

FIRST WORLD WAR

PART NINE: SUPERPOWERS AT WAR

Sponsored by

A MONTHLY
12-PART SERIES
TO MARK THE
CONFLICT'S
CENTENARY

➤ **PATRICK
BISHOP**
America powers in

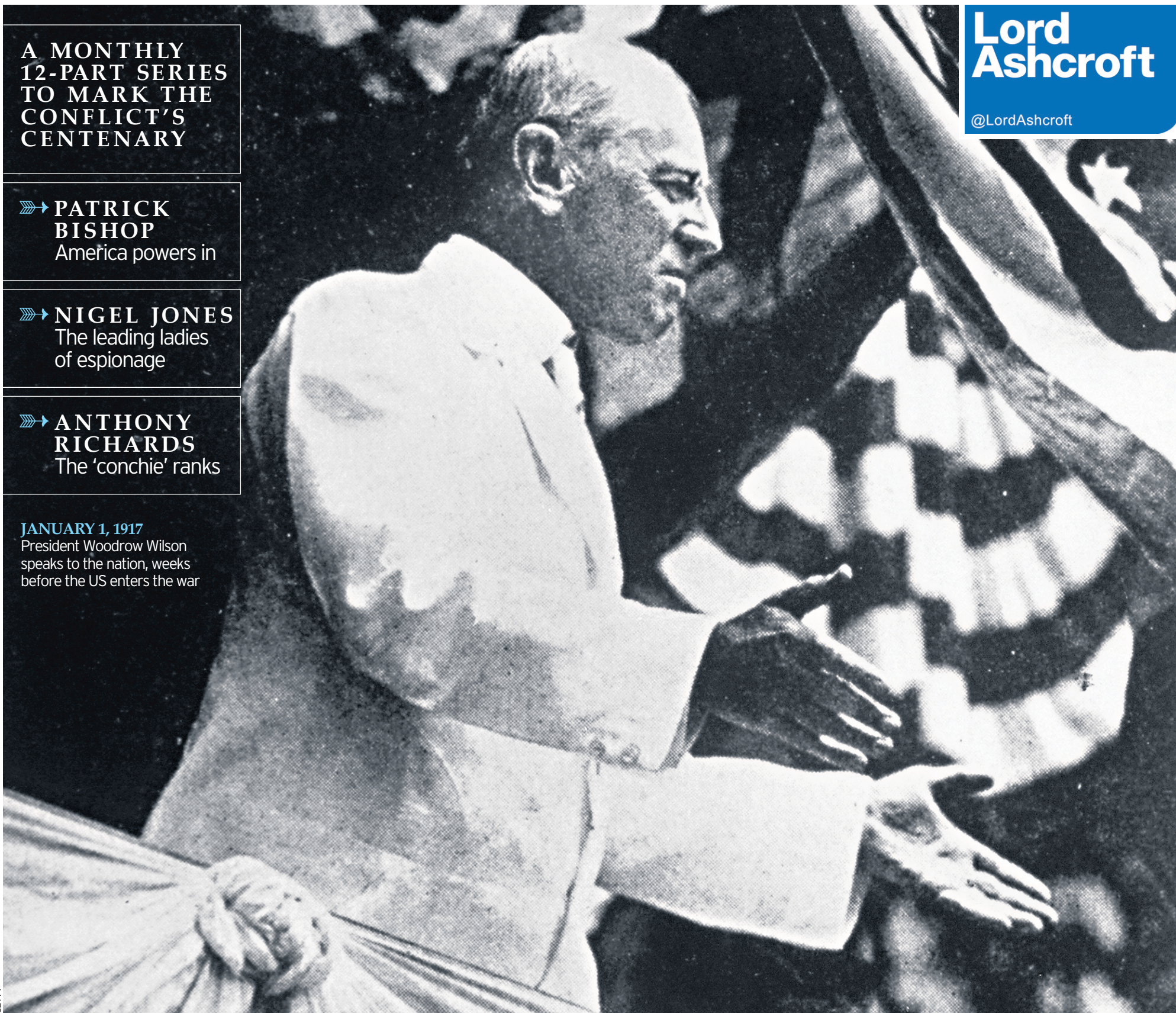
➤ **NIGEL JONES**
The leading ladies
of espionage

➤ **ANTHONY
RICHARDS**
The 'conchie' ranks

JANUARY 1, 1917
President Woodrow Wilson
speaks to the nation, weeks
before the US enters the war

**Lord
Ashcroft**

@LordAshcroft



GETTY

**LORD ASHCROFT
MEDAL COLLECTION**



Visit lordashcroftmedals.com to find
out more about these brave men and
discover the remarkable stories
behind the Victoria Cross.

Join us for an exclusive red carpet gala evening, celebrating the 50th anniversary of one of our nation's greatest films



Released in 1964, ZULU recounts the historic Battle of Rorke's Drift during the Anglo-Zulu War. Eleven Victoria Crosses were awarded, historically the greatest number on a single day of action.

On June 10th, at Odeon, Leicester Square, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary with a unique screening of this much-loved cinematic classic.

ZULU has been specially remastered for the occasion, and will be appearing in its original widescreen format. The evening will also feature a Zulu choir, The Welsh Guards choir, and a unique opportunity to see rare, never-before-seen footage.

Buy tickets at www.zulu50.com



THE DAVID BATTREY
MEMORIAL TRUST

WELCOME

The 20th century was to be dominated by two superpowers – but their fate in the First World War couldn't have been more different. America entered the war reluctantly in 1917 but left triumphant, paving the way back home for materialism and reform. Russia saw revolution and dictatorship, with casualties in the millions. Patrick Bishop argues that both outcomes were inevitable; the war merely speeded up events.

We also look at how wartime politics led to the rise of the spy – in particular two powerful female secret agents – and at the harsh treatment meted out to conscientious objectors who refused to fight and were punished for their “cowardice”.

This month's work of battlefield art is by John Lavery, who was thwarted in his attempts to fight aged 58 so focused on painting the home front. Other regular features include Michael Ashcroft's story of a VC hero, poetry from the trenches by Siegfried Sassoon and readers' letters about loved ones who fought in the war. Also read about how a piece of shrapnel could have obliterated one of the greatest names in 20th-century literature.



Zoe Dare Hall
Series editor



➤ **POWER PLAY**
How America and Russia's drastically different fortunes in the war helped shape the 20th century.
Patrick Bishop, P4-5

➤ **A SECRET WAR**
They could have been straight out of fiction, but Mata Hari and Edith Cavell lived and died bravely as agents in the service of their countries.
Nigel Jones, P6-7

➤ **WOMEN'S WORK**
Artist John Lavery was employed by IWM to highlight the role of women in post-war France. We look at *The Ordnance CO's Cookhouse*.
Richard Slcombe, P8

➤ **POET'S ANGER**
Siegfried Sassoon's short poem *The General* is a powerful and sardonic indictment of the conduct of the war.
Anthony Richards, P9

➤ **HEROES' NIGHT**
Lt-Cdr George Bradford was one of eight men to win the Victoria Cross during the naval raid on Zeebrugge in 1918.
Michael Ashcroft P10-11

➤ **THE DISSENTERS**
The conscientious objectors to military service who were judged to be cowards and cads.
Anthony Richards P12-13

➤ **POST BOX**
Your letters describing the courage of loved ones; Ernest Hemingway's brush with death on the Italian front.
Zoe Dare Hall, P14-15

IWM PODCAST
Hear IWM's *Voices of the First World War* podcasts at www.1914.org/podcasts

Front cover: US President Woodrow Wilson on the George Washington en route to France; left, a 1919 Russian poster showing how the Revolution helped workers

➤ **THE SPONSOR**
Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC

Inside the First World War, a 12-part series, is sponsored by Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC, an international businessman, philanthropist and military historian. Lord Ashcroft is sponsoring the monthly supplements because he wants to promote a greater understanding of the First World War and

to remember those who gave their lives in the conflict. Lord Ashcroft has established himself as a champion of bravery, building up the world's largest collection of Victoria Crosses (VCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious award for courage in the face of the enemy. He has also written four books on bravery: *Victoria Cross Heroes*, *Special Forces*

Heroes, *George Cross Heroes* and *Heroes of the Skies*. In each of these 12 supplements, Lord Ashcroft tells the incredible stories behind First World War VCs from his collection. Lord Ashcroft purchased his first VC in 1986 and currently owns more than 180 of the decorations. Three years ago, he began collecting George Crosses (GCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most

prestigious award for courage not in the face of the enemy. He currently owns 14 GCs. Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collections are on display in a gallery that bears his name at IWM London, along with VCs and GCs in the care of the museum. The gallery, built with a £5 million donation from Lord Ashcroft, was opened by HRH The Princess Royal in 2010. Lord Ashcroft has been a successful

entrepreneur for the past four decades, launching, buying, building and selling companies – both private and public – in Britain and overseas. He is a former Treasurer and Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party. In September 2012, he was appointed a member of the Privy Council and was made the Government's Special Representative for Veterans' Transition. He is Treasurer of the

International Democratic Union (IDU) and one of Britain's leading experts on polling. Lord Ashcroft has donated several millions of pounds to charities and good causes. He founded Crimestoppers (then the Community Action Trust) in 1988. He is the founder of the Ashcroft Technology Academy and Chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University. His numerous other charity roles

include being Vice Patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, a Trustee of IWM London, an Ambassador for SkillForce and a Trustee of the Cleveland Clinic in the US. For information about the Lord Ashcroft Gallery, visit iwm.org.uk/heroes. For information on Lord Ashcroft, visit lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



Birth of the American Century



THE WAR MADE THE US LEADER OF THE FREE WORLD AND SHAPED THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, SAYS **PATRICK BISHOP**

When Gen John Pershing arrived with the first American troops in Paris in the summer of 1917, he made a pilgrimage to a sacred site. It was the tomb of the Marquis de Lafayette, who despite his aristocratic lineage had gone to the aid of the American revolutionaries in their triumphant struggle against the British. “*Lafayette, nous voilà!*” (Lafayette, we are here!) the general is supposed to have declared, though the words are more likely to have been uttered by his aide, Charles E Stanton. This act of homage was more than a mere courtesy. It was an expression – intended for international consumption – of the motivations that had propelled a largely reluctant United States into the war. By this gesture, America was saying that its decision to enter the conflict was driven by the same impulses that had moved Lafayette – that is, a hatred of autocracy and a desire to make the world a freer and better place.

This attitude represented a fundamental shift in America’s relationship with the rest of the world and had enormous consequences for the history of the 20th century. By raising its standard in the global defence of liberty, the US more or less guaranteed its participation in the next war. It would also pitch it into a long, ideological confrontation with the other power whose destiny was changed utterly by its involvement in the First World War – the Russian Empire in its incarnation as the Soviet Union.

In 1914, the US intended to stay out of a conflict

that seemed emblematic of the rottenness of old Europe, a place from which most Americans were thankful to have escaped. Step by inexorable step, the US was dragged in. The austere, high-minded president Woodrow Wilson won the 1916 election vowing to maintain neutrality. Germany’s actions, though, made the position untenable. In May 1915, a German U-boat sank the British liner Lusitania, killing 1,198, including 129 Americans. This and other sinkings piled further pressure on Wilson.

The revelation of the “Zimmermann Telegram” – a signal intercepted and deciphered by British intelligence from Germany’s foreign minister to his man in Mexico, offering the Mexicans the return of territories lost to the US if they joined the war on Germany’s side – helped generate support for war. On April 6, 1917, Congress voted to declare war on the Kaiser and his allies. Until then, America had done very well out of the war. Exports to Europe boomed and its financial institutions piled into markets previously dominated by Britain. Such a momentous step required momentous justifications and Wilson was the man to provide them.

US intervention would ensure this was “the war to end all wars”, said Wilson, and America would be fighting to make “the world safe for democracy”. Troops would not start arriving in large numbers until 1918, but their appearance was decisive.

If Wilson thought his vital contribution would mean he could dictate the terms of the peace, he was mistaken. His blueprint for a new world order was

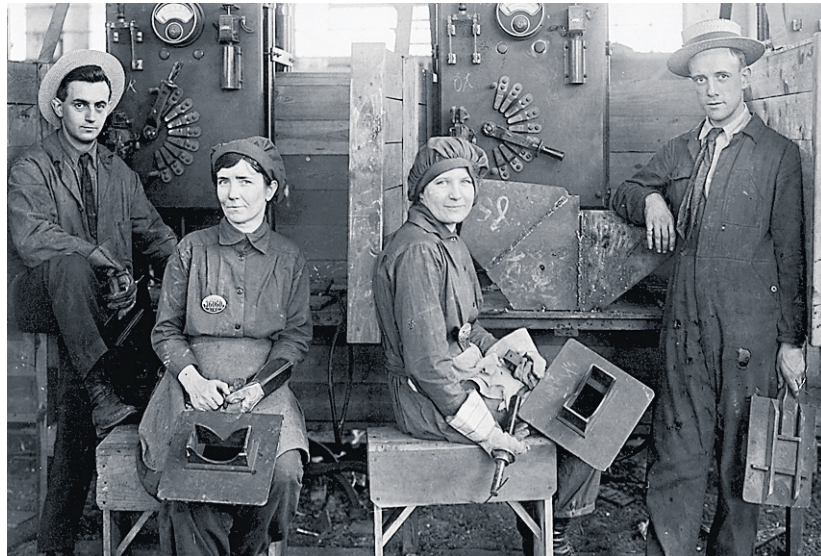
laid out in his “Fourteen Points” based on principles of open diplomatic dealing, free trade and national self-determination.

His proposed generosity towards the Germans was opposed with particular bitterness by the French, who demanded vast reparations for their losses and the military emasculation of their enemy. The Versailles Treaty thus ended up a mish-mash of Wilsonian idealism and old-fashioned vengefulness. It was a formula for trouble which the Wilson-inspired League of Nations created by the treaty could do nothing to avert.

The US was transformed internally by its entry into the war. The conflict was a struggle of competing resources and America’s were radically reorganised to maximise efficiency. Among the results were the penetration of women into blue-collar jobs that had formerly been exclusively male territory and the migration north of black workers to take the place of workers who had gone to war. This would lead, as soon as the war ended, to the 19th Amendment giving women the vote and, in the longer term, start the process of delivering racial equality.

Of all the combatant nations, the US did the best out of the war. It emerged from its brief but heavy involvement as unmistakably the most powerful nation in the world. Its tiny army had expanded to a mighty five million, laying the foundations for its military pre-eminence at the close of the century.

But this did not give Americans a taste for further adventures. In the 1920 election, Wilson tried to turn



it into a referendum on the League of Nations. However, the Democrats were thrashed by the isolationist Republican candidate Warren Harding, America steered clear of the League and, for the time being, the US was plunged into contented neutrality.

But something had happened to the US that ensured this was to be the American Century. The experience of participation and victory gave the country a new cohesiveness and confidence that propelled it into the role of leader of the free world. Americans felt that they had set an example of how a nation – no matter where its citizens hailed from – should behave.

The feeling is evident in the patriotic musical fare served up by Tin Pan Alley, in particular the work of Irving Berlin. Berlin’s patriotism was heartfelt. His parents had fled the anti-Semitic pogroms of Tsarist Russia and, after an impoverished upbringing on New York’s Lower East Side, a string of hits had made him a Broadway star. Drafted into the army in 1917, he had done his bit for the war effort by co-writing such upbeat songs as *Let’s All Be Americans Now*.

The trauma of war was barely felt in America. Compared to the European belligerents, its losses of 116,000 dead were small. It was able to emerge from the conflict full of strength and optimism, convinced of the value of its institutions and way of life.

Russia’s experience of the war produced entirely the opposite effect. In the space of four years, the most autocratic government in Europe would collapse into revolutionary ferment from which

MAKING HISTORY
Clockwise from main picture: Crowds cheer US general John Pershing in Paris in 1917; two female welders in Philadelphia, the first US women to work in shipbuilding; Lenin addresses a rally in Moscow in 1917; Tsar Nicholas II and family before the Russian Revolution

Sponsored by

Lord Ashcroft
@LordAshcroft

would emerge the world’s first communist regime. The catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Germans at Tannenberg in August 1914 was a harbinger of the suffering to come. With the failure of successive offensives, casualty figures running into the millions and economic disaster leading to shortages of essential supplies, the incompetence of the Russian ruling class was laid bare.

After Tsar Nicholas II appointed himself supreme commander of the army, the fortunes of the war and the house of Romanov became fatally intertwined. In the early months of 1917, hunger was added to seething discontent and, in Petrograd and other cities, bread riots erupted. Fearing revolution, the army’s high command forced Nicholas to abdicate. The swiftness of his departure amazed everyone. Even Lenin, watching with eager eyes from his exile in Switzerland, was taken aback. “It’s so staggering,” he told his wife. “It’s so completely unexpected.”

When the Tsar’s brother, Michael, refused to replace him, three centuries of dynastic rule came to an end and the governance of Russia fell into the hands of an ill-assorted Provisional Government which struggled to maintain the war effort.

By now, the famously enduring troops had reached their limits. Soldiers’ committees sprang up demanding an end to the war. In July, another offensive was launched which, after initial successes, ground to a halt. The news triggered a further slump in morale and a surge of anger against the ruling class. Units refused orders to move to the front and millions deserted. In the countryside, armed bands turned on landowners, burning and killing.

Lenin was stuck in Zurich, stranded by the tides of war. At last, in April 1917, the German foreign ministry arranged for him and his entourage to be transported through their territory in a sealed train and then on to Sweden and home, in the hope that his return would accelerate the Russian collapse.

With Lenin’s arrival, events moved rapidly from upheaval to revolution. On reaching Petrograd’s Finland Station, he was met by a crowd of red flag-waving soldiers, sailors and workers who now controlled the city. He told them that “the worldwide socialist revolution has already dawned... We have to fight for a socialist revolution, to fight until the proletariat wins full victory!”

Lenin had abandoned existing Bolshevik policy to make it plain that there could be no accommodation with the moderate revolutionaries personified by Alexander Kerensky, the head of the Provisional Government. There was to be no parliamentary democracy, dominated by the bourgeoisie, but all power would rest with the soviets – councils elected by the workers. The lines were now drawn for a power struggle that would plunge Russia into an appalling five-year civil war.

After Kerensky ordered his arrest, Lenin fled to Finland. In October he returned to Petrograd, which was now controlled by the Bolsheviks. From there he plotted the *coup d’état* that would overthrow the Provisional Government and ultimately bring about communist rule. One of the Bolsheviks’ first acts was to announce Russia’s withdrawal from the war, which was formalised in March 1918 with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

The Russian Revolution would probably have happened anyway. The traumatic effects of the war ensured that it arrived more quickly and in a more drastic form than might have been the case if it had evolved in peacetime. The triumph of American capitalism was also a historical inevitability, but accelerated by the industrial pressures of the war.

By its entry, America changed the course of the war. It did not, though, achieve its war aims. Wilson had talked about making the world “safe for democracy” and envisioned a post-conflict international landscape bathed in the light of reason and harmony. Instead, in Russia, autocracy was replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat and everywhere in Europe saw the rise of fiercely nationalistic and anti-democratic parties.

As a result of the First World War, the world was presented with two completely contrasting models of how society might be ordered. One promoted materialism and personal liberty, the other collectivism and the virtue of the mass over the individual. The struggle between the competing ideologies would last for much of the rest of the century, being laid aside for a few years only when self interest demanded that the US and the USSR joined forces against Nazism and Fascism.

Their shared victory only sharpened the rivalry, giving birth to a Cold War whose effects were felt all over the globe and linger today.

The women whose lives made spy fiction look tame



SPYING INSPIRED PRE-WAR BESTSELLERS, BUT THE TRUE STORIES OF EDITH CAVELL AND MATA HARI WERE FAR MORE DRAMATIC, SAYS **NIGEL JONES**

With the trench lines static, and populations occupied and resentful, there was plenty of opportunity in the First World War for both sides to use espionage as a weapon. In the previous decade, Britain was racked by spy mania, with bestselling fiction such as Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* and Saki's *When William Came* stoking public fears of German invasion aided by an army of "sleeping" spies. The panic was exaggerated by the popular press but spying was real enough.

Such fears led in 1909 to the foundation of Britain's modern secret services: MI5 to counter espionage domestically and MI6 to carry out spying abroad, principally against Germany. Both secret services were led by military men, initially with skeleton staffs and limited budgets. Col Vernon Kell, a part-Polish officer known as K, ran MI5, specialising in monitoring German agents around ports with the aid of a special section in the Post Office that opened their letters. Mansfield Cumming, or C, an eccentric, monocled sailor who suffered seasickness, was Kell's counterpart in MI6, whose agents monitored the building of Germany's High Seas Fleet.

Spy networks were even more active elsewhere in Europe. The Kaiser's military intelligence chief was the briskly efficient Col Walter Nicolai, who survived both world wars, only to be arrested by Stalin's secret police and die under "interrogation" in 1947. Pre-war spy scandals such as France's Dreyfus affair and Austria's Redl case – which saw Vienna's counter-intelligence chief, Col Alfred Redl, betray Austria-Hungary's military secrets to Russia – proved spying was an essential weapon for the powers that would plunge Europe into war.

Two of the war's most famous secret agents were women – women so different in career and character that the only thing they had in common was the manner of their deaths, both shot at dawn by firing squads. One was the British nurse Edith Cavell, shot by the Germans in Brussels. The other was an erotic dancer and courtesan who called herself Mata Hari, killed by the French outside Paris. Cavell, born near Norwich, daughter of a clergyman, was inspired by Florence Nightingale. A fervent Christian, when war began she was running a training clinic for nurses in Brussels. For almost a year after the capital was occupied, and helped by a team of Belgians (it is not certain if she was formally recruited by MI6), she combined her profession with hiding wounded or strayed Belgian, French and British soldiers in her home and hospital. From there they were smuggled across the frontier to the neutral Netherlands and back to Britain. Under German military law, such humanitarian acts were treason.

Cavell and a handful of helpers were betrayed by a Belgian traitor, arrested and condemned to death. The decision, while legally impeccable, caused outrage around the world. America was still neutral and its diplomats in Brussels made frenzied efforts to save Cavell. But the Germans shot her and one of her Belgian assistants on October 12, 1915.

Her last words to the Anglican chaplain who comforted her in the death cell rang around the world: "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone." Cavell's stoicism, her courage in the face of death, her self-sacrifice and her honesty if naive admission of her "crimes", made an immediate impression on global

opinion. It was a propaganda gift for the Allies, who made much of German barbarism in coldly condemning and killing such a saintly female figure. Statues of Cavell were erected in every continent. Schools, streets and even a mountain were named after her. French chanteuse Edith Piaf was baptised in her honour. And the execution helped bring the US into the war in 1917. It was a disastrous PR own goal by Germany.

Not so France's equally ruthless elimination of amateur spy Mata Hari exactly two years after Cavell's death on October 15, 1917. Born Margarethe Zelle in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, she lost her mother when young and answered a marriage ad placed by a much older Dutch colonial officer, Rudolf MacLeod. The couple had two children, but MacLeod was a syphilitic womaniser and Margarethe escaped marital misery by studying the customs and particularly the dance of what is now Indonesia.

After her son's death from syphilitic complications, Margarethe fled MacLeod and returned to Europe, settling in Paris where she reinvented herself as Mata Hari (Eye of the Morning), a daring interpreter of Indonesian dance. Her sensuous movements and near-nude appearances in costume jewellery and little else made her a sensation. For a few years, she entranced audiences in a dozen capital cities.

By 1914, however, the novelty had worn off and, ageing and with her dance career in freefall, Mata Hari cast around for a new role. She found it when

she signed up as Col Nicolai's Agent H-17. She was an attractive catch for German intelligence for several reasons. As a neutral Dutch national, she could move freely around a Europe at war; and as a courtesan who had always been free with her favours, her many high ranking-lovers would whisper indiscreet secrets to her over the pillow.

The British were the first to rumble Mata Hari as a spy. Using code-breaking techniques and technology then in their infancy, a team in the Admiralty's Room 40 – a forerunner of Bletchley Park and GCHQ – intercepted her messages and she was arrested and questioned by Scotland Yard during a visit to London. Released through lack of hard evidence to stay at the Savoy hotel, the Yard tipped off their French counterparts to keep a close eye on her.

They caught up with her at another fancy hotel on the Champs Élysées in February 1917. Brought to trial that autumn after the French army had suffered staggering losses and mutinied, the authorities were in no mood to show mercy to a woman they accused of causing the deaths of up to 50,000 French soldiers. She was shot at the Fort de Vincennes. A rumour that she flung open her coat to reveal her naked body to distract the squad that shot her was unfounded.

The two most famous of the women who died violently in the First World War could not have been less alike. But since their deaths, both have been hailed by feminists as victims and martyrs in a world at war manipulated by men. Both also conformed to traditional female stereotypes: ministering angel and temptress siren. But the evidence suggests that, for all their differing motives, both knew what they were doing and accepted their deaths with a cool courage worthy of the bravest of soldiers.



A WOMAN'S WAR Clockwise from bottom left: a statue of Edith Cavell in St Martin's Place, London; a South African recruiting poster uses Cavell's death as propaganda; Cavell and her dogs in Brussels before the war; Mata Hari performing the Dance of the Seven Veils in 1906

‘Not a single man has an ounce of patriotism left’

By 1918, British and Commonwealth soldiers on the Western Front were weary. Arras, Ypres and Cambrai left them desperately tired and wondering if the war would ever end. The BEF needed time to recuperate. Instead, it was forced to extend its line south across the Somme to relieve the hard-pressed French. The men of Haig's army remained committed to the war. The grand political ideals that inspired so many to join up may have disappeared, but there were no rumblings of mutiny. The war had simply become a matter of personal integrity – of seeing it through for yourself, your comrades and your people back home. These sentiments were expressed in a letter written by Cpl Laurie Rowlands to his future wife on February 5, 1918. Although jaded and politically disillusioned, Rowlands, who was serving near Peronne in France with the 15th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry, remained a strong fighting soldier. Only three months later, he was severely wounded during the great German attacks but awarded the Military Medal for his bravery.

Sweetheart Mine!

Now – barring accidents – you will get to know all about it! I know you'll have a big surprise when you get this letter. I hope it lands without mishap. If anybody in authority was to see it! ... Perhaps you would like to know something of the spirit of the men out here now. Well! the truth is (and, as I said before, I'd be shot if anyone of importance collared this missive!) every man Jack is fed up almost past bearing, and not a single one has an ounce of what we call patriotism left in him. No-one cares a rap whether Germany has Alsace, Belgium or France, too, for that matter! All that every man desires now is to get done with it and go home. Now that's the honest truth and any man who has been out within the last few months will tell you the same. In fact – and this is no exaggeration – the greatest hope of a great majority of the men is that rioting and revolt at home will force the Government to "pack in" on any terms. Now you've got the real state of affairs – "right from the horse's mouth", as it were. I may add that I, too, have lost pretty nearly all the patriotism that I had left. It's just the thought of you all over there – you who love me and trust me to do my share in the job that is necessary for your safety and freedom – it's just that that keeps me going and enables me to "stick it". As for religion – God forgive us all! – it hasn't a place in one out of a million of the thoughts that hourly occupy men's minds. The Padres – and it's anything but pleasant to say so – but they absolutely fail to keep up a shred of their church's reputation. Nay! Behind the line every man – and it's almost without exception – relies solely on DRINK for his relaxation, amusement, pleasure – everything! Ay! Girlie mine, it's ghastly! But! – thank God for those dear ones at home who love true and trust absolutely in the strength, the courage and the fidelity of those who are far away 'midst danger and death! These are my mainstays, and thoughts of them always come to stay me and buck me up when I most feel like chucking it up and letting things slide. God bless you darling, and all those I love and who love me, for without their love and trust I would faint and fall. But don't worry Dear Heart o' Mine, for I shall "carry on" to the end – be it bitter or sweet – with my loved ones ever my first thought and care, my guide, inspiration and spur. Au revoir, my own sweetheart, and God will keep you safe till the storm is over. With all my heart's deepest love, Your own loving Laurie



JOHN LAVERY: THE ORDNANCE CO'S COOKHOUSE, HENRVILLE, BOULOGNE (1919)

"An army marches on its stomach" is traditionally attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte. Achieving this 100 years later during the First World War was an onerous logistical task.

Sustaining Britain's huge conscript army alone required more than 5,000 catering staff, including 700 members of the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps. The heat

and hardship of the enormous backroom effort is captured realistically in *The Ordnance CO's Cookhouse, Henrville, Boulogne* by John Lavery. Although a notable genre and landscape painter, Belfast-born Lavery's greatest success was as a society portraitist. He was elected first president of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters

in 1911 and painted a royal family group portrait at Buckingham Palace in 1913. In 1914, aged 58, Lavery tried to join the Artists Rifles, but was unable to keep up with other recruits. Three years later he made another attempt to see the front as an official war artist. But his plans were ended by a car crash. He and his wife were

badly concussed, so Lavery focused on painting the home front. The works, ranging from images of munitions factories to harbours, were not to his liking: "totally uninspired and dull as ditch-water" were his own words. Despite his misgivings, Lavery was much sought-after for official and independent commissions. After the Armistice, he

finally arrived in France, employed by the Imperial War Museum's Women's Work Section. The commission resulted in 13 paintings dealing with the work of women, from clerical duties in Rouen's town hall to the cavernous Army Bakeries in Dieppe. Undertaking his commission between May and June 1919, Lavery was encouraged to stress

the women's "comradeship with the men, which is encouraged as tending to lessen the unrest on the part of the Tommies since the Armistice". But in *The Ordnance CO's Cookhouse*, the gathered Tommies, who peer through the cookhouse windows (on the right), seem to emphasise the division between the sexes in post-Armistice France.

- Richard Slocombe, senior art curator, IWM
- *The Ordnance CO's Cookhouse, Henrville, Boulogne* will feature in IWM's Truth and Memory: First World War Art exhibition, which will open on July 19, along with new First World War galleries: www.iwm.org.uk

WAR POEM

The sardonic humour of ‘The General’ by Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

Siegfried Loraine Sassoon was born on September 8, 1886 and, comfortably supported by a private income, spent much of his early life indulging his passions for cricket, fox-hunting and romantic poetry. Affected by patriotic fervour at the outbreak of war, Sassoon enlisted immediately as a trooper in the Sussex Yeomanry. Following a riding accident he applied for a commission and was appointed 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in May 1915. Six months later, he embarked to join the 1st Battalion in France, where he would meet fellow officer and aspiring poet Robert Graves. Awakened by his first taste of trench warfare and deeply affected by the harsh conditions and constant danger, Sassoon's poetry became much harder in language and tone, his

earlier romantic verse forgotten in favour of ugly reality. The recent deaths of his brother Hamo at Gallipoli and in March 1916 of David Thomas – a fellow Royal Welsh Fusiliers officer with whom Sassoon and Graves had both developed a deep affection – had an enormous effect on his attitude to the war. The anger and despair instilled in Sassoon by his losses led him to become increasingly unconcerned with personal welfare, and his poems were marked by their use of sardonic humour and irony to deliver an angry condemnation of the war. A shoulder wound received on April 16, 1917 shortly after transferring to the 2nd Battalion led to Sassoon's evacuation to England. It was in Denmark Hill Hospital that he wrote *The General*, one of his most famous war poems.

Although Sassoon's unnamed General serves as an archetype for affably incompetent military leadership, his chief inspiration was Maj-Gen Sir Reginald Pinney, the officer commanding the 33rd Division of which Sassoon's battalion in 1917, the 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers, was a part. Meeting Pinney in person after the war, Sassoon chatted to him genially about "hunting, cricket and infantry warfare".

Sassoon's use of a "working-class" voice here serves to highlight the difference between the "common" soldiers at the front and the "educated" staff officers undertaking administrative and planning work back at the base. Frontline troops were often critical of those seen to have "cushy" jobs, regardless of their rank.

THE GENERAL (APRIL 1917)

➔ ‘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.
➔ ‘HE’S A CHEERY OLD CARD,’ GRUNTED HARRY TO JACK
➔ AS THEY SLOGGED UP TO ARRAS WITH RIFLE AND PACK.
BUT HE DID FOR THEM BOTH BY HIS PLAN OF ATTACK. ➔

As Sassoon wrote this poem from his hospital bed in London, he would no doubt have been thinking of his battalion still in France, busy fighting the Battle of Arras which had opened earlier that month on April 9, 1917. The battle was in part a diversionary attack to support the French-led offensive further south on the Aisne. Sassoon had been wounded while leading a bombing assault on the night of April 16.

This final ironic line epitomises the "Lions led by Donkeys" idea which became popular in the military history of the Sixties, portraying brave soldiers being sent to an unnecessary death by incompetent leadership. Despite more recent studies suggesting that the blame attributed to military leadership is too simplistic an interpretation of events and unfair to the individuals involved, this critical viewpoint still shapes the way in which many regard the First World War.

Storming ashore: self-sacrifice in the heroic raid on Zeebrugge



LT-CDR GEORGE BRADFORD GAVE HIS LIFE IN AN ATTACK DESIGNED TO KNOCK OUT A U-BOAT BASE, SAYS **MICHAEL ASHCROFT**

For much of the war, the Belgian port of Zeebrugge was used by the Imperial German Navy as a base from which its U-boats were able to attack British maritime targets and light shipping. Several attempts had been made in 1917 to block the port with a bombardment but, when these failed and British shipping losses approached crisis point in the spring, a new plan was devised.

In one of the most audacious episodes of the war, the Royal Navy was ordered to take the fight to the enemy in 1918 by attacking Zeebrugge and the canal that led inland to the German submarine base at Bruges. The aim of the enterprise was simple: to block the entrance to the canal and prevent the exit of German U-boats. It was to be achieved by sinking aged British ships in the canal's shallow waters. The undertaking, however, was anything but simple – as the events of April 22-23, 1918, bore out.

The initial intention was to conduct the raid on Zeebrugge on April 2, 1918, but this was postponed after the wind changed direction, making it impossible to achieve the necessary smokescreen that was required for the attack. Further attacks for April 11 and April 14 were also abandoned after the British force had set off, again because the weather was unsuitable.

Eventually the attack was launched three weeks later than first planned, with a concurrent but smaller assault on the port of Ostend. Both Zeebrugge and Ostend, because of their strategic importance, were heavily fortified. In the fading light of Monday, April 22, an armada of 142 vessels and more than 1,700 officers and men steamed across the English Channel under the command of Vice-Adml Roger Keyes. A larger number of vessels – 73 – were bound for Zeebrugge, with 67 destined for Ostend. Two were there to observe and supervise the attacks.

The armada was an odd mix of sleek, modern destroyers, obsolete, slow cruisers, along with two aged submarines, torpedo boats, motor launches and two Mersey ferries, Daffodil and Iris II. Finally, there was HMS Vindictive, a three-funnelled light cruiser which, despite nearing the end of its useful life, had been chosen for a leading role in the drama. The intention was to block the two enemy-held ports with at least three obsolete ships and two aged submarines while, in the case of Zeebrugge, a storming party from the specially formed 4th Battalion, Royal Marines, along with a strong naval party was to land from the Vindictive on the sea wall known as the Mole.

The events of that night were dramatic and, at times, confused. The raid on Zeebrugge led to the award of no less than eight Victoria Crosses (VCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious award for courage in the face of the enemy. This article concentrates on the role of just one of those VC recipients: Lt-Cdr George Bradford.

George Nicholson Bradford was born in Witton Park, Darlington, Co Durham, on April 23, 1887, one of four brothers and, much later, a sister. His father was a colliery manager and a strict disciplinarian who instilled into his children a strong work ethic and a passion for sport. Bradford was educated at Darlington Grammar School, the Royal Naval School in Eltham, south-east London, and Eastman's School in Southsea, near Portsmouth. In 1902, Bradford joined HMS Britannia as a cadet and was renowned as a fine athlete and boxer, eventually becoming Navy Officers' welterweight champion and twice appearing in the finals of the Army and Navy Officers' championships. Initially coached by his father-in-law, a top bare-knuckle fighter, Bradford was said to box with grace, agility and courage.

Before the war, Bradford had shown immense bravery while serving in the Royal Navy as a first lieutenant. Following a collision between a destroyer and a trawler on March 3, 1908, he led the efforts to save crewmen trapped on board the stricken fishing boat. He successfully rescued three men from the boat but was then told there was another young man on the sinking trawler.

An eyewitness later described how, without hesitation, Bradford "sprang on board, rushed to the forepeak, now inky black, and as the trawler gave a lurch, appeared with the unconscious boy in his arms". Bradford leapt into the whaler of his destroyer, HMS Chelmer, only seconds before the trawler upended and sank. Bradford was promoted to lieutenant as a result of his gallantry and joined the battleship HMS Vanguard on her commissioning in March 1910.

After almost two years' service in Vanguard, Bradford returned to destroyers, serving as first lieutenant of Amazon for two years from January 1912. In January 1914, he was appointed to Orion. However, after the outbreak of war, the general reluctance of the enemy to take on the Grand Fleet at sea restricted Bradford's opportunities to show his courage again. He wrote regularly to his younger sister and told her, prophetically, in 1917: "I think the Huns will have had all they want by this time next year." Bradford was not particularly ambitious, as his

steady, rather than spectacular, rise through the ranks of the Navy indicated. But he was talented at teaching the men under his command and he inspired great loyalty from those who served with him.

On the night of April 22, 1918, his 31st birthday, and having served throughout the war, Bradford was on board Iris II – one of the two Mersey ferries. The extent of his bravery is revealed in the citation for his VC, which was eventually announced on March 17, 1919: "For most conspicuous gallantry at Zeebrugge on the night of the 22-23 April 1918."

"This officer was in command of the Naval storming parties embarked on Iris II. When Iris II proceeded alongside the Mole, great difficulty was experienced in placing the parapet anchors owing to the motion of the ship. An attempt was made to land the scaling ladders before the ship was secured. Lt Claude E K Hawkings managed to get one ladder in position and actually reached the parapet, the ladder being crushed to pieces just as he stepped off it. This very gallant young officer was last seen defending himself with his revolver. He was killed on the parapet.

"Though securing the ship was not part of his duties, Lt-Cdr Bradford climbed up the derrick [a small crane used to load and unload cargo] which carried a large parapet anchor and was rigged out over the port side; during this climb the ship was surging up and down and the derrick crashing on the Mole. Waiting his opportunity, he jumped with the parapet anchor on to the Mole and placed it in position. Immediately after hooking on the parapet anchor, Lt-Cdr Bradford was riddled with bullets from machine-gun fire and fell into the sea between the Mole and the ship. Attempts to recover his body failed.

"Lt-Cdr Bradford's action was one of absolute self-sacrifice. Without a moment's hesitation he went to certain death, realising that in such action lay the only possible chance of securing Iris II and enabling her storming parties to land."

Bradford had died in a splendid act of self-sacrifice. His body was washed ashore a few days later, some three miles down the coast at Blankenberge where he was given a military burial by the Germans. "I can truly say a more honourable, straight, and gallant gentleman never lived," the captain of HMS Orion said of Bradford, adding that he was "beloved by all".

Not for the first, or last, time during war, a propaganda campaign distorted the facts. The raid on Zeebrugge was portrayed by the British as an overwhelming success when, in fact, the block ships were sunk in the wrong place and the canal was re-opened after a few days to submarines at high tide. British casualties (dead and wounded) were 583 men and yet the German losses were only 24 men.

At Ostend, further along the coast, the attack failed and was called off. It was repeated on the night of May 10-11, this time using the battered Vindictive as one of the blockships. But once again, although it was sunk in the harbour, it was only partly successful in blocking the canal. As before, the British portrayed the attack as a resounding victory but the reality was that a combination of poor weather and fierce German resistance had minimised the damage. The British suffered 47 casualties at Ostend compared with just 11 for the enemy. There is no doubt, however, that there were many cases of incredible bravery by individuals and the raid resulted in the award of three VCs and numerous other gallantry awards.

Bradford's widowed mother learnt the news of her son's posthumous VC in a letter written by Admiral Keyes on March 14, 1919, which said: "I knew he would eventually get it, because although many actions were performed on that night by officers and men who survived, and by others who gave their lives, amongst the latter your son's act of glorious self-sacrifice stood out, I thought, alone..."

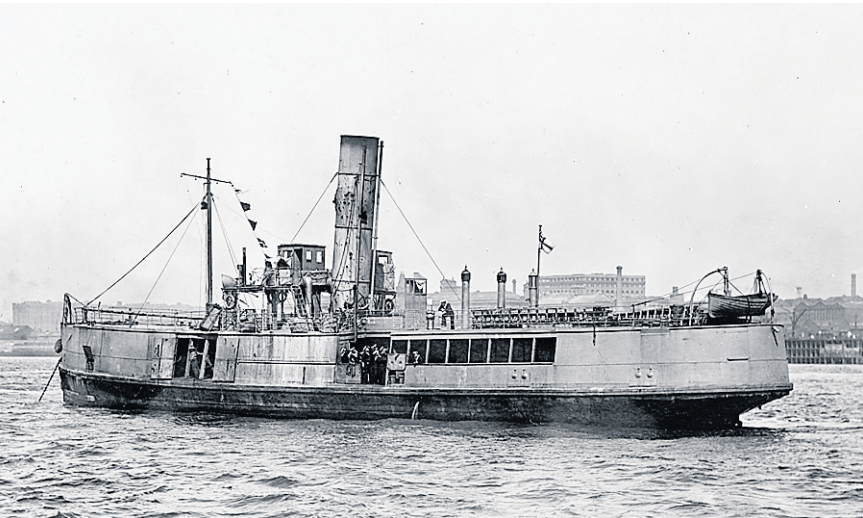
Bradford's mother received his medal from George V on April 3, 1919. It was the second time she had attended such a ceremony on behalf of one of her four sons. Her youngest, Lt Roland Bradford, of the 9th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry, was awarded the VC for his bravery on October 1, 1916, at Eaucourt L'Abbaye in France, when acting as a temporary lieutenant colonel aged only 24. He survived that battle and was also awarded the Military Cross (MC) but died in Cambrai, France, on November 30, 1917.

Her third son, James, was also awarded the MC – also when serving with the Durham Light Infantry. He was killed in the Battle of Arras in May 1917. Her eldest son, Thomas, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), survived the war. Mrs Bradford placed In Memoriam notices in *The Times* on the anniversaries of her three sons' deaths every year until she died in 1951. For several years, she attended Armistice Day services wearing the four gallantry medals of her three dead sons.

George Bradford's gravestone is engraved with the image of the Victoria Cross in Blankenberge Town Cemetery in West Flanders, Belgium. He is commemorated at least three times in his home town of Darlington: a headstone at the Memorial Hall; a plaque at Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College and another at Holy Trinity Church. I purchased Bradford's medals at an auction in London in 1988 and they are now on display at the gallery bearing my name at Imperial War Museums, London.

HEROIC STORIES

● Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a Tory peer, businessman, philanthropist and author. The story of George Bradford's VC appears in his book *Victoria Cross Heroes*. For more information, visit victoriacrossheroes.com. Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at IWM, London. For more information, visit iwm.org.uk/heroes. For details about his VC collection, visit lordashcroftmedals.com. For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit lordashcroft.com. You can follow him on Twitter: [@LordAshcroft](https://twitter.com/LordAshcroft)

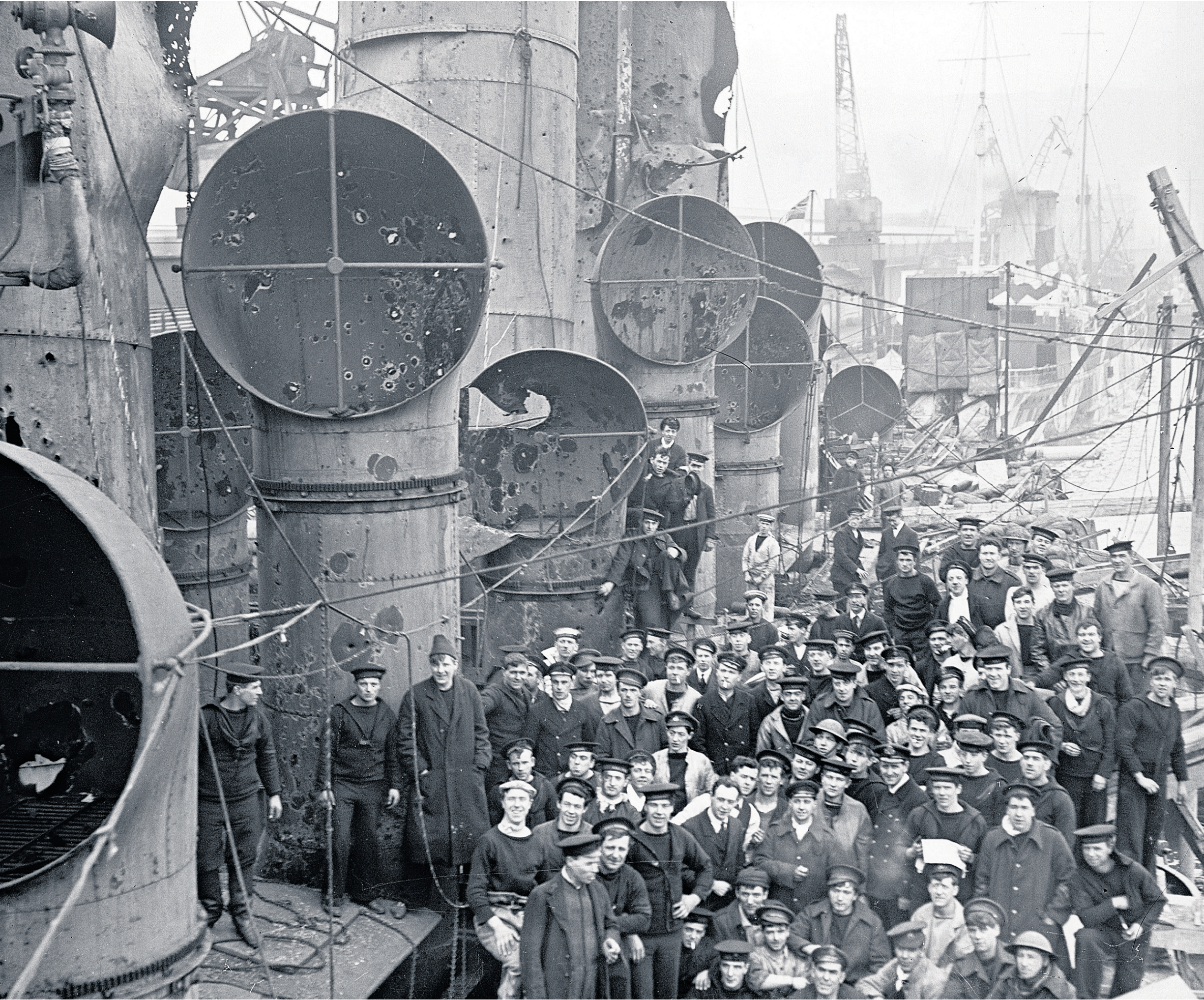


Sponsored by




COURAGE AT SEA

Clockwise from main picture: HMS Vindictive returning from the mission to block the submarine base at Bruges in 1918; VC winner Lt-Cdr George Bradford; the Mersey ferry Iris II approaches its home port of Liverpool after the raid; Bradford's medals, including his VC



Paying a high price for refusing to fight

 **THE AUTHORITIES OFTEN REGARDED CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS AS COWARDS, SAYS ANTHONY RICHARDS**

By the end of 1915, the outlook for Britain was bleak. Hopes of a swift success on the Western Front had been dashed while the campaign at Gallipoli had been an outright failure. The country was to face a prolonged war that would necessitate further sacrifices, not only of men but also of individual freedom because of greater government involvement in everyday lives.

Conscription was seen as a necessary step to boost the number of soldiers and hasten a final victory. But neither Asquith's coalition government nor the military had considered properly how they would deal with those who objected to military service for reasons of conscience. The Military Service Act, which came into force on March 2, 1916, introduced conscription to the UK. Those men who appealed against military service would face locally established tribunals who were to decide between "conscience or cowardice". It was down to the individual objector

to demonstrate "proof" of their beliefs, which was a far from straightforward task given the intangible nature of a person's conscience.

There were many justifications for refusing to fight. The most common was that war and the act of killing were inconsistent with most religious teaching. Many followed this conviction despite their respective churches often supporting the government's position. Others made a political argument against the war. This was the age when socialism was growing in importance and war was deemed to have no place in a truly socialist society. In the words of Keir Hardie, founder of the Independent Labour Party: "Militarism and democracy cannot be blended." Some regarded the conflict as a result of political manoeuvrings rather than having a clear moral purpose.

Within this range of beliefs, individual attitudes varied dramatically. Some objected to any form of fighting while others opposed only the current conflict. Some would refuse any co-operation with the authorities; others embraced active participation as stretcher bearers or munitions workers.

The first six months of the Act saw more than 750,000 cases being heard by tribunals, of which a small number were recognised as "legitimate". From March 1916 until the end of the war, only 16,000 men were registered as conscientious objectors and allocated alternative service "of national importance". Such work was primarily unarmed service in the Non-Combatant Corps or Royal Army Medical Corps,



FACE OF PROTEST
Young men enter a No-Conscription Fellowship meeting

or civilian labour such as farm or factory work.

Tribunals were harsh towards the men society regarded as shirkers. Hearsay and personal opinion were admissible as evidence against them: one outspoken tribunal councillor was heard to declare that "a man who would not help to defend his country and womankind is a coward and a cad".

Members of tribunals were overwhelmingly middle-class and working in the interests of local government, so were wholeheartedly behind the national cause of finding able-bodied men to fight. Opposition to the war was a minority view, held and acted upon by less than half of one per cent of eligible men. From early in the war, a campaign of shaming men to enlist by presenting them with a white feather if they were not in uniform had helped

MANY 'CONCHIES' SERVED AS STRETCHER BEARERS AT THE FRONT LINE AND SHOWED GREAT COURAGE

create a situation in which every man had to be seen to be "doing his bit" and nonconformity led to mockery. Several societies were formed by conscientious objectors in order to encourage mutual help and support on an increasingly hostile home front. Organisations such as the No-Conscription Fellowship worked towards a wider pacifism movement, while notable figures such as Bertrand Russell and Ramsay MacDonald backed the cause. The public declaration against the war made by Siegfried Sassoon in June 1917 showed even military heroes could question the justification for war.

Some 1,350 men held out for "absolute" exemption from military service and around 985 of these refused to recognise the tribunals or the military orders they received as non-combatants. Such individuals were eligible for court martial and endured repeated terms of imprisonment under sentence of hard labour. This tested physical and mental stamina, with allegations

Sponsored by

Lord Ashcroft

@LordAshcroft

of ill-treatment being common. Among the absolutists was the Quaker Stephen Hobhouse, whose social work in the East End had been widely admired; a campaign prompted by his solitary confinement and sickness led to the release of many objectors on grounds of ill-health.

The most extreme example of brutality was possibly the case of the Richmond Sixteen, who were sent against their will to France with the Non-Combatant Corps in June 1916 and sentenced to death for refusing to obey orders.

Although a reprieve commuted their sentence to 10 years' imprisonment, this decision was made only after one of the men threw a note from a train window to reveal their plight.

Despite their common portrayal at the time as cowards, the bravery and determination shown by many objectors in standing up for their beliefs led many people, even soldiers and politicians, to develop an admiration for them. Many "conchies" ended up at the front line, serving as stretcher bearers in organisations such as the Friends Ambulance Unit. Many men were killed while demonstrating considerable courage under fire.

The massive loss of life which resulted from the First World War encouraged much public sympathy with the cause of pacifism in the Twenties and Thirties. It meant the outbreak of the Second World War would be marked by a more sympathetic system of conscription and a significantly greater awareness of the legitimacy of conscientious objection.

●Anthony Richards is IWM's head of documents

WRONGDOING AT WORK CAN HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES...

Find out more about Crimestoppers' Integrity Line and how it can protect your company, before it's too late.

www.theLine.co.uk | enquiries@integrityline.co.uk

The Integrity Line is owned and operated by the registered charity, Crimestoppers. Crimestoppers Trust is a Company Limited by Guarantee, Registered in England No. 0202885. Registered Charity No. 1088827 (England) and SC037960 (Scotland). Postal address: Crimestoppers Trust, PO Box 324, Wellington SH16 6BG.

POWERED BY **CRIMESTOPPERS**

OPERATION ZYGOS

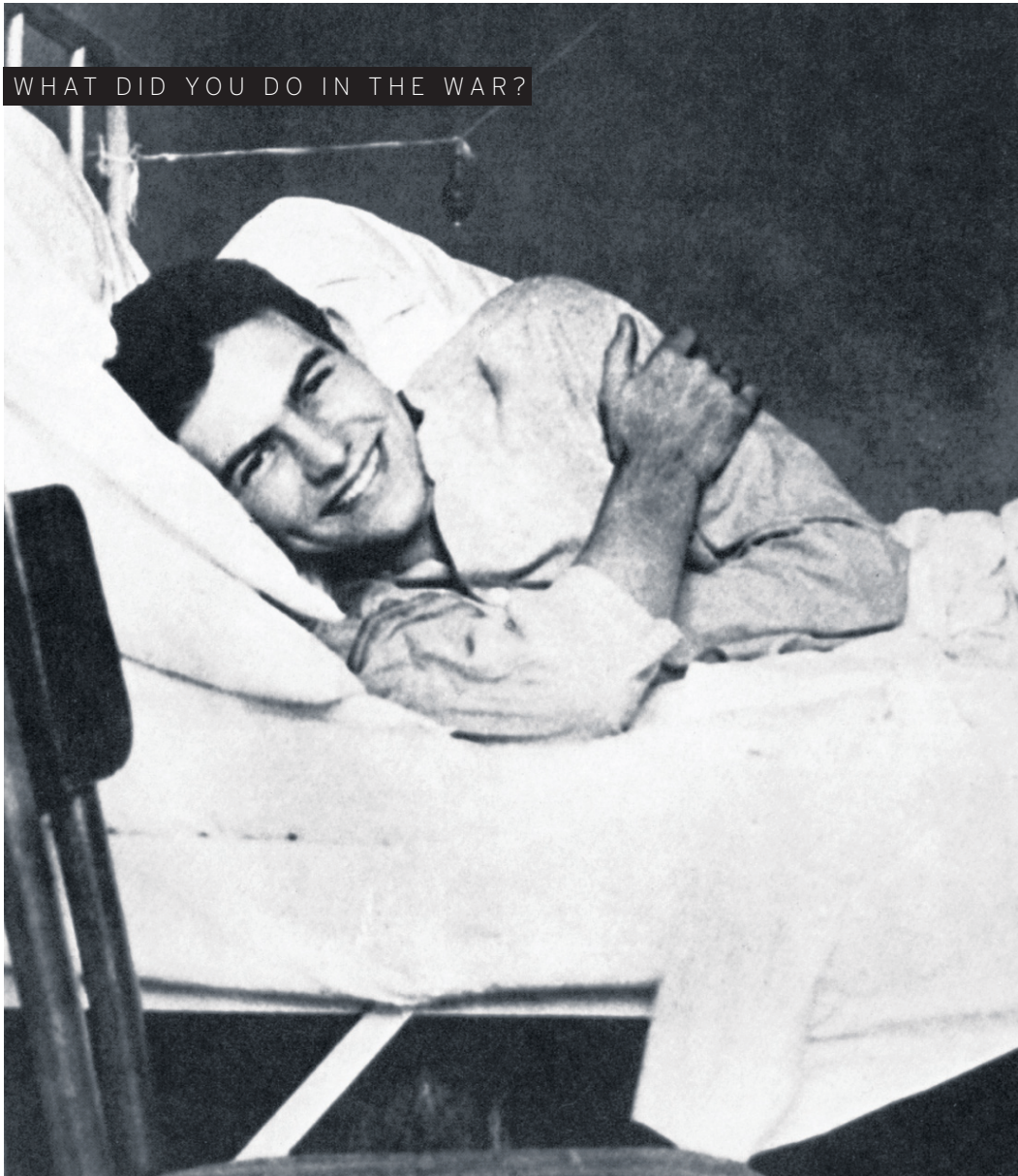
They've been hiding in the shadows too long....

Independent crime-fighting charity Crimestoppers is on the hunt for the UK's most wanted fugitives, evading capture in Cyprus.

We need your help to find them

Visit www.crimestoppers-uk.org/opzygos to find out more and give information anonymously. Or you can call us on **0800 555 111** (from the UK) or **8000 55 11** (from Cyprus).

Registered Charity No. 1108687 (England) and SC037960 (Scotland). Please do not use social media to give information about crime.



Hemingway’s mission: to tell the truth about war

Had a piece of shrapnel in June 1918 taken a different trajectory, one of the greatest writers of the 20th century would never have been known.

Soon after leaving high school in Illinois, Ernest Hemingway enlisted as an ambulance driver with the American Red Cross, arriving in Paris in May 1918, while the city was under German bombardment, before moving on to the Italian front. On his first day in Milan, he was sent to retrieve the remains of female workers blown up in a munitions factory explosion. “I remember that after we searched quite thoroughly for the complete dead we collected fragments,” Hemingway wrote in his non-fiction work, *Death in the Afternoon*.

While running a mobile canteen in Fossalta di Piave, he was wounded two weeks before his 19th birthday by Austrian mortar fire. “There was a flash, as when a blast-furnace door is swung open, and a roar that started white and went red,” he described in a letter home. He also wrote: “When you go to war as a boy you have a great illusion of immortality. Other people get killed; not you... Then when you are badly wounded the first time you lose that illusion and you know it can happen to you.”

Although severely wounded in both legs, he carried an injured Italian soldier to safety and was hit again by machine-gun fire – an event that saw Hemingway become one of the first Americans to be awarded the Italian Silver Medal of Bravery.

Sent to recuperate for six months in a hospital in Milan, he fell in love with an American nurse called Agnes von Kurowsky and returned to Illinois at the end of the war, expecting her to marry him. Instead, she informed him she had become engaged to an Italian officer and

Hemingway was left alone to face a home town that remained the same while his perceptions of life had been skewed for ever.

Perhaps no other American writer is associated so closely with writing about war and Hemingway used his first-hand experiences as a backdrop for his works. Two short stories, *Soldier’s Home* and *Big Two-Hearted River*, deal with the alienation of returning home a veteran, and his bestselling novel *A Farewell to Arms* was based on his experience of serving in the Italian campaigns.

As a war reporter, Hemingway was determined to tell the public about the reality of war. As a novelist, he is credited by many with changing fiction and the way we talk about war. “Hemingway was at the crest of a wave of modernists that were rebelling against the excesses and hypocrisy of Victorian prose. The First World War is the

watershed event that changes world literature as well as how Hemingway responded to it,” said the literary critic Gail Caldwell.

In his anthology *Men At War*, Hemingway tells his three sons that they have a book “that will contain the truth about war as near we can come by it... It will not replace experience. But it can prepare and supplement experience. It can serve as a corrective after experience.”

As for that piece of shrapnel, Hemingway kept it, along with a ring containing a fragment of bullet. But for generations to come, his most enduring souvenirs of war will always be his words.

Zoe Dare Hall

YOUR LETTERS

Post box

We have received a magnificent postbag and inbox of letters, documents and stories in response to our request for readers’ First World War memories. Here are just a few of the many we would like to share with you. Please keep them coming.

Write to: First World War, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT or email firstworldwar@telegraph.co.uk

SCOTCH TAMES A WILD HORSE

John Driver from Bentley, Hampshire, writes: “When I was a young boy, I never got on with my father, Arthur. It was only when I reached my teens that we had a conversation of sorts and only then did I appreciate the horrors he had gone through...

“He joined up in 1914 and went to Belgium immediately. He joined the RFA and, after learning how to ride a horse, was one of the gunners who rode as outrider on the team of eight that pulled the limber and gun. He told me once that if his horse reared or shied, he would reach into his haversack, grab a bottle of scotch and clout it on the head. ‘But Dad, what a waste of whisky’.

“‘Didn’t matter. We got issued a bottle a day.’ Sadly, he became a bottle-a-day chap in later life and now I can see why. How would these fellows have lived out the horrors of the trenches without the scotch and rum issue?

“At one time, he purchased a pair of binoculars and on the lacquered copper tubes he had scratched all the battles he had fought in. He was badly gassed in 1918 and lost his sight for six months. The gas played havoc with his lungs, too. The effects remained with him for the rest of his life. He told me a harrowing tale of how he managed to grope his way along a carriage to find a breath of fresh air amid the stench on the hospital train back to Blighty.

“My mother was a working lady in an aircraft factory owned by a certain Mr A V Roe, teaching others how to weld these newfangled lightweight metals. But she also did her bit as a nursing auxiliary giving a hand with these lads back from France and blinded. The rest is history.

“As the years pass by, I become more and more proud of my Dad. What drive and what ambition.”

MEMENTOS OF NURSE MCLEOD

“My maternal grandmother, Mary Watson McLeod, was one of the 105 graduates of the Montreal General Hospital School of Nursing who served in the Great War. Aged 25, she enlisted in the Canadian Army Medical Corps in May 1917 and served in Canada, England and France until demobbed in January 1920,” writes Paula Spangenthal from Ealing.

“She worked in Boulogne at the No 3 Canadian General Hospital, which treated an average of 1,000 patients a day and was housed in the partly damaged building and in wooden huts and tents with the help of the Canadian Red Cross. The hospital achieved an astonishing level of patient care. Out of more than 87,000 admissions and 7,500 operations, only 491 deaths were recorded.

From these years, my grandmother has an autograph album signed and beautifully annotated with poems, pencil and pen cartoons and

FAMILY MEMORIES

Clockwise from bottom left: the machine-gun section of the 8th Battalion East Surrey Rgt, in which Jack Lancaster served; Arthur Driver; a cartoon, Putting on Weight, drawn by soldiers. It belonged to Nurse Mary Watson McLeod, left

drawings by recuperating Commonwealth soldiers. I have always loved the album because of its gentle humour, the obvious affection and respect showed by my grandmother and the incredible care and skills shown by the recuperating soldiers. My grandmother returned to Canada after the war and died in Ontario in 1956.”

SILENCE OVER THE SOMME

Iain Warner from Dilham, Norfolk, has 50 or so letters from his great uncle, John Basil Lancaster (known as Jack) to his mother and sisters, “from the time he enlisted in September 1914 until he relinquished his commission on account of his wounds in May 1920. He joined the Norfolk Regiment in Norwich, but after two days was transferred to the 8th Battalion East Surrey Regiment on the day of its formation. The battalion spent 10 months training in England before deployment to the Somme in July 1915.

“Jack was posted to the machine-gun section. At the end of the day on July 1, 1916, he was the only one of his section left intact and was promoted to sergeant. He was awarded a DCM for his actions, ‘for conspicuous gallantry during an attack. When every man of his



machine-gun section had been either killed or wounded, Sgt Lancaster continued to work his gun single-handed and eventually collected remnants of other detachments, organised them into a team, and, by his courage and example inspired them with confidence to advance’, as *The London Gazette* reported.”

Mr Warner explains that, after a spell back in England, Jack was posted to Belgium “and, at Poelcappelle on October 13, he was hit by a sniper’s bullet through the shoulder. He was

hospitalised in England, then returned to the Somme area in August 1918 with the 7th The Queens... He was wounded for the second time, this time by shrapnel. He was repatriated and spent the best part of 18 months in military hospitals.

“He never talked about July 1, 1916 – the first day of the Battle of the Somme – but the following letter to his mother gives a small insight into his experiences....”

Dear Mother, I expect you’ll be wondering how I’m progressing as no doubt



you’ve seen plenty of news in the papers already about the push forward on our front...

Everything was done in broad daylight. We climbed out over the top at half past seven and walked across to Fritz’s front line as if we were going to a footer match. As a matter of fact one of the other companies did dribble a football from one to another for the greater part of the way across. It was picked up later in Fritz’s wire...

... Sorry to say the Gun crew lost a bit heavily. Of those you know Jeff and Draper were killed, and

Turk and Sergeant De’Ath were wounded. Payne got done in during the time we were in the trenches before. As a matter of fact, of all the original gunners of A Company who came from England I’m the only one left intact, though some few are only slightly wounded... You needn’t let the Western Front advance worry you with regard to me for a time now as we shall undoubtedly continue here (the line being advanced from us continually) until the battalion is made up to something like fighting strength...

Sponsored by

Lord Ashcroft
@LordAshcroft

IN A FATHER’S FOOTSTEPS

Mrs Gaeta Stokes from Reading writes: “I will find it difficult to write about my father, Ernest Wicks, as the whole story still upsets me. I am 80 years old now and my parents were in their forties when I was born. All was well in the family until the Second World War started. Once the bombing started, my father was back, mentally, in the First World War trenches. The guns on the airfield a few miles away added to his confusion.

“He was in the Essex Regiment – a gunner in the Royal Field Artillery – and the war took him to Passchendaele (wounded), Lens, Ploegsteert, Armentiers (wounded), Vimy Ridge and Kemmel Hill. He was wounded in his legs and was sent home to the army hospital in Woolwich. When he recovered, he was sent back to the front. Not fit to join the RFA again, he was put in the harbour force. This meant going out to bring in the wounded and the dead. That was when he was wounded in the head, which resulted in him losing his right eye. He was honourably discharged and returned home to work on the farm with his beloved horses.

“When the Second World War started, my two older brothers joined the Army and my sister joined the ATS. That left the three of us at home. Dad did what he could and went fire-watching most nights. Sadly things were getting too much for him and he started to drink. This annoyed my mother and upset her as she had less and less money to manage on and it eventually led to them parting.

“I went to see him nearly every week and he began to tell me his First World War memories. His legs were still a bother to him, always bandaged and often ulcerated. He said that during the war, it was hard to get washed or keep clean.

“He said that when he eventually took off the khaki bandage wrap they wore over their trousers at the bottom of the legs, the skin on the legs came away and the legs were infested with lice. He also had a bad cough which he said was the result of mustard gas.

“Dad died in 1956 of double pneumonia. My husband and I decided to see the places Dad had been, so we began our journey into his past. At Ypres, Passchendaele and Vimy Ridge, I walked in the trenches that he too must have been in.”

JUNE ISSUE

● Tommy’s War: a look at the reality of life in the trenches on the Western Front, plus the danger and discoveries behind the tunnellers’ war. The IWM also unveils its global Lives of the First World War interactive platform to mark the centenary.

● Please keep on sending us your First World War photos and memories. Write to: First World War, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT or email firstworldwar@telegraph.co.uk.

BACK ISSUES

● Inside the First World War is a compelling 12-part series which will run monthly up to the centenary of the war’s outbreak. To catch up with any of the eight parts published so far, visit telegraph.co.uk/insidethewar





NORTH



**FROM
STREET
TO TRENCH:
A WORLD WAR
THAT SHAPED
A REGION**

FREE ENTRY

WELCOME LIFE - THE QUARTER - TRANSFORMED WINDUP HOUSE - MANCHESTER MUSEUM