers, air raid wardens, first responders, and

¹⁶⁶ Susan Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 122.

¹⁶⁷ Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, 124-125.

¹⁶⁸ Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, 218; Hammett, "It's In the Blood," 1.

¹⁶⁹ Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor, and Linsey Robb, *Men in Reserve: British Civilian Masculinities in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 1.

¹⁷⁰ Hammett, "It's in the Blood," 1-2.

¹⁷¹ Hammett, "It's in the Blood," 4;7.

more. However, the field in which they have been most remembered is as members of the Home Guard.¹⁷²

In the spring of 1940 Britain began to prepare for the worst: an eventual invasion force from Germany. In the event of an attack the military would go into action to defend Britain. To bolster the military's efforts the government called for local units known as Local Defense Volunteers (LDV) to organize, drill, and prepare for securing and defending Britain in the event of an attack. The formation of the LDF was meant as a propaganda move to help bolster morale and to ease invasion fears.¹⁷³ Historian David Yelton argues, "In the wake of the stunning defeat in France, Britain's psychological and physical ability to resist needed bolstering. The LDV could be used to do both, but only if its men were properly disciplined, equipped, and supervised."¹⁷⁴ The Local Defense Volunteers were rebranded as the Home Guard in July 1940.¹⁷⁵ The Home Guard was the brainchild of Winston Churchill who sought to find an effective way to utilize the large amounts of middle-aged volunteers being refused from traditional military service.¹⁷⁶ By Churchill's estimates, half of the members of the Home Guard were veterans of the Great War.¹⁷⁷

The popularity of these World War I veterans in the Home Guard was rather contentious. Famed author George Orwell, referred to the Home Guard as "A People's

¹⁷² Hammett, "It's in the Blood," 1-3.

¹⁷³ David Yelton, "British Public Opinion, the Home Guard, and the Defense of Great Britain, 1940-1944," *The Journal of Military History* 58, no. 3 (1994): 464.

¹⁷⁴ Yelton, "British Public Opinion," 468.

¹⁷⁵ Calder, *The People's War*, 121.

¹⁷⁶ Calder, *The People's War*, 121.

¹⁷⁷ Calder, *The People's War*, 124.

Army Officered by Blimps.”¹⁷⁸ This was a reference to David Low’s prewar newspaper cartoon character Colonel Blimp. The fictional Blimp was an excessively patriotic veteran of the First World War painted as a political and military relic of the Victorian and Edwardian period.¹⁷⁹ Calder argues that, “Though Colonel Blimp gave generously of his time and money, he irritated his comrades by turning out in a uniform gorgeous with medals at a time when most Volunteers thought themselves lucky if they had sets of thin overalls which fitted them.”¹⁸⁰ He also argues that these veterans were reluctant to drill or share their scarce supplies such as rifles with other men.¹⁸¹

Controversy over these everyday Colonel Blimps manifested itself in popular culture in numerous ways. Historian Jessica Hammett notes, “Depictions of veterans in popular culture could... be considerably less complimentary, perhaps in part because of the general belief that the mode of warfare and the German foe were very different to the earlier conflict.”¹⁸² This view of World War I veterans was featured in the 1943 film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*.¹⁸³ The film’s title is an allusion to the famous comic character. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* tells the story of the fictional Major General Clive Candy and covers his life through the Boer War, the First World War, and the Second World War.

The film was controversial upon its release. In particular, the film drew direct criticism from Winston Churchill who decried the film. He asserted, “Pray propose to me

¹⁷⁸ Calder, *The People’s War*, 124.

¹⁷⁹ Calder, *The People’s War*, 122.

¹⁸⁰ Calder, *The People’s War*, 123.

¹⁸¹ Calder, *The People’s War*, 123.

¹⁸² Hammett, “It’s in the Blood,” 5.

¹⁸³ *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (London: General Film Distributors, 1943).

the measures to stop this foolish production.”¹⁸⁴ The *Telegraph* explains, “The British government was in no doubt it was about the outdated ideas of a military dinosaur, a blustering, faintly ridiculous figure with a walrus moustache, who is more concerned with decency and fair play than with the pragmatism and bloody reality of modern warfare.”¹⁸⁵ This underlying theme is present throughout the film. The film portrays Candy as a man that is out of touch with the current times. The subtle message of the film is “We thank you for your service and admire your ambition, but this is a different war.” Veterans pushed back against this popular perception of their status and argued that their combat experience from the First World War uniquely prepared them to offer their help and perspective during the Second World War.¹⁸⁶

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp opens with a British army unit receiving orders to stage an invasion of London as a drill to test Home Guard preparations. The orders declare that “war begins at midnight.” Lieutenant Spud Wilson, the young officer in charge of the unit, considers this plan futile. He informs his men to prepare immediately. The army descends upon London and captures Major General Clive Candy, leader of the Home Guard, while he is relaxing in a bath house. Candy repeatedly protests that war was supposed to begin at midnight. Candy is mocked with disdain by Lieutenant Wilson. Wilson argues that the Germans will attack without warning and will not play by such rules as Candy expects. Warfare has changed since Candy’s service. The film then

¹⁸⁴ Geoffrey Macnab, “Colonel Blimp: The Masterpiece Churchill Hated,” *The Independent* (London), December 2, 2011.

¹⁸⁵ Mark Lee, “The Life and Times of Colonel Blimp: Why Churchill Wanted It Banned,” *The Telegraph* (London), June 15, 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Hammett, “It’s in the Blood,” 15.

proceeds to show flashbacks of Candy's life during the Boer War, the First World War, and the Second World War.

One of the underlying messages of the film is that Candy's idealized gentleman's approach to war was outdated even during his prime years. In one scene set during the World War I flashback, Candy arrives at a train station in France seeking immediate transport. He is shuffled around from young officer to young officer who finally secures a car to transport Candy to his destination. The young officers keep stressing to Candy that all of the available trains and vehicles are being used for other purposes. Candy remarks that this sort of inefficiency would never have been tolerated during the Boer War. As Candy drives away, the young officer makes a snide remark and insinuates that he does not consider the Boer War a real war.

The film ultimately concludes with a reluctant pro-war message. While the film does not celebrate or promote war as a positive thing, it argues that this war must be fought by any means possible to stop the spread of Nazism. This comes across in several key scenes in the final act of the film. Major General Candy is supposed to give a speech on the BBC as a morale boost for the British at home and abroad. Candy's speech is cancelled by the producer that read his intended message. In the cancelled speech, Candy argued that it would be more noble to lose the war than to employ the total-war military tactics used by the Nazis. Candy returns home to his personal assistant Angela and his German friend Theo to learn that he has been dismissed from the British Army into forced retirement. Theo argues that the Nazis need to be resisted by any means necessary. He argues that times have changed and the days of a gentleman's approach to war are over. Angela and Theo suggest that Candy join the Home Guard as a means to participate

in the war effort. The film presents the Home Guard as a place to stick these old veterans aside in order to keep them out of the way while still making them feel like they were contributing to the war.

However, veterans in civil defense did not view themselves as useless or outdated burdens as depicted in popular culture. Historian Jessica Hammett argues, “In civil defense, veterans were able to develop narratives about their value, forming a particular brand of ‘useful masculinity,’ and this enabled them to present a strong and united opposition to dominant cultural narratives which downplayed the value of veterans and civil defense as a whole.”¹⁸⁷ Outside of immediate times of crisis, such as the Blitz, civil defense was viewed by many of the British public as a waste of resources and the members of these organizations were often “accused of being overpaid army dodgers.”¹⁸⁸ Veterans were instrumental in fighting against these criticisms by drawing parallels between downtime spent in the trenches of the Western Front.¹⁸⁹

In addition, regardless of the popular beliefs about Colonel Blimp, the film or his real-life counterparts serving in the Home Guard, the existence of these Blimps reflect a generation still striving to fulfill their duty to their nation and their government. Rather than jaded individuals who had given up on their country, these veterans saw an opportunity to serve and offered their time and their ability to their community.

An example of these Home Guard volunteers is Paul Lucien Maze. A Frenchman who had served with the British army during the First World War, Maze sought to resume his role as a liaison in the spring of 1939. The War Office at Whitehall denied his

¹⁸⁷ Hammett, “It’s In the Blood,” 14.

¹⁸⁸ Hammett, “It’s In the Blood,” 7.

¹⁸⁹ Hammett, “It’s In the Blood,” 9.

request as they explained, “I am... well aware of your exceptional qualifications for employment on liaison duty. Unfortunately, there are relatively few such appointments for which we nominate holders in peace time, and in the cases where we do so, we normally appoint regular officers or those who have recently retired.”¹⁹⁰ Yet, Maze was not deterred from finding a way to assist with the British war effort. Paul Maze offered himself to the Home Guard and took on an important role in its leadership and organization.

With the Home Guard, Paul Maze worked diligently to boost morale at home, send cheer and good will to troops in the field, and to make sure that the Home Guard had all of the supplies and government support that it needed to function successfully. Maze used his personal friendship with Winston Churchill to advance the needs of the Home Guard as well as to boost their morale. In one particular letter to Churchill, Maze noted, “It was a joy to lunch with you last Thursday and find you in such good form. The cigar you offered to our Home Guards has already stirred many of their hearts, and will work magic, conveying, as it does, a direct message from you. I was glad that I was able to put before you some of their problems and moved to see the attention you paid to them.”¹⁹¹ In addition to thanking Churchill in this letter he also requested more supplies and material. Maze requested for Churchill to try to directly address the Home Guard as a whole to boost morale. Maze noted, “since David Margesson [Secretary of State for War] spoke to them, they have never been addressed – a few words from you would invigorate them, they would all feel like me when I left you on Thursday, thrilled and inspired to do

¹⁹⁰ Letter to Paul Maze, May 5, 1939, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁹¹ Paul Maze to Winston Churchill, April 5, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

more.”¹⁹² Maze concluded this letter by noting that he was preparing a memo that addressed the problems and logistical concerns of the Home Guard.

In the spring of 1943 Maze published this memorandum detailing the problems confronting the Home Guard and posited several solutions to help ease their burdens. Maze argued that the Home Guard was not provided with the same level of government support as the ARP and the Fire Watchers. He explained, “First, ARP and the Fire-watching were given priority over H.G. when compulsory enrolment was introduced, and H.G. had to take what was left. The Wardens’ service is now largely superfluous, and a great deal of fire-watching can be, and is done by the H.G.”¹⁹³ The ARP and the Fire Watchers supported Maze in his requests for more men. He noted, “I have 170 names of men whom the A.R.P. and Fire-watching controllers are willing to release for this duty, but the men will not volunteer and the Ministry of Labour have no power to compel them.”¹⁹⁴ Maze requested that the Home Guard have the power to enlist men into compulsory service and also for the ability to extend this compulsory action to older men and women to release younger men for active service in the army.¹⁹⁵ There is no letter or document in Maze’s collection indicating whether or not his demands were met. However, this is the only petition in the file demanding for more men and women to join the home guard.

In addition to recruitment, Maze’s other major concern for the Home Guard was the lack of guns and ammunition. He noted, “Some Battalions have still only got 50%

¹⁹² Paul Maze to Winston Churchill, April 5, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁹³ Man Power in the Home Guard, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁹⁴ Man Power in the Home Guard, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁹⁵ Man Power in the Home Guard, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

rifles for their men. A man without a rifle cannot be expected to keep up interest.”¹⁹⁶

Maze also requested more vehicles including both motorcycles and armored vehicles. Maze was persistent in his efforts. In one particular instance, Maze and his men were supposed to be receiving much needed material. However, at the last minute the orders sending supplies to the Home Guard were retracted by another officer to be deployed elsewhere. Rather than surrender, Maze immediately turned to his friend and ally Winston Churchill. He asserted, “The authorities are ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’ and this will not solve the problem of personal weapons. In fact, a great deal of harm will come out of the scheme if it is allowed to be put into effect... I dread to think what the men’s feelings will be when their weapons are taken away after having promised them more ammunition for practice which they have been longing for.”¹⁹⁷

Paul Maze did much more than advocate for more guns, supplies, and men. Maze actively worked to raise morale for the Home Guard and British troops abroad. He even sought to build up the morale of the War Office. His valiant efforts did not go unnoticed. A letter from Winston Churchill addressed to “My dear Paul,” thanked Maze for his efforts. Churchill wrote, “Thank you so much for your very kind telegram, which reached me at the White House. It was you who suggested to me first that I should make the broadcast to the Home guard and, as it appears to have been well received, you have the satisfaction of adding this to the services which you have rendered to them.”¹⁹⁸ Churchill

¹⁹⁶ Ammunition Situation in the Home Guard, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁹⁷ Paul Maze to Winston Churchill, April 9, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

¹⁹⁸ Winston Churchill to Paul Maze, May 17, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

thanked Paul Maze for his efforts to reach out to him as well as striving to build up the members of the Home Guard.

Maze also wrote letters of encouragement to troops in the field. Major S. M. Lett from the 1st Battalion of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada wrote in gratitude, "Many thanks for your recent letter. We feel that it was very kind of you to remember us at this time."¹⁹⁹ Multiple letters from various individuals including Clementine Churchill express gratitude for Maze's time, efforts, gifts, and good will.²⁰⁰ The letters from Clementine Churchill indicate an intimate personal friendship between the Churchills and Maze. Their various letters discuss a wide range of topics including art, literature, and family members.²⁰¹ It is clear Maze's gifts and friendship were valuable to Churchill. Clementine wrote, "Winston is enchanted with the lovely water colour of the proud American flag. I have hung it in his bedroom where he can see it when he looks up when he is working in bed."²⁰²

In November of 1944 Maze was loaned by the British Army to assist the Royal Air Force. His orders noted, "Approval is given for posting the above named officer to H.Q., Bomber Command, RAF, High Wycombe, Bucks, to fill vacancy in the rank of Major... Capt. Maze, whilst loaned to Air Ministry will be subject to Air Force Act, but

¹⁹⁹ S. M. Lett to Paul Maze, June 29, 1944, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King's College.

²⁰⁰ Clementine Churchill to Paul Maze, July 24, 1942, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King's College; Clementine Churchill to Paul Maze, March 19, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King's College.

²⁰¹ Clementine Churchill to Paul Maze, March 19, 1943, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King's College.

²⁰² Clementine Churchill to Paul Maze, July 24, 1942, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King's College.

remains chargeable to Army Funds.”²⁰³ Maze investigated the effects of the Allied bombing campaigns in Germany for the RAF. His original orders sent him to look at “Hamburg, Kiel, Lubeck, Bremen, and Frankfurt” but his eventual report included numerous other German cities.²⁰⁴

Paul Maze saw a way to serve his country during the Second World War and he took it. He was not bitter about his World War I service. In December of 1945 Maze was released from military service with the utmost gratitude and respect. His release papers stated, “Now that the time has come for your release from active military duty, I am commanded by the Army Council to express to you their thanks for the valuable services which you have rendered in the service of your country at a time of grave national emergency.”²⁰⁵ In gratitude for his service Maze was given an honorary promotion from Captain to Major.²⁰⁶

Paul Maze’s story is a unique one, but it connects with the larger trends across several other World War I veterans in this study. World War I was not a war that they deemed stupid or pointless. World War I always persisted to have meaning and importance. Despite Maze’s valuable service during the Second World War, he did not write a memoir or personal account of his World War II exploits. His letters and memorandums are what remain of his service. Maze only wrote a memoir of his World

²⁰³ Official Memorandum Appointing Maze to the RAF, November 3, 1944, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College Maze, 22/34.

²⁰⁴ Orders from Bomber Command, August 3, 1945, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College Maze; Official Report on Bombing Campaigns, 1945, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

²⁰⁵ War Office to Paul Maze, December 7, 1945, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

²⁰⁶ War Office to Paul Maze, December 7, 1945, Paul Lucien Maze Collection, King’s College.

War I service. As illustrated in the previous chapter, Maze's extensive letters in the 1960s and 1970s to his comrades are addressed to his World War I compatriots. It is quite clear that World War I is what occupied Maze's time and remembrances.

Similarly, Capt. Ralph Henry Covernton did not think his World War II experience something special or of importance to national memory. After discussing World War I for the first 130 pages of his memoirs he noted, "Since then, although I have been able to make several globe-trotting trips, there has been nothing of sufficient interest to continue these memoirs. The following few notes are connected with my war experiences during 1939-1945, but are not of any special interest except perhaps to myself."²⁰⁷ The last twenty pages of his memoir are devoted to his World War II experiences.

Unlike Maze, Capt. Ralph Henry Covernton's request to serve was denied. Instead Covernton spent World War II in the occupied Channel Islands cut off from his home nation. As discussed in the previous chapter, Capt. Ralph Henry Covernton had served the British army as an electrical engineer during the Boer War and served as a junior officer in the trenches of the Western Front during the First World War. Despite being unable to serve in the World War II, his story reveals several important insights about the British experience of the Second World War.

Covernton was enjoying a quiet life in Capetown, South Africa when war erupted. He immediately sought passage to England and returned to London via ship in December 1939.²⁰⁸ Covernton noted the desperation and anxiety in the air upon his arrival.

²⁰⁷ Capt. Ralph H. Covernton M. C., 'Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,' Capt. Ralph Henry Covernton Collection, King's College, 133-134.

²⁰⁸ Covernton, 'Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,' 134-136.

Covernton also experienced a firsthand encounter with London Air Raid Precautions (ARP) workers. He recounted, “It was a strange feeling coming straight off the sea after a voyage of over five weeks into the rush of London at about 6 p.m. in complete darkness, where everyone was dashing about with hand-torches. On getting out of Fenchurch Street Station I had one or two bad falls and a kind civilian who picked me up after one of these, very severely ticked [told] me off for not having a torch.”²⁰⁹

Covernton did not simply return to England for security. He went to volunteer his time. He recalled, “After spending Christmas with some of the family and staying for a time... where I had my first experience of rationing – but a comfortable one – I began to make enquiries as to doing some work of some sort under the Government; but was told on every hand that at my age, I had just entered my 70th year, this was quite hopeless.”²¹⁰ Unable to serve his country, Covernton returned to his summer home in Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands.²¹¹ Covernton spent the entirety of the Second World War in the Nazi occupied Channel Islands.

He was not the only World War I veteran trapped there. He recalled, “I arrived there early in March and with many other veterans of the 1914-1918 war watched the progress of this new war with a certain amount of apprehension as to its slowness, but with no sort of doubt as to its final end, though with no notion that it might drag on for six years.”²¹² Guernsey fell to Germany at the end of June 1940. Covernton recalled that

²⁰⁹ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 137.

²¹⁰ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 137.

²¹¹ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 137.

²¹² Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 137.

the Germans used the occupied island in order to produce propaganda films to send back to Germany and show off Nazi success.²¹³

Covernton argues that despite food rationing and deportations, the British in the Channel Islands maintained their spirit. He recalled, “As the food got less and less, monotony began to change to moods of depression, although never at any time did I personally (or I think any English people) think or dream of anything but final victory and we were always buoyed up by the few, but very few, very successful bombing raids on German ships in the harbor or machine gunning of German troops caught in the open.”²¹⁴ Covernton also observed the eerie deportations of British families. From his writings it is impossible to conclude directly the fate of these men, women, and children, but it is likely that these families were victims of the Holocaust. Covernton’s chilling recollection is full of the common phrases used in Nazi propaganda. He recalled, “In September 1942, whole batches of Guernsey families, women and children, were for some unknown reason shipped across to France en route to Germany. Apparently they were well treated and given a special train to take them across Europe to their particular camps.”²¹⁵

Covernton himself was almost deported to a concentration camp in Germany because of his veteran status. Covernton noted, “In February 1943 further batches were warned to go, mostly men and in every case officers and men who had served in the last war. Among these I was included and we all had to go before a German medical

²¹³ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 140.

²¹⁴ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 142.

²¹⁵ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 145.

board.”²¹⁶ Covernton was spared deportation due to illness from malnutrition and a clerical error that had incorrectly recorded his age. He explained, “I found out afterwards that they had previously got my age wrong and had put me down as sixty-two instead of seventy-two. Over seventy’s not being evacuated. Hence I sat tight and nothing happened.”²¹⁷ While Covernton escaped deportation to a concentration camp, his story is quite harrowing and revealing. His tale shows the danger that veterans faced under Nazi occupation. Although Covernton was unable to serve during the Second World War, his experience of the war years was marked by his status as a veteran of the Great War.

Covernton and the fellow citizens stranded on the Channel Islands were not liberated from German occupation until 1945. Covernton noted his frustration and concerns about the delayed relief efforts. He remarked, “We all thought that as soon as the Invasion had successfully taken place and our army well established relief to the Islands would follow at once. Actually it took just on a further year before relief came to us and that became a year of real starvation for the island following on two or three years of continuous malnutrition.”²¹⁸

Like Covernton and Maze, Colonel Roderick Macleod only wrote memoirs of his experience in the First World War. Macleod differs from Covernton and Maze in one specific aspect. Macleod was a career military officer. As discussed in the previous chapter, Macleod had served with the British Army as an officer during the Curragh Incident in Ireland and through the First World War. His extensively detailed memoirs end in 1918. It is striking that his memoirs do not address the Second World War for two

²¹⁶ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 145.

²¹⁷ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 145.

²¹⁸ Covernton, ‘Fifty Odd Years of Memoirs,’ 147.

reasons. First, his memoirs were written in the 1960s rather than in the immediate aftermath of World War I. Second, his World War II service was particularly noteworthy.

Colonel Roderick Macleod was one of the British officers responsible for diverting the German Army's attention from the planned Normandy invasion. Macleod and his fellow officers were tasked with tricking the Germans into thinking that the invasion of mainland Europe was going to come from somewhere else led by the fictional Fourth Army. Macleod was an instrumental part of Operation Fortitude. Operation Fortitude was the code name given to the Allied efforts to deceive the Germans in order to make way for Operation Overlord, the D-Day attack at Normandy. Operation Fortitude involved the use of false intelligence reports as well as the use of fake landing craft including rubber inflatable military equipment.²¹⁹

Macleod's "The Story of the Fourth Army and its part in the Deception Operation to Cover the Normandy Landings" is largely a technical report with a formal breakdown of the operation itself. Macleod explained, "I was to operate a deception plan to cover the invasion of Normandy which would take place about the end of May. I was to go to Scotland and represent an Army about to invade Norway with the object of pinning down the 9 German divisions known to be there and prevent them interfering with the landings."²²⁰ Macleod and his crew carefully crafted a schedule of broadcasts designed to deceive the Germans. In addition to these broadcasts, troops were brought in and regular training exercises were carried out to build up the illusion.²²¹ Macleod explained, "I was

²¹⁹ Gardiner, *Wartime*, 530.

²²⁰ Col. Roderick 'Rory' Macleod, 'The Story of the Fourth Army and It's Part in the Deception Operation to Cover the Normandy Landings,' Col. Roderick 'Rory' Macleod Collection, King's College, 1.

²²¹ Macleod, 'The Story of the Fourth Army,' 4-6.

told that the ‘bluff’ was not likely to last more than 3 months because by then the Germans were bound to suspect there was something phony about it. But that would be long enough to cover the landing.”²²²

Macleod was afraid that the operation would be discovered by the Germans and that their duplicity would be unmasked. He recalled, “During all our exercises I was rather nervous that German aeroplanes would come over and see how really thin we were on the ground. Some machines did come but luckily were shot down and no messages from them reached the Germans.”²²³ After looking poised to attack Norway, Macleod and his men joined the United States Army to stage the impending “attack” at the Pas de Calais. Macleod noted in his report, “The Normandy landings were to appear as a feint, and ours, some time later, as the main invasion.”²²⁴

Macleod and his men successfully diverted attention from the Normandy landings. His report noted, “Our bluff again succeeded. The Germans believed what we wanted them to believe, that the Normandy landings were a feint and that the real invasion would take place further north.”²²⁵ He noted that the 15th German Army remained stationed on guard in the Pas de Calais until six weeks after D-Day before finally sending several divisions further south.²²⁶ The actions of the Fourth Army seemed so real that Macleod asserted, “The feeling that the Fourth Army really existed and the

²²² Macleod, ‘The Story of the Fourth Army,’ 1.

²²³ Macleod, ‘The Story of the Fourth Army,’ 6.

²²⁴ Macleod, ‘The Story of the Fourth Army,’ 6.

²²⁵ Macleod, ‘The Story of the Fourth Army,’ 9.

²²⁶ Macleod, ‘The Story of the Fourth Army,’ 9.

fact that it was holding German troops immobilized made one almost believe in its reality.”²²⁷

Macleod and the Fourth Army were used as a diversionary unit throughout 1944. During the fall of 1944 they were stationed in East Anglia threatening an invasion of the Low Countries. He detailed, “We remained in East Anglia till November. Our Army was then reduced to one Corps of three wireless divisions which moved to Yorkshire and went on with its activities there, now aimed at Denmark, till March 1945.”²²⁸

Despite being a short technical report of the military actions undertaken as part of the plan of deception, there are several key passages which note Macleod’s satisfaction with his successful endeavors. His report concluded, “Thus we were in action for a year, instead of the three months predicted. Winston Churchill kindly said in his ‘Second World War’: ‘Our deceptive measures both before and after D-Day had created confused thinking. Their success was admirable and had far-reaching results on the battle.’”²²⁹

Attached with a small handwritten note, Macleod added with pride, “And in ‘Great True Spy Stories’ according to John Baker White: ‘It was the greatest deception in the history of war, and there may never be a greater.’”²³⁰

As important and monumental Macleod’s actions were during the Second World War, these actions are not part of extensive and meticulous memoirs. It is clear from his writings and personal emphasis that the First World War was the defining experience of his life. Macleod did not see the outbreak of a second war as invalidating the Great War.

²²⁷ Macleod, ‘The Story of the Fourth Army,’ 11.

²²⁸ Macleod, ‘The Story of the Fourth Army,’ 10.

²²⁹ Macleod, ‘The Story of the Fourth Army,’ 10.

²³⁰ Macleod, ‘The Story of the Fourth Army,’ 10.

Veterans of the First World War actively served their country in some capacity during the Second World War. Their stories have largely been pushed to the side and ignored. This chapter used three different case studies to show how veterans' experience of the Second World War was motivated and shaped by their veteran status. Paul Maze used his experience as an officer in the First World War to organize and build up the Home Guard. Ralph Henry Covernton showed the impact of his veteran status living in a Nazi occupied zone. Rory Macleod had served the entirety of the era of the World Wars as a career military officer. Each one of these men dealt with the legacy of the First World War in their own way. It is clear that these men did not consider their efforts in either war a waste of time or resources.

CHAPTER V – RECONSIDERING THE GREAT WAR SOLDIER IN BRITAIN

The image of the First World War as a futile effort of cataclysmic proportions has not been an easy one for historians to shake from the public. Part of this struggle is the historiographic debate surrounding the origins of the First World War. What caused the outbreak of the First World War? Why did Britain get involved? In preparation for the centenary of the war, the British government stated that it wanted to “honour those who died in the conflict without making a judgment on why the war began.”²³¹ In an opinion piece for *History Today* in advance of the centenary, historian Gary Sheffield sharply retorted, “Merely commemorating the sacrifice of British troops without explaining why they died gives support to the dominant popular view that the war was futile and the deaths meaningless.”²³² In another piece several months later, Sheffield expounded on his explanation and stated, “The government, through its silence, is tacitly endorsing the popular view of the war as a futile one, a belief that is sharply at odds with most modern scholarship and with how it was perceived at the time.”²³³ If there is no clear reason to enter the war, then there is no reason for soldiers to die.

In 1914 Britain did not question why it went to war. Britain went to war to defend itself from the German Empire. The soldiers who volunteered at rates that exceeded Kitchener’s wildest expectations knew that they were fighting to protect their loved ones and their country. Yet, the popular tragicized image of the Great War persists. The writings of the War Poets, which should stand as a snapshot of an individual’s experience

²³¹ Gary Sheffield, “The Great War Was a Just War.” *History Today* (August 2013).

²³² Sheffield, “The Great War Was a Just War.

²³³ Gary Sheffield, “The First World War Was Far from Futile,” *The Guardian* (June 17, 2013).

of modern warfare have taken on their own legacy. Instead these writings stand timeless outside of their moment of creation to give false testament to the myth of a universal soldier experience.

The first chapter of this thesis analyzed the lives of two of the most famous War Poets who survived the war. Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves captured a particular moment in their lives with their writings. However, even their own writings do not accurately represent lifelong disillusionment and malcontent. Sassoon spent the later years of the Great War slinging harsh critiques at the British government, the home front, and the generals in charge of the war. Yet, he found meaning in his service and closure in his later years through his experience of the Second World War. His poem “1914-1945” presented this time as an era in which Britain fought for survival against the Kaiser and Hitler. Robert Graves similarly was able to reconcile his World War I experiences later in his life. After disavowing England and moving abroad, he returned at the onset of the Second World War to serve. Neither one was the lifelong disillusioned man captured in the verbal photograph of their works.

The next chapter explored the lives of several young officers in the British Army. They represented the diverse backgrounds of the men that volunteered to serve. Students abandoned their studies. Workers left their jobs. Career military officers adapted to trench warfare and rebuilt the army with Kitchener’s new recruits. They saw the extreme depths of the First World War at the Somme. When they returned home, they kept in touch with one another and held onto the memories of their wartime service with pride. Veterans perceived the first half of the twentieth century as an important time of technological innovation and growth and they deemed this experience worthy of preservation in their

journals and memoirs. Many of the soldiers studied for this thesis wrote memoirs of the Great War. Few of them wrote memoirs of the Second World War. However, they did experience another world war in their lifetimes.

The final chapter analyzed how serving in the Great War impacted veterans' experiences of World War II. Veterans actively volunteered to work in civil defense serving prominently as Air Raid Wardens or in the Home Guard. Veterans fought back against the popular image presented in cultural media such as *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* by asserting their usefulness and connecting their tasks to their previous wartime service. Capt. Ralph Covernton's story illustrated that even those that did not serve again experienced the Second World War differently from other civilians because of their veteran status. Covernton was nearly deported to a Nazi concentration camp because of his status as a British veteran of the First World War. None of these men viewed their World War I experience as a waste because of the outbreak of a new war.

King George VI's statement at the outbreak of the Second World War raises an important point that has not been fully explored by historians. As he famously remarked, "For the second time in the lives of most of us, we are at war." Historians have extensively studied World War I and World War II, but there has been relatively little study on the human links that run across this era of global conflict. This thesis has attempted to place the experience of the two world wars in context with one another by exploring the impact of these wars on British soldiers. This study has shown that veterans of the First World War dealt with their war experiences for the entirety of their lives, but they did not return home believing that they had wasted their time fighting for king and country.

The memory of the First World War is still a contentious issue. Gary Sheffield remarked, “It is hard to overestimate the extent to which the idea of the war being ‘futile’ and the battles meaningless bloodbaths conducted by callous and criminally incompetent generals is (to use an appropriate word) ‘entrenched.’ In a two-decade career as a public historian... I have become well aware that daring to suggest that *Blackadder Goes Forth* is not actually a documentary brings forth paroxysms of anger.”²³⁴ At the same time some historians have also pushed back against the new revisionist history of the war. Martin Francis recently asserted, “An uncompromising demolition of the myth of the war as a senseless tragedy risks throwing out the proverbial baby with the bath water, diminishing the fact that the war was undoubtedly experienced by millions as an agonizingly palpable catastrophe, the causes and contours of which can only be fully recovered by sustained attention to the conceptual links between ideology, cultural identity, and mass killing.”²³⁵ It is possible to view the First World War as a colossal tragedy and yet still maintain that there was a reason for soldiers to fight. Preparing for the centenary, Sheffield noted, “Today, horrified by the casualties of 1914-18... we tend to see the conflict in terms of what the War Poet Wilfred Owen called the ‘pity of war.’ This is right and proper, but we should not lose sight of why the war was fought... Like all wars, it was tragic, but it was certainly not futile.”²³⁶ Sassoon and Graves’ later writings and actions indicate that they would agree with Sheffield’s assessment. That needs to be part of the larger discussion of the First World War.

²³⁴ Sheffield, “The Great War Was a Just War.”

²³⁵ Martin Francis, “Attending to Ghosts: Some Reflections on the Disavowals of British Great War Historiography,” *Twentieth Century British History* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2014): 357.

²³⁶ Sheffield, “The First World War Was Far from Futile.”

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