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War-stained: British Combatants and Uniforms, 1914-18

Historians have long recognised the role of military uniforms in marking the transformation of civilians into servicemen. However, this was not a simple transition, completed the moment individuals put on service dress shortly after enlistment. Rather, the process of transformation continued throughout servicemen's life in the military, reflecting changed circumstances that might include a move to a different war theatre, promotion or illness and injury. Focusing on the experiences of British soldiers during the First World War, this article explores the meanings of uniforms as servicemen were transformed from raw recruits into experienced combatants. It questions the extent to which the stained and worn uniforms that seemed the inevitable outcome of front line duty were seen as consistent with the manly heroism expected of soldiers, paying attention not only to the army authorities' insistence on 'spit and polish', but especially to combatants' perceptions of the effect of dirt on their own identities and sense of self. Thus, this article argues, the transformation into combatants involved potentially dangerous and degrading encounters with dirt and vermin, but also the development of strategies – centred on bodies and on uniforms – that sought to counter the threat of long-term harm and pollution.

Introduction

In August 1915 E. K. Smith observed in a letter to his mother that at last he was 'beginning to feel horribly like a soldier'. This was almost a year after he had enlisted: becoming a soldier clearly took time.¹ Like thousands of other men who joined the armed forces during the First World War, Smith had discovered that the transformation of the Edwardian citizen into a soldier was a complex business, involving long weeks of weapons training, marching and drill, instruction in regimental traditions and history, as well as the acquisition of uniform and equipment. According to J. M. Bourne, 'the army's preliminary training was carefully

designed to break recruits of their civilian perceptions and to remould them in the army's image'.² Most of the men who were thus inducted into the armed forces during the First World War, either as volunteers or as conscripts, saw themselves as temporary soldiers only. If lucky enough to survive the conflict unharmed, the great majority fully intended to return to their pre-war lives and occupations at the cessation of hostilities. Nevertheless, like pre-war 'regular' soldiers, they too were expected to shed their civilian identities when they entered the armed forces.

The key contribution of military uniforms to transforming more or less keen civilians into soldiers is widely acknowledged in the First World War literature, as is their significance in marking an individual's rank, regimental affiliation and service record.³ As was often stated, it was difficult for recruits to feel like 'real' soldiers until they were kitted out in a proper uniform. As Arthur Hamilton Gibbs, who joined a Cavalry regiment in 1914, explained: 'khaki gave one standing, self-respect, cleanliness, enabled one to face an officer feeling that one was trying at least to be a soldier'.⁴ Unsurprisingly, the delays in supplying khaki uniforms in the early months of war, as well as the poor quality and fit of the items provided by the armed forces thereafter, often undermined recruits' sense of themselves as 'proper' soldiers, encouraging a feeling that they were simply 'masquerading' as servicemen.⁵

In addition, the complexities of army kit had to be mastered: servicemen's memoirs are full of references to confusion over belts, buckles, puttees, straps and other items. Officers, who were given an allowance with which to purchase their own uniforms and did not have to rely on army quartermasters, were not forced to wait as long as privates for their khaki uniforms and generally managed to obtain better quality and better fitting items. However, they too had to learn how to cope with them. In December 1914, for example, the reverend Andrew Clark, the vicar of a rural Essex parish, was amused to see a young officer whose puttees were very publicly unravelling and tripping him up as he marched through the village with his men.⁶

The unfortunate officer will no doubt eventually have learnt how to put on puttees correctly. That said, the transformation from civilians into soldiers was not always completed the moment when a man finally obtained a khaki uniform and learnt how to wear it. In fact, the transformation could, and did, continue in the course of an individual's war service, as both uniforms and servicemen's identities shifted and adjusted to changed circumstances that might include promotion or the allocation of special duties, as well as illness or injury.⁷ Indeed, it is the aim of this article to examine the role of the uniform in marking one such

transformation: that of a more or less raw recruit into a combatant with experience of front line duty, even if not necessarily of battle.

A cartoon by Edwin Morrow, published in *The Bystander* in November 1914, suggested that objects like trouser-presses, cologne and well-polished shoes were among the ‘things’ that no longer ‘mattered’ once a man found himself on the front line (Fig. 1). But was this really the case? The willingness of so many men to join the armed forces at the outbreak of war was clearly perceived as a mark of patriotic manliness, with both propaganda and the press stressing the link ‘between participation in warfare and physically and morally virtuous masculinity’.⁸ In this context, the shedding of civilian clothes and of the paraphernalia associated with civilian life could provide a striking way of conveying many men’s adherence to dominant notions of appropriate male conduct in wartime.⁹ However – this article will question – was the worn, shabby and mud-stained uniform associated with front-line duty seen as symbolic of an even greater degree of manly heroism?

Using a range of autobiographical and ‘personal’ sources, including correspondence and diaries, written both during the conflict and in its aftermath, the article begins by exploring the meanings associated with dirty, muddy uniforms. After briefly considering the attitudes of civilians and of new recruits, both officers and private soldiers, the article examines more experienced combatants’ often ambivalent responses to the armed forces’ insistence on ‘spit and polish’, before turning to their perceptions of the effect of dirt on their own identities and sense of self. The article then concludes by exploring the strategies adopted by combatants in order to counter the dangers – psychological, as well as physical – posed by dirt. As far as they were concerned, trouser presses and cologne may only have been the stuff of dreams, but this does not mean that the dust, dirt and lice of the front line were accepted with equanimity.

Figure 1 ‘The Nut’s Dream’, *The Bystander*, 25 November 1914.

Uniforms and front-line service

The transformation of raw recruits into combatants with experience of front-line duty was very likely to leave visible, physical traces on their bodies and uniforms. The mud of the Western Front has provided some of the most iconic images of the First World War,¹⁰ but both contemporary and subsequent accounts also singled out the dust, flies and sweat of the Middle East, or the lice and other pests that seem to have plagued all the battle fronts. For example, the Palestine battlefield was described by ‘Arnewood’ as: ‘sprinkled with dead men

and horses unburied, so that flies became a plague; at moments the back of one's jacket and one's back were black with flies, and although we were always hungry, food was abominable in these surroundings'.¹¹

As Dan Todman points out, the conditions endured by combatants were not always this hellish, either on the Western or on other battle fronts.¹² Nonetheless, even when not so extreme, front line conditions could hardly fail to have a very visible impact on bodies and uniforms, transforming hitherto spick and span soldiers into dirty, unshaven and frequently lousy veterans. In October 1917 Lieutenant L. B. Eyre mused in his diary that animals seemed able to keep clean even in the trenches. His men, however, were not so lucky: 'even though they don't live on all fours they are coated with mud from head to foot after the first day in'.¹³ The rank-and-file arguably experienced particular difficulties with dirt: officers had the advantage of being able to count on the services of servants, responsible for keeping uniform and kit clean, sometimes at considerable inconvenience and even danger to themselves.¹⁴

However, the extent to which officers were immune from the effects of front line duty should not be exaggerated: active service led to the wear and tear of *all* uniforms. In March 1918 Harold Charrington wrote to his sister, complaining that 'my pants are full of holes now'. A month later he exclaimed that 'I think most of my clothing now will make good souvenirs, as I haven't got much which hasn't been punctured!'¹⁵ It was not always possible to make light of front line conditions. In May 1915 Lieutenant James Butlin explained to his friend Basil Burnett Hall that during the offensive at Festubert it had been 'impossible to bury the dead ... for three days we grovelled in mud and clay ... one stumbled blindly over dead and dying'.¹⁶

While using less graphic language, Private Len Jellings tried to convey something of the reality of trench conditions and their impact on his appearance in a letter to his mother, written in the midst of the German offensive of March 1918, which eventually claimed his life: 'am in the trenches, mud up to my knees at times. I thought I had got a touch of rheumatism at first, but it went off ... You ought to have seen me the other day, before I had a wash and shave. You wouldn't have known me (hardly)'. Not wishing to worry her, he then went on to reassure her that 'we have a change of socks every day, and have our feet rubbed with oil'.¹⁷ Like many other combatants writing home, both officers and rankers, Jellings stressed – only half-jokingly – that battle experience had transformed his appearance, rendering it almost unrecognisable, even to loved ones back in Britain. In a similar way, in November 1916 Mowbray Meades wrote in one of his affectionate letters to his wife that

‘you would never have recognised me [in the trenches] ... trudging along thro’ a sea of mud, well muddied up myself, with my steel helmet on’.¹⁸

Mrs Jellings’s and Mrs Meades’s responses to such descriptions are unknown. However, it is very likely that like most other civilians, both would long since have learnt to recognise the signs of active service on the bodies, clothes and boots of soldiers on leave. During the war uniforms no longer marked rank-and-file soldiers’ status as drunken ne’er do-wells, recruited from the dregs of society. Rather, they conveyed the wearer’s patriotism and courage, the dirt associated with front line duty adding further to the image of military valour.¹⁹ John Lucy, a regular soldier who had joined an Irish regiment in 1912, was pleasantly surprised by civilians’ kindly attitude and ‘tender and sympathetic glances’ when he was granted a brief period of leave in April 1915: ‘my weather-stained, ill-fitting uniform and the dried-up mud on my unpolished boots showed that I was home from the front’. He was particularly struck by the fact that ‘men and women made way for me, and they talked to me affectionately, as the English public never before talked to their soldiers’.²⁰

Civilians seemed to view dirty uniforms as symbols of bravery, a respect for appearances that astonished and pleased Lucy, but often infuriated other servicemen. Walter Ostler, a railway booking clerk from North London, recognised the realities of war when he saw infantrymen ‘returning from France ... plus the liquid mud ... [the soldiers had been] hung all round with equipments [sic] trenching tools, rifle, bayonets water bottles haversack valise and seeing them in the state they were I thought not for me if it can be avoided’.²¹ All too often, however, as Nicoletta Gullace has shown, civilians seemed to get it wrong, admiring appearances while ignoring or glossing over the underlying realities of pain and sacrifice. On his return home after being wounded in France, for example, Mr Jones spent some time at ‘a part of Clarence Pier ... [called] the “Bull Ring” and we used to go there to get a girl’. On one occasion, a young woman annoyed him by refusing to talk to him, the pristine condition of his uniform leading her to cast doubt on his status as a ‘real’ soldier. Challenged by Jones, she told him that ‘I don’t speak to toy soldiers only those with guts’, and handed him a white feather.²²

New recruits, for their part, were not always above trying to emulate the disreputable appearance of more experienced soldiers. On his first night in the trenches Phillip, the young subaltern protagonist of Henry Williamson’s autobiographical series of novels spanning the first half of the twentieth century, hoped that ‘he would soon become lousy, like the regulars. Itchy-koo they called it, like the ragtime song *Hitchy Koo*’.²³ Indeed, once at the front a too clean appearance could be interpreted as the outward sign of a dangerous, indeed sometimes

fatal, rawness and lack of experience. Years after the end of the war, Charles Bricknall still clearly remembered one particularly tragic incident, which had taken place while his division of gunners was being relieved by a unit fresh from England: 'they was all spick and span, buttons polished and all the rest of it'. Many of them died as the road they were marching on was shelled, the victims of their own and their officers' inexperience.²⁴

Spit and polish

A well-groomed appearance and pristine uniforms and boots may have been tell-tale signs of a dangerously inexperienced soldier. At the same time, however, in the eyes of combatants themselves, particularly those with some experience of the front line, there was little of the heroic in a dirty uniform and unkempt appearance. In November 1914 private Douglas Bell was resting with his comrades after a bout of trench digging near Bailleul, when they 'saw some stragglers from the lines come limping in, incredibly dirty and played out. They had a fortnight's growth of beard, were plastered with mud from head to foot, greatcoats ragged and torn'. They were 'barely able to drag one foot after another'. Bell and his comrades were left to wonder who these men were, unable to suppress the suspicion that far from military valour, their appearance embodied defeat: 'we gazed at them in wonder and pity; hope we never come to look like that'.²⁵ Inevitably, they soon did.

Servicemen frequently complained about the amount of time they had to devote to cleaning their uniforms and equipment. While attached to the general headquarters of the British army in France, E. K. Smith soon tired of all the 'button cleaning and so on. Really the amount of "show" business one has to do here is too awful for words'.²⁶ The troops' appearance was governed by detailed army regulations.²⁷ As the army's Commander in Chief, Sir John French, made clear in 1915: 'the Army Council is responsible for the pattern of all equipment, for the correctness of the stores supplied and for their interchangeability'.²⁸ During the conflict, furthermore, regulations were supplemented by General Routine Orders, which dealt with problems as they arose, including on the matter of 'Dress' and its care. It was the duty of officers to police and enforce such regulations, while at the same time setting a good example. While acknowledged as inevitable, the effects of front-line duty were to be minimised and rectified as soon as possible. For example, in 1915 Order 55 reminded officers that 'while it is fully recognised that during the progress of active operations in the field the wear and tear of uniforms of officers and men must necessarily be great, every effort will be made by Commanding Officers of units to prevent the introduction of unauthorised articles of dress'.²⁹ Servicemen were held responsible for any avoidable damage to their uniform: Order

420 warned ‘all concerned’ that ‘Articles lost or rendered unserviceable through negligence must be replaced at the expense of the individual’.³⁰

However, despite the Army Council’s best efforts, orders to clean up did not seem to originate in clear and predictable regulations. On the contrary, especially in private soldiers’ eyes, they appeared to be issued at random – and often highly inopportune – moments, at the whim of faceless superior officers. An anonymous ‘ex-serviceman’ recalled how after fighting at Ypres, his battalion had been granted a period of welcome rest. However, the respite proved short-lived: ‘one ... morning, somebody had a brain wave at headquarters ... The battalion was dismissed to brush-up. Not a speck of trench mud must be seen on any clothing or equipment, buttons to be cleaned and boots polished, and all tin hats painted for Sunday morning parade’. The final item was the last straw: ‘the tin hat business put the tin hat on’.³¹

That said, despite such complaints, most combatants expressed their approval of the armed forces’ insistence on spit and polish. Indeed, notions of dirt, of a dirty appearance and unsavoury habits, were regularly used by combatants to distinguish themselves and their ‘pals’ from degraded or simply unfamiliar ‘others’. The enemy, who after all was rarely seen, or indeed smelled, bore the brunt of such complaints far less often than did rival regiments or British allies, both combatants and civilians. One soldier explained the hostility between a Scottish regiment and his own: ‘they despised us for looking so clean, we despised them for looking so dirty’.³² Britain’s French and Belgian allies were also frequently the butt of such scorn. Having just arrived in France in November 1914, Douglas Bell was billeted in an old cavalry barrack: ‘sanitation ... is an absolute disgrace. There appears to be about one privy to a block, never cleaned ... I think the French must be a dirty lot in these matters’.³³ Corporal Jack Sherwood also found that his billets left something to be desired: ‘the peasants are the dirtiest lot of people I have come across yet’.³⁴ Back in Britain, in August 1916 a Corporal Brooks told the reverend Andrew Clark that ‘you never see a French soldier with a clean shirt. They wear a dirty bit of rag around their necks and call it a tie’. Amused, Clark noted in his diary that ‘to hear our soldiers talk you might imagine they dislike the French more than they do the Germans’.³⁵

Such comments did not simply reflect recruits’ acceptance of the army’s insistence on a ‘proper’ military appearance. Arguably most importantly, they also demonstrated a continued commitment – both among officers and among privates – to civilian norms of cleanliness and grooming.³⁶ A clean body, well-kept hair and clean, unwrinkled clothes were a visible sign of an individual’s status and place in Edwardian society. The opportunity to

change into a clean outfit when one was soiled or wet, or to have garments properly cleaned, pressed and cared for, were perceived not only as signs of relative affluence, but also of manly 'worth' and even imperial superiority.³⁷ It is perhaps unsurprising that the sight of clean, well-groomed, uniformed non-combatants should remind less fortunate servicemen of their own rough and unkempt appearance, arousing a sense of discontent that could quickly turn into hostility. Ernest Parker, for example, described in his autobiography how in the winter of 1915–16 it was suspected that almost all the bombers in his company (himself included) were suffering from scabies. They were marched off *en masse* to hospital, where 'we donned hospital blue and had great fun baiting the RAMC [Royal Army Medical Corps] orderlies whose neatly oiled hair and smart mud-free uniforms had an irritating effect on our ruffianly crowd of Durham bombers'.³⁸

These soldiers' scorn of uniforms that showed no sign of wear and tear is clear. However, alongside such hostility, what emerges most commonly in the personal accounts of combatants, both officers and rank-and-file soldiers, is not a sense of manly superiority as battle-hardened veterans, but – if not an actual sense of inferiority – a sensitivity to any hint that their scruffy appearance might be an object of contempt or ridicule. Staff officers, with distinctive red lapels and cap bands that 'connoted intellectual work performed at chairs and tables', were most often suspected of such snobbery.³⁹ Gerald Burgoyne, a regular soldier and Boer war veteran, wrote in his diary in May 1915 that the staff had very little to do with the front line soldier, and in fact 'appeared rather to look down on him for being shabby in appearance and rather dirty, and now nothing irritates the regimental officer more than the sight of the Red Tabs'.⁴⁰

Major Raper was one such irritated officer. In November 1915 he complained about 'the large number of young men connected with the host of different Staffs out here, who loaf about on the lines of communication, beautifully dressed, but have never been anywhere near the firing line or done a hard day's work. I would pull all such into Infantry Regiments and make them do some of the real work of the war'.⁴¹ In the case of the rank-and-file, resentment focused not only on the Staff's presumed avoidance of the dangers and hard work of the front line, but also on the comforts and perks attached to their status. Reginald Garrod recalled in his memoirs that in 1915 in the trenches near Bethune water had been both difficult and dangerous to get. As a result, drinking had taken priority over cleaning or shaving. Despite the circumstances, Garrod had been ticked off by a staff officer for not shaving. 'Really, some of these Staff Officers didn't have a clue, as this one obviously had a servant with easy access to water'.⁴² Staff Captain Geoffrey Brooke was among those red-

tabbed officers who valued a 'smart appearance'. 'Slovenliness in turn-out', he stated, 'more or less unavoidable in foul weather, is liable to creep in as a result of trench warfare, but this should be corrected in billets'. Even he, however, had to admit that front-line soldiers were likely to see this as smacking of 'irritating fatigues enforced by a busy-body martinet'.⁴³

In line with the military authorities' thinking, Brooke was particularly concerned with the impact of a ragged and dirty appearance on morale and esprit de corps, and consequent potential for insubordination: 'the loss of a smart, soldierly bearing means loss of discipline'.⁴⁴ Most combatants were not particularly interested in issues of discipline, but much as they resented outsiders' (especially staff officers') criticism, they hardly viewed the signs of front-line duty on a soldier's body and clothes as symbolic of a gain in heroism or manliness. On the contrary, dirt was perceived as invasive and full of potential dangers. As Eric Leed points out: 'the war literature is full of surprising encounters with corpses, complaints of being unable to prevent dirt, mud, and vermin from invading the most personal spaces'.⁴⁵ In 1917 Lieutenant Eyre 'confessed' in his diary that he and his comrades had acquired 'a supreme contempt for mud, and when once covered almost take pleasure in plonking into puddles and skipping about on top'. However, his insouciance had limits; he had to admit that 'I'd rather be a clean caterpillar'.⁴⁶ The dirt of the front line, unlike that associated with football or hunting fields, rarely inspired a light-hearted response.⁴⁷

Dirt and loss

Writing almost twenty years after the event, William Linton Andrews recalled that he and his comrades had emerged from the battle of Festubert in May 1915 stripped of their identity as modern men, even as the armaments that threatened their bodies and their lives were those produced by modern industrialised economies. After ten days without any opportunity to wash or shave, both men and officers looked like 'Crimean veterans', an image to which his memoirs returned more than once.⁴⁸ A similar comparison was made by Sidney Rogerson, who from the vantage point of 1933 wondered: 'who would have believed that in so short a time youths like ourselves, brought up with all the scrupulous twentieth century regard for cleanliness and sanitation, could ... be as cheerfully lousy as medieval mercenaries?'⁴⁹ Dirt and lack of grooming thus did not so much throw soldiers 'back to some primeval chaos'⁵⁰ or to an ahistorical 'troglo-dyte world',⁵¹ but rather stripped them of their veneer of modernity, taking them back to a historical past that was less modern and civilised than the present. In a letter to his sister in November 1915, written somewhere in France, private Harley suggested

that ‘since the days of Napoleon no such hairy a crowd of unwashed bandits has tramped the “route nationale” ’.⁵²

Furthermore, taking into account the fact that in Edwardian Britain manliness, class and health were all associated with a clean body and clean, well-kept clothes, it is unsurprising that being forced to give these up was also frequently perceived as involving a loss of status. According to Aubrey Herbert, for example, his unit’s doctor’s ‘neatness and smart appearance’ contrasted with that of most others in the ‘cramped and stinking ... encampment’, for ‘the dust and heat of the Dardanelles had turned everyone else into scallywags’.⁵³ In December 1914 Achilles Burgoyne complained in his diary that ‘my company is a regular mob, shockingly disreputable ... Their clothing is in rags and they don’t care how they turn out. It’s heartbreaking’.⁵⁴

Even worse than losing status and being reduced to the condition of ‘scallywags’ or a ‘disreputable’ ‘mob’, was the risk that front line service could rob combatants of their very humanity, and reduce them to the level of animals. In his diary, Major Raper complained not only that he himself looked like a ‘tramp’, but also that in the trenches ‘men get very dirty and cannot wash properly ... One sees the men in the support trenches where they may undress, sitting outside their dug-outs searching themselves [for lice] like monkeys’.⁵⁵ Being lousy was especially associated with a reduction to bestial status. Bombardier X, supposedly writing to his mother in June 1915 from trenches near Ypres, explained that ‘I’ve been a fortnight without taking my clothes off and, naturally, living in the ground, like animals, we are all lousy. Dear old Rover at home is better off, for ... he at least gets a good tubbing every fortnight. Lord! I could do with one now!’⁵⁶

In November 1916 Colonel Jack, the commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment, explained his reasons for maintaining a neat and proper appearance, by stating that ‘there’s no need to live like a pig even though one is surrounded by filth’. After all, one could ‘always die like a gentleman – clean and properly dressed’.⁵⁷ As an experienced soldier, Jack must have seen enough death in the trenches to be well aware that a clean and dignified death was highly unlikely. As ‘Fusilier Bluff’ explained: ‘dead men on a modern field of battle do not lie prim, heroic and regular ... They do not look like men at all’. Rather ironically, they actually looked ‘like bundles of dirty clothes’.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the aspiration to maintain a certain standard of dress, even under the most gruelling of circumstances, remained a significant one. Furthermore, despite the supposed association between clean linen and gentlemanly status, such an aspiration was by no means limited to officers. Lying injured in a shell hole during the battle of the Somme, private Francis Field

eventually realised that he knew one of the corpses lying nearby. It was Larry: 'precise in manner and dress he would go to any lengths to perform a clean shave'.⁵⁹

Combat and cleanliness

The men who enlisted during the First World War belonged to a generation that was aware of the role of germs in causing illness and of the association between dirt and infection.⁶⁰ The dangers were very real ones. As Mark Harrison points out, the Edwardian army had come to recognise the central role of sanitation and disease prevention within the context of military medicine, the South African war having demonstrated the damaging effects of many officers' disinterest in issues of hygiene. It was thus increasingly stressed that ultimate responsibility for sanitation should lie with regimental officers and 'it became the policy of the Army to educate its officers and NCOs in the rudiments of hygiene'.⁶¹ The First World War saw the army take a step further and establish a separate corps dedicated to dealing with issues of sanitation and hygiene – the Sanitary Companies – although officers remained ultimately responsible for ensuring the cleanliness of men and billets.⁶²

At the same time, rank-and-file soldiers were also expected to help protect themselves. Ernest Jones, for example, was sent to Salonika in 1916, where the following winter he was found to be suffering from badly frost-bitten feet. At the hospital he was asked: 'Did I use whale oil? Did I have clean socks each day? Not much chance of this, as at times we would not have our clothes off for weeks when in the front line. If we tried to wash our clothes we had no chance of getting them dry'. Jones was questioned twice by the hospital authorities, although it was eventually 'found that I had not contributed to my condition'.⁶³ T. A. Silver, on the other hand, was reported by his unit's doctor 'for going sick' with frost-bitten feet 'in a filthy condition'. He protested that this was hardly his fault, 'with having to wear dirty socks and walking about the muddy trenches and no hot water to wash my feet', but this cut little ice and he 'got ... seven days field punishment' before eventually being sent to hospital back in England.⁶⁴

That said, combatants' personal accounts, both those written during and in the aftermath of war, stressed the dangers to their physical health far less often than those to their sense of self, evincing what Santanu Das describes as 'an extraordinary psychic anxiety' about such matters.⁶⁵ Soldiers, furthermore, may have perceived their transformation into dirty veterans as involving the potential loss of something, be it modernity, status or humanity, but they did not generally portray this as a *permanent* loss: the emphasis was not on the dangers of an irreversible degradation, but rather on the importance of practices and

rituals, also centring on the body and the uniform, which served to restore what had temporarily been lost.

In her seminal work on *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, first published in 1966, Mary Douglas stressed that contemporary Western understanding of dirt were not simply based on notions of hygiene and concerns over health: ‘our ideas of dirt also express symbolic systems’.⁶⁶ However, she believed that while ‘primitive culture is pollution-prone ... ours is not’, adding that ‘with us pollution is a matter of aesthetics, hygiene or etiquette, which only becomes grave in so far as it may create social embarrassment’.⁶⁷ This may (or may not) have been true of Britain in the 1960s, but the importance placed on grooming and cleansing practices by First World War combatants suggests that they took the dangers of pollution, mixed as they were with the traumatic impact of war, rather more seriously than Douglas’s slightly dismissive tone might suggest.⁶⁸

Goods sent from home by family or – less frequently – friends, could play an important part in restoring combatants’ well-being. In May 1918, for example, Captain E. W. Cremer became a prisoner of war. Five months later he was badly in need of new clothes, including ‘underclothing, also my old trench uniform is in rags’. A week before the Armistice he wrote home, expressing his gratitude for the garments they had sent: ‘it is simply splendid to have a good change of underclothing’.⁶⁹ He was not alone. Requests and thanks for various items of clothing, as well as food, cigarettes and a range of other items, peppered the wartime correspondence of most combatants, both officers and privates. In July 1915, for example, Frank Birkinshaw was ‘anxiously awaiting socks, as the only part of mine left are the tops. Also reinforcements in the way of shirts are urgently needed’.⁷⁰

The parcels sent to officers tended to be more frequent, varied and valuable, although their requests often exhibited the same sense of urgency. In July 1917 Captain Herbert Leland thanked his wife for gathering ‘some clothes together for me. I have got my knees through both pairs of breeches. The seat is entirely out of one, and I am without pants!’⁷¹ Rather more surprising was Major Richardson’s request to his mother, written from ‘Trenches’ in France: ‘please send me ... a pair of easy slippers size 7 with elastics sown on to keep them on my feet and marked with my name’.⁷² Some, like Lieutenant G. N. Holt, regularly sent dirty garments to be washed at home.⁷³

That said, there were limits to the help that even the most affluent and conscientious relative or friend on the home front could provide. In November 1915, for example, A. W. Savage thanked his old employer ‘for your offer to send me anything but there is nothing I require except a good bath’.⁷⁴ Indeed, washing off the signs of the front line were frequently

depicted as a fundamental part of the recovery process.⁷⁵ J. G. Fuller emphasises that ‘the eternal “bull” ... was often bitterly resented by men weary almost to death from their time in the line’, but there was a considerable difference between orders to polish boots and buttons while in action and the opportunity to bathe, shave and change into clean items.⁷⁶

In November 1916 Captain Leland was billeted in a hotel in ‘a large [French] town’, after spending the previous month in the trenches. ‘The most glorious thing of all (keep it secret) but it was the first hot bath I have had since I have been in France. I spent about half hour in it and felt so clean’.⁷⁷ In 1916 Lieutenant Holt wrote to his parents that ‘After a long dose of the line – twenty days last time – it is absolutely paradise to get clean again’.⁷⁸ In his war memoir Sidney Rogerson explained how, upon returning back to camp after seeing action in the final stages of the battle of the Somme, he finally had a chance to wash. ‘The transformation was magical. Spiritually and in appearance I was a different being. Youth has a surprising resilience, and memories of the dirt, discomforts and dangers of the past four days were sloughed off with the soap and water and the application of a razor’.⁷⁹ (Figure 2)

Figure 2 Cleansing rituals? *The Bystander*, 16 August 1916

It was not only officers who recognised the importance of such rituals. Correlli Barnett’s contention that ‘there was little to choose by way of amenity between a slum yard and a trench’, meaning that ‘many of the rank-and-file were in fact better off in the trenches than at home’,⁸⁰ has been disputed by later historians.⁸¹ Whatever their pre-war living conditions, in fact, most privates appeared just as keen as their officers to get rid of the dirt of the trenches. In May 1917 private Birkinshaw wrote to his mother from France that ‘we had a bath a week ago. We had to march ten miles there and back to have it, but it was worth it’.⁸²

Indeed, despite many officers’ irritation at what they saw as the rank-and-file’s child-like dependence and unwillingness to take responsibility for their own welfare,⁸³ soldiers displayed a good deal of ingenuity in improvising washing facilities where these were not provided by the army. On the Western Front communal bathing facilities had been set up by early 1915, so that most soldiers on active service could expect at least one weekly bath, but this was by no means guaranteed, either on this or on other fronts.⁸⁴ Where such facilities were not available, privates went to considerable lengths to get a wash, without needing to be coaxed or coerced by officers.⁸⁵ In May 1915, while serving in Gallipoli, Horace Bruckshaw and some comrades dug a hole in the ground, put a waterproof sheet over it, filled it with water and ‘then enjoyed a much needed bath’. They had just finished their ‘rough and ready

toilet [when] a big shell dropped right in amongst us knocking out seven or eight'. The sudden carnage in the midst of what was supposed to part of the recovery from the trials of front line duty was particularly disturbing: 'it gave us a terrible shaking up'. Nonetheless, despite the almost constant shelling, neither Bruckshaw nor his comrades gave up trying to find ways of keeping clean.⁸⁶

For most other combatants, cleaning rituals had much more straightforward benefits and fewer dangers. When Aubrey Wade and his fellow artillerymen were relieved in November 1917, during 3rd Ypres, they were 'rotten dirty and crawling with lice ... we had not shaved for weeks ... our socks were all in one with our feet and boots ... our clothing stank of cordite and gas and mud', but this did not matter, as they were finally leaving the battlefield behind. As the days passed peacefully behind the lines, 'gradually we became cleaner and cleaner as the last traces of our gruelling wore off under the constant brushing and polishing'.⁸⁷

Conclusion

Soiled and worn uniforms served to mark combatants' transformation from raw recruits into veterans with experience of front line duty, and many civilian men and women sought to express their admiration and respect for such war-stained garments. In more experienced soldiers' eyes, however, the dirt, mud, stains and lice that attached themselves to their bodies and uniforms were not associated with manly heroism, but with fears of harm, loss of self-respect, status and even humanity. Far from leading soldiers to abandon peacetime norms of 'proper' grooming and hygiene, the conditions of the front actually strengthened them, as simple and seemingly mundane cleaning practices – washing, shaving, changing into fresh garments – acquired a new importance in staving off the dangers of permanent degradation and providing some much-needed comfort to counter the traumas of front-line service.

It becomes understandable, then, why the loss of such consolations should be so keenly felt, by officers and private soldiers alike. Trooper William Clarke, for example, who saw active service on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918, described in his memoirs how on one occasion he managed to have the first hot bath and 'clean, dry, lice-free clothing' in four weeks. While on his way back to the line a shell had burst nearby, but although 'smothered in mud and debris', he had emerged unharmed. Tellingly, Clarke's thoughts were not of his lucky escape. Rather, he mused, 'I can remember weeping with fury. That lovely feeling of being dry and clean gone'.⁸⁸

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¹ Ernest Kennedy Smith, *Letters Sent from France: Service with the Artists' Rifles and the Buffs December 1914 to December 1915* (London: J. Cobb, 1994), p. 89.

² J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War 1914–1918* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), p. 216.

³ Jane Tynan, 'Military Dress and Men's Outdoor Leisurewear: Burberry's Trench Coat in First World War Britain', *Journal of Design History*, 24, 2 (2011), pp. 139–56; Jane Tynan, '“Tailoring in the Trenches”: The Making of First World War British Army Uniform', in *British Popular Culture and the First World War* ed. by Jessica Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 71–93; Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999, first published 1996), p. 128. See also David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army and the British People c. 1870–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, first published 2005), pp. 85–6, 95–6. For an earlier period, see Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic War through the Crimea* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁴ Arthur Hamilton Gibbs, *The Grey Wave* (London: Hutchinson and Gibbs, 1920), pp. 13–14, quoted in L. Ugolini, 'Consumers to Combatants? British Uniforms and Identities, 1914–18', *Fashion Theory*, 14, 2 (2010), 159–82 (p. 166).

⁵ Ugolini, 'Consumers to Combatants?', 159–82 (pp. 159–72).

⁶ A. Clark War Diary, 'Echoes of the 1914 War in an Essex Village', 15 December 1914, Ms Eng. Hist. e. 94, Special Collections, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. The process of acquiring and first putting on a uniform after enlistment during the First World War is explored in Ugolini, 'Consumers to Combatants?'.

⁷ For example, see the analysis of 'convalescent blues', the uniforms worn by soldiers recovering from illness or injury, in Jeffrey Stephen Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers*

and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 99–115.

⁸ Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 3. On the propaganda link between enlistment and manliness, see also Meg Albrinck, ‘Humanitarians and He-Men: Recruitment Posters and the Masculine Ideal’, in *Picture This: World War Two Posters and Visual Culture*, ed. by Pearl James (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 312–39; Nicoletta F. Gullace, *‘The Blood of our Sons’: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 37–46, 105.

⁹ The complex relationship between Edwardian masculinities and military service has recently been the focus of renewed attention. See, for example, Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival and the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Meyer, *Men of War*; Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudnik, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Gullace, *‘The Blood of our Sons’*; George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Earlier research remains influential, especially Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994); Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War One* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁰ Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, chapter 1; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, first published 1975), chapter 2.

¹¹ ‘Arnewood’, *With the Guns West and East* (privately published: not dated), p. 67.

¹² Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), especially pp. 1–8.

¹³ L. B. Eyre, ‘1917 Impressions’, 22 October 1917, Private Papers of Lieutenant L. B. Eyre, Documents 4903, Imperial War Museums collections (IWM), London.

¹⁴ Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front 1914–1918* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004, first published 2005), pp. 225–26.

¹⁵ Harold N. Charrington to sister, 5 March 1918 and 8 April 1918, Private Papers of Lieutenant Colonel H. N. Charrington, Documents 11394, IWM. See also the photographs taken by Major A. C. L. D. Lees in Cameroon in 1913 and 1914, showing some rather worse-

for-wear uniforms. A. C. L. D. Lees, photograph album, Cameroon, 1913–14, Private Papers of Major A. C. L. D. Lees, Documents 1068, IWM.

¹⁶ James H. Butlin to Basil Burnett Hall, 10 August 1914, Private Papers of Lieutenant J. H. Butlin, Documents 7915, IWM.

¹⁷ Len Jellings to mother, 8 March 1918, Private Papers of L. Jellings, Documents 7319, IWM. Wartime correspondence between mothers and sons is explored further in Michael Roper, ‘Maternal Relations: Moral Manliness and Emotional Survival in Letters Home during the First World War’, in *Masculinities in Politics and War*, pp. 295–315.

¹⁸ Mowbray Meades to wife, 30 November 1916, Private Papers of M. Meades, Documents 11660, IWM. Servicemen’s use of letters home to describe the changes wrought on their physiques and character by the experience of soldiering is explored in Meyer, *Men of War*, pp. 23–25.

¹⁹ Images of pre-1914 soldiers as the epitome of masculinity, ‘loyal, patriotic, brave and therefore virtuous’, co-existed, particularly where rank-and-file soldiers from unglamorous regiments were concerned, with perceptions that they were drunken riff-raff, best avoided by the respectable. French, *Military Identities*, pp. 232–58 (p. 233). See also Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850–2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), pp. 7–145. Attempts to improve the Edwardian army’s image are explored in Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 167–82.

²⁰ John Lucy, *There’s a Devil in the Drum* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), p. 317.

²¹ Walter G. Ostler, IWM Interview, 21 March 1973, 39, IWM. Ostler joined the Royal Flying Corps.

²² Nicoletta F. Gullace, ‘White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War’, *Journal of British Studies*, 36, 2 (1997), pp. 178–206 (p. 201).

²³ Henry Williamson, *How Dear is Life* (London: Macdonald, 1984, first published 1954), p. 299.

²⁴ Quoted in Fussell, *The Great War*, pp. 30–31.

²⁵ Anon. (Douglas Herbert Bell), *A Soldier’s Diary of the Great War* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1929), pp. 59–60. See also the description of the ‘fresh divisions, with shining buttons and smart uniforms’, who were about to relieve Ernest Parker’s battalion during the battle of the Somme: ‘when these laughing men turned their eyes towards us, their smiles

froze on their faces'. Ernest Parker, *Into Battle 1914–1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994, first published 1964), p. 60.

²⁶ Smith, *Letters Sent from France*, p. 44. See also Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 52.

²⁷ Jane Tynan stresses the role of the uniform as a tool of surveillance used by the authorities to control 'the military body'. Tynan, '“Tailoring in the trenches”', especially p. 87. Such surveillance was by no means always successful. See Laura Ugolini, 'The Illicit Consumption of Military Uniforms in Britain, 1914–1918', *Journal of Design History*, 24, 2 (2001), pp. 125–38.

²⁸ Field-Marshal Sir John Denton Pinkstone French, *Extracts from General Routine Orders Issued to the British Army in the Field* (General Headquarters, 1915), p. 56.

²⁹ French, *Extracts from General Routine Orders*, p. 34; Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haigh, *Extracts from General Routine Orders Issued to the British Armies in France. Part 1. Adjutant General's Branch* (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 83–85, especially p. 83, both in Department of Printed Books, IWM. See also Tynan, '“Tailoring in the Trenches”'.

³⁰ French, *Extracts from General Routine Orders*, p. 57.

³¹ An Ex-Service Man, *Memories* (Keighley: The Crown Press, 1930), p. 14. See also J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 61.

³² Quoted in Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 147.

³³ Anon., *A Soldier's Diary*, pp. 54–55.

³⁴ Jack Sherwood to Sylvia Jones, 2 December 1915, Letters from Lance Corporal Jack Sherwood to Sylvia Jones, 1915–17, MS 1726/2/1, Birmingham City Archives.

³⁵ *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark, 1914–1919* ed. by James Munson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 150.

³⁶ See also Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 65.

³⁷ Laura Ugolini, *Men and Menswear: Sartorial Consumption in Britain, 1880–1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 28–29; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 207–31.

³⁸ Parker, *Into Battle*, p. 39.

³⁹ Fussell, *The Great War*, pp. 82–84 (p. 83). See also Holmes, *Tommy*, pp. 225–26; Gary D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 97.

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- ⁴⁰ Gerald Achilles Burgoyne, *The Burgoyne Diaries* (London: Thomas Harmsworth Publishing, 1985), p. 218. Although see also p. 82.
- ⁴¹ R. G. Raper, Diary, 1915–16, 7 November 1915, Private Papers of Major R. G. Raper, Documents 4319, IWM.
- ⁴² Reginald G. Garrod, 'First World War Memoirs', pp. 29–30, Private Papers of R. G. Garrod, Documents 6677, IWM.
- ⁴³ Geoffrey Brooke, *The Brotherhood of Arms* (London: William Clowe and Sons, 1941), p. 53.
- ⁴⁴ Brooke, *The Brotherhood of Arms*, p. 53. See also the disciplinary role of 'convalescent blue' uniforms. Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 103.
- ⁴⁵ Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 18.
- ⁴⁶ L. B. Eyre, '1917 Impressions', 22 October 1917, Private Papers of Lieutenant L. B. Eyre, Documents 4903, IWM.
- ⁴⁷ That there can be positive, 'manly' connotations to dirt is acknowledged, for example, in Elizabeth Pisani, 'Leviticus be Damned: Dirt in the Community', in *Dirt: The Filthy Reality of Everyday Life* ed. by Kate Forde (London: Profile Books, 2011), pp. 91–115 (pp. 98–99); Ingun Grimstad Klepp, 'Patched, Louse-Ridden, Tattered: Clean and Dirty Clothes', *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, 5, 3 (2007), pp. 254–75 (pp. 266–67). Neither of these works, it should be noted, focuses on Edwardian Britain.
- ⁴⁸ William Linton Andrews, *Haunting Years: The Commentaries of a War Territorial* (London: Hutchinson, not dated, c. 1930), pp. 130–31.
- ⁴⁹ Sidney Rogerson, *Twelve Days* (London: Arthur Barker, not dated, c. 1933), p. 126.
- ⁵⁰ Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, p. 45.
- ⁵¹ Fussell, *The Great War*, chapter 2.
- ⁵² C. B. Harley to 'Dada' (sister), 29 November 1915, Private Papers of C. B. Harley, 05/54/1, IWM.
- ⁵³ An MP (Aubrey Herbert), *Mons, Anzac and Kut* (London: Edward Arnold, 1919), pp. 110, 130.
- ⁵⁴ Burgoyne, *The Burgoyne Diaries*, p. 26.
- ⁵⁵ R. G. Raper, Diary, 1915–16, 7 August 1915, Private Papers of Major R. G. Raper, Documents 4319, IWM.

⁵⁶ Bombardier X, *So this is War! The Truth about the Western and Eastern Fronts Revealed* (London: Hutchinson, not dated, c. 1930), p. 46. This was a fictional, or at least fictionalised, account of one man's wartime experiences. See also Holmes, *Tommy*, pp. 589–92.

⁵⁷ Rogerson, *Twelve Days*, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Anon, *Fusilier Bluff: The Experiences of an Unprofessional Soldier in the Near East 1918 to 1919* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1934), p. 76. See also Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, pp. 211, 213; Nicholas J. Saunders, 'Material Culture and Conflict: The Great War 1914–18', in *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War*, ed. by Nicholas J. Saunders [and Paul Cornish] (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), pp. 5–25 (p. 9).

⁵⁹ Francis J. Field, 'First weeks in France', Private Papers of F. J. Field, Documents 3726, IWM.

⁶⁰ Victoria Kelley, *Soap and Water: Cleanliness, Dirt and the Working Classes in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 21–25; Rosie Cox, 'Dishing the Dirt: Dirt and the Home', in *Dirt*, ed. by Forde, pp. 37–73 (p. 43); Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, p. 39.

⁶¹ Mark Harrison, *The Medical War: British Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 125.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 132.

⁶³ Ernest V. J. Jones, 'Notes on a soldier's life in the 1914–18 war in Macedonia', Private Papers of E. V. J. Jones, Documents 987, IWM.

⁶⁴ T. A. Silver, *Memoirs, 1914–19*, Private Papers of T. A. Silver, Documents 7715, IWM.

⁶⁵ Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, p. 37.

⁶⁶ M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003, first published 1966), p. 36.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁶⁸ A point also made by Victoria Kelley in her work on cleanliness and the Victorian and Edwardian working class. As she points out, there was nothing 'playful' about the 'deadly serious social values' on which notions of purity and filth were based. Victoria Kelley, 'The Interpretation of Surface: Boundaries, Systems and their Transgression in Clothing and Domestic Textiles, c. 1880–1939', *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, 7, 2 (2009), pp. 216–35 (p. 233). See also Kelley, *Soap and Water*.

⁶⁹ E. W. Cremer to parents, 1 October 1918 and 5 November 1918, Private Papers of Captain E. W. Cremer MC, Documents 9361, IWM. See also Annette Becker, 'Art, Material Life and

Disaster: Civilian and Military Prisoners of War', in *Matters of Conflict*, ed. by Saunders [and Cornish], pp. 26–34.

⁷⁰ Frank Thornton Birkinshaw to mother, 10 July 1915, F. T. Birkinshaw Private Papers, Documents 4870, IWM.

⁷¹ Herbert John Collett Leland to wife, 28 July 1917, Private Papers of Captain H. J. C. Leland DSO, Documents 6280, IWM.

⁷² S. O. B. Richardson to mother, not dated, c. 1915, Private Papers of Major S. O. B. Richardson, Documents 8059, IWM.

⁷³ See, for example, G. N. Holt to parents, 1 December 1916, Private Papers of Lieutenant G. N. Holt, Documents 7690, IWM. Thank you to Paul Cornish for directing me to this collection.

⁷⁴ A. W. Savage to K. A. Scott-Moncrieff, 1 November 1915, K. A. Scott-Moncrieff, General Manager, Electrical Supply Company, DF115, Liddle Collection (1914–18), Special Collections, Brotherton Library, Leeds University.

⁷⁵ For those injured or ill soldiers who could not help themselves, cleaning became part of the process whereby nurses and other auxiliary medical staff worked to 'restore' combatants to as close to 'full health' as they could realistically achieve. Christine E. Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 119. Thank you to Jessica Meyer for pointing me towards this book.

⁷⁶ Fuller, *Troop Morale*, p. 78.

⁷⁷ Herbert John Collett Leland to wife, 11 November 1916, Private Papers of Captain H. J. C. Leland DSO, Documents 6280, IWM. The joking injunction to 'keep it secret' is telling. Jessica Meyer suggests that it was in private diaries, rather than in correspondence, that 'issues of bodily discomfort could be discussed with propriety'. Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 52.

⁷⁸ G. N. Holt to parents, 30 December 1916, Private Papers of Lieutenant G. N. Holt, Documents 7690, IWM.

⁷⁹ Rogerson, *Twelve Days*, p. 103.

⁸⁰ Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), pp. 431, 432.

⁸¹ See, for example, Todman, *The Great War*, p. 9; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1998), p. 342.

⁸² Frank Thornton Birkinshaw to mother, 7 May 1915, F. T. Birkinshaw Private Papers, Documents 4870, IWM.

⁸³ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 85–86.

⁸⁴ Holmes, *Tommy*, p. 590. See also Harrison, *The Medical War*, pp. 133–34.

⁸⁵ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, pp. 130–31. Harrison notes that ‘most men needed little prompting to rid themselves of the hated body louse’. Harrison, *The Medical War*, pp. 134.

⁸⁶ *The Diaries of Private Horace Bruckshaw 1915–16*, ed. by Martin Middlebrook (London: Scholar Press, 1979), p. 39.

⁸⁷ Aubrey Wade, *The War of the Guns: Western Front, 1917 and 1918* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1936), pp. 62, 65.

⁸⁸ W. Clarke, ‘Recollections 1914–18’, p. 5, W. Clarke Private Papers, Documents 1377, IWM.