A Study of the Variety of Responses to Death in the British Army on the Western Front, 1914-1918

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Abstract

This thesis explores the variety of responses that the infantryman of the British Army experienced on the Western Front, 1914-1918. Through the concept of the Combat Grief Cycle this work offers an opportunity to understand and construct a form of shared experience in relation to violent death in war for those who served on the frontline. There has been a great deal of research into the civilian outpouring of grief and mourning both during and after the war, with little attention paid to those who were immersed in the horrors of death at the front. This thesis addresses this gap in the historiography. It is a common misconception that fighting men became hardened and indifferent to the losses they bore witness to. Although this thesis accepts that men were able to harden their emotions towards death, it considers how this was never general and could not endure the duration of their service. One traumatic loss or witnessing mass death could breach a man's defences and cause repressed grief to consume an individual or community of soldiers.

The concepts of bereavement, grief and mourning all feature heavily in this thesis but are only part of the story concerning soldiers' interactions with the dead and dying. This work has deployed and analysed numerous sources in order to determine the many different ways individuals reacted to their losses. Furthermore, it considers how losses bound soldiers together, separate from the civilian sphere, into communities in mourning as men collectively grieved for what had been lost. It also explores the relative nature of the cohort war experiences, positing that the Battle of the Somme was not the only event that shattered illusions of sacrifice for soldiers but instead, represented one in a series of watershed moments. This thesis demonstrates that soldiers at the front created their own emotional code for sharing grief which ran counter to society's expectations of soldiers as stoic masculine figures. As an extension to this, soldiers created a coded language which allowed them to convey how deeply they had been affected by the loss of friends and comrades. Therefore, this work examines how soldiers used writing as a way to mediate their grief, create enduring memorials to the dead and share their experiences of grief with the Home Front. It also explores how burial and frontline commemorations offered an opportunity for soldiers to come to terms with the violence of death in war. However, when these avenues of expression were not available it led to impaired mourning, which if left unmediated could lead to a lifetime of repressed and painful grief. Ultimately, this thesis has determined that bereavements suffered as a result of violent death in war had long term consequences for survivors and was one of the factors which led to disillusionment amongst soldiers and veterans.

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List of Abbreviations

AIF – Australian Imperial Force

BEF – British Expeditionary Force

CEF – Canadian Expeditionary Force

IWGC – Imperial War Graves Commission

IWM – Imperial War Museum

NCO – Non-Commissioned Officer

NZEF – New Zealand Expeditionary Force

OR – Other Ranks

Introduction

> We feel intensely for those we have lost… we mourn for them with a grief more real and poignant in that they were to us not merely comrades-in-arms, but personal friends.[1]

These were the words of the editor of *The Outpost*, a trench journal published for the 17th Service Battalion, Highland Light Infantry in August 1916 after suffering heavy losses on the Somme. The battalion lost twenty-two officers and 447 other ranks, killed, wounded or missing in the first four days of the fighting. Mourning is synonymous with the experience of the First World War which brought civilian societies in touch with unprecedented levels of violence and death. Memorials erected after the war, both at home and on the frontline, have served as a permanent reminder of the destruction the conflict caused. These are the relics of the civilian outpouring of grief and emotion that followed the war; a representation of society's attempts to make sense of four and a half years of the decimation of youth. The editor of *The Outpost* offers a window into the grief of another group, whose sense of loss was marginalised both during after the war; the soldiers themselves.

A great deal of study has been completed on grief in civil society with particular emphasis being given to the wives and mothers of the fallen. However, little attention has been paid to the men who bore witness to the violence and death on the battlefields. This work addresses this imbalance by exploring the intense bereavement and subsequent mourning soldiers experienced at the front and in the aftermath of the war. *The Outpost* gives an indication of the world of death which existed on the frontline, where men grieved for friends and struggled to comprehend the mass death they were witnessing. Marginalised in historical study and only afforded a tacit and brief acknowledgement that of course war changed fighting men. There has been an acceptance that they might have briefly and privately grieved for a comrade killed but the pain never lingered. For society soldiers were stoic heroes of combat. In reality soldiers of the Great War lost, grieved and mourned their friends and comrades. They confronted violent death head on and had to process the death of those they loved. As *The Outpost* demonstrated, men who mourned the fallen grieved for 'friends' and did not just view their losses as part of the military sacrifice demanded by war. Malcolm

[1] 'Editorial', *The Outpost*, 1 August 1916, p. 144.

Brown asserted that 'to have been "in the trenches" put a permanent mark on a man'. He became part of a 'private world' which could only be understood by those he had shared it with.[2] The aim of this research is not to suggest that men were irrevocably broken by their experiences of war, but instead it will demonstrate how contact with death at the front affected men, often for the rest of their lives.[3]

The Western Front provides the focal point for this thesis as the theatre most suitable for initial studies into soldiers' responses to death. Jay Winter argues this was the site 'where mass death converted war from conventional contest to a puzzling, unprecedented catastrophe', where the 'apocalypse arrived' without hope or end in sight.[4] The Western Front holds a special standing within British cultural memory as a reflection of the true futility of modern warfare. Most British and Dominion regiments passed through this front in four and half years of fighting, the most sustained theatre of the conflict, providing a wealth of shared experience to draw on. Other theatres such as Gallipoli, Mesopotamia and the Italian Front presented their own unique challenges and conditions which affected soldiers' interactions with death; they deserve individual studies and eventual comparisons. Focusing on one theatre allows for a closer reading and analysis of soldiers' interactions with death in relation to a single environment, making the creation of a framework to test against other theatres possible. The British Army was vast during the First World War, encompassing a number of different arms and experiences. All would have witnessed death but did not live with it as the infantry did in the trenches. For this reason, the infantry provides the focus for this thesis. The average monthly casualty rate for a battalion was thirty men which was higher during offensive action.[5] This meant the majority of soldiers certainly experienced the loss of friends and officers.[6] Moreover, as a soldier's position in the army influenced his interactions with death, this thesis

[2] Malcolm Brown, *Tommy Goes to War* (Stroud: History Press, 1978), p. 46.
[3] Initial ideas in relation to this research have been covered in Natasha Silk, 'Soldiers in Mourning: Grief, Bereavement and Burial Practices of the Men Who Served in the British and Dominion Armies during the Battle of the Somme, 1916' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Kent, 2016). Natasha Silk, 'Witnesses to Death: Soldiers on the Western Front', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Artistic and Cultural Responses to War Since 1914: The British Isles, the United States and Australasia*, ed. by Martin Kerby, Margret Baguley and Janet Macdonald, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) pp.147-162.
[4] Jay Winter, 'Representations of War on the Western Front, 1914-18: Some Reflections in Cultural Ambivalence', in *Power, Violence and Mass Death in Pre-Modern and Modern Times*, ed. by Joseph Canning, Hartmut Lehmann and Jay Winter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 205.
[5] Brown, *Tommy Goes to War*, p. 49.
[6] Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005), p. 47.

examines individual responses from the rank of private to Captain. This is to retain an emphasis on the trenches. Responses to death were also influenced by military identity determined by the regiment and battalion in which the individual served. For example, the artillery, Tank Corps and Royal Flying Corps had different communal outlooks to those forged by infantry regiments. To study the impact of death within these groups, their identities and communities require analysis in order to understand the individual and collective experience. Soldiers from the Dominion armies have been included on a limited basis to draw out similarities and the subtle differences which existed between the different nationalities. Due to the influence of nationality and their relationship to the empire these groups require their own detailed study.

This thesis will consider a broad array of responses and interactions with death, with the principal focus the soldier's experience of bereavement, grief and mourning. Winter defines these terms as follows, 'Grief is a state of mind, bereavement is a condition. Both are mediated by mourning, a set of acts and gestures through which survivors' express grief and pass through the stages of bereavement.'[7] Grief is the emotional response to loss, whereas mourning refers to the cultural and social rituals used to come to terms with a bereavement.[8] Acts of mourning reflect the communities understanding of the correct way for the bereaved to behave.[9] Grief is always reserved for a person who is loved and only occurs when an individual has lost a personal connection.[10] Although this thesis does not represent an interdisciplinary study it has drawn from a number of other fields to aid in the analysis of the soldier's experience. In particular psychology, anthropology and conflict archaeology are areas of study which offer theories that can help deepen historical understanding in relation to death, mourning or burial. These areas provide frameworks which are not usually accessible through historical enquiry alone. Psychologists Colin Murray Parkes and Tony Walters agree that grief is not a 'disease' but a 'process', as it does not have a prescribed set of symptoms but a number of stages the bereaved individual has to move through. Furthermore, the individual cannot return to the pre-bereaved state, as bereavement causes 'disruption' to the sense of self; loss means an individual is no

[7] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 29.
[8] Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994), p. 20.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Colin Murray Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 7.

longer someone's 'child, parent, partner or friend'.[11] Even after a loss has been accepted, pain revisits at different points for the rest of an individual's life.[12] Mourning is also affected by the type of bereavement suffered and manifests itself as a result of culture and personal understandings.[13] Despite differences between individuals, the result of loss is always the same; it irrevocably changes the life of the bereaved.

The death of an individual also creates chaos within a community, causing disruption and upheaval, and demonstrating the fragility of human life.[14] Mourning concerns showing belonging to a community, with collective acts offering the griever comfort and a channel for their emotions, both helping to relieve the pain caused by loss.[15] This pain is greater when it is someone young who has died as it represents a reversal of the natural order.[16] Psychologists have noted that people struggle to accept accidental or untimely death, with society particularly incapable of tolerating violence. If someone is killed then another is responsible and to acknowledge death can occur to anyone at any time undermines faith that the world is a place of order, terrifying the collective.[17] Robert Lifton has coined the term the 'death imprint' in relation to the notion that witnessing a violent death generates an intense trauma that leads to the 'inability to mourn'. The image which surrounds the loss makes it difficult to move on due to 'the degree of unacceptability of death constrained in the image of the prematurity, grotesqueness, and absurdity'.[18] Those affected are unable to rebuild the image of the shattered person into one which reasserts that individual's vitality and

[11] Ibid. Tony Walter, *On Bereavement: The Culture of Grief* (Buckingham: Open University, 1999), p. 107. Lucy Noakes, 'Gender, Grief and Bereavement in Second World War Britain', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 8:1 (2015), p. 73.
[12] Inge V. Del Rosario, 'A Journey into Grief', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 43:1 (2004), pp. 19-24.
[13] Marina Larsson, 'A Disenfranchised Grief: Post-War Death and Memorialisation in Australia after the First World War', *Australian Historical Studies*, 40:1 (2009), p. 81.
[14] Jon Davies, 'One Hundred Billion Dead', in *Ritual and Remembrance: Responses to Death in Human Societies*, ed. by Jon Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 30. Phillipe Aries, 'Death Denied', in *Death, Dying and Bereavement*, ed. by Donna Dickson, Malcolm Johnson and Jeane Samson Katz (London: Sage, 2000), p. 10.
[15] Sarah Tarlow, 'An Archaeology of Remembering: Death, Bereavement and the First World War', *Cambridge Archaeology Journal*, 7:1 (1997), p. 108.
[16] Leonard V. Smith, Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 71. John F. A. Sawyer, 'Isaiah as a Source Book for Scriptural Texts about Death and Mourning', in *Ritual and Remembrance: Responses to Death in Human Societies*, ed. by Jon Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 91.
[17] Parkes, *Bereavement*, p. 85. Edward K. Rynearson, *Retelling Violent Death* (Philadelphia: Brumer-Routeldge, 2001), p. 21.
[18] Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 169.

integrity.[19] The first response to a violent death is avoidance by accepting the death but ignoring the trauma of loss. However, this state does not endure and eventually the bereaved will confront all aspects of the death when it is acknowledged with resilience.[20] Due to the ability of adults to build a picture of what life would have been like if the death had not occurred, the bereaved will also grieve over the loss of life's possibilities.[21] Branislaw Malinowski has argued the death of a loved one creates conflicting emotions. It concerns the continuation of a deep love which existed prior to the bereavement but the repulsion at the sight of the corpse and the decay.[22] This is the bridge that mourning rituals are designed to help the bereaved cross, allowing them to create an acceptable relationship with the dead. Where this is not possible mourning becomes impaired.

As long as people have organised themselves into groups there has always been a need to mourn and carry out rituals.[23] Thomas Laqueur has argued that the dead have always been an integral part of human society, needed by the living to form the foundations of communities.[24] However, the cultural relationship with death and expectations of mourners has evolved throughout history. Throughout the nineteenth century the Victorian celebration of death, which had been integral to society, evolved into a taboo.[25] Ostentatious commemorations of the dead declined in the twentieth century, as death was increasingly removed from the public eye and out of the home.[26] The First World War eventually completed this process.[27] Even though mourning traditions were curtailed, some Victorian notions surrounding death endured. Central to the Victorian idea of dying was the concept of a 'Good Death'. This concept refers to the 'right' and 'true' end to a Christian life; it occurred peacefully and surrounded by loved ones. The worst fate was to die alone;[28] a fate that many soldiers experienced on the Western Front. However, the glorification of death in war was on the increase,

[19] Ibid., p. 170.
[20] Rynearson, *Retelling Violent Death*, p. 28.
[21] Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, p. 188.
[22] Branislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (The Free Press, 1948), pp. 47-8.
[23] William G. Hay, *Do Funerals Matter? The Purpose and Practice of Death Rituals* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.
[24] Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 1.
[25] Tarlow, 'An Archaeology of Remembering', p. 108.
[26] Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis: London and its Dead* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2006), p. 182.
[27] Tarlow, 'An Archaeology of Remembering', p. 110.
[28] Arnold, *Necropolis*, p. 182.

particularly in relation to self-sacrifice for the good of the nation, instilled in young men through the public-school ethos of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.[29] In the military the nineteenth century initiated the move away from mass burials for soldiers and monuments to officers, to a more democratic system of individually marked graves.[30] Societies changing relationship with the dead in the Edwardian era influenced how death in war was approached both at home and abroad.

Traditional mourning practices alone could not help soldiers come to terms with the losses they sustained on the battlefield. In reality, practices utilised during conflict had little in common with the mourning rituals of peacetime.[31] Death was omnipresent in the trenches and cohabitation with the dead led to abhorrent practices, such as the removal of clothing from a body.[32] Not only were soldiers affected by living with the dead, it also provided the context in which men had to process their personal losses. Therefore, veterans sought justification in their sacrifice but were torn between the memory of 'horror' and 'glory'.[33] Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker suggest there is still much to understand about grief resulting from combat. Mourning has previously been used to consider the impact of mass death on society but not as 'the yard stick of deep pain' for the individual.[34] This thesis seeks to shed light on how 'deep pain' in relation to bereavement came to punctuate a soldier's service and the civilian life of those who survived.

Soldiers' collective grief has its foundations in the concept of 'circles of mourning' as advocated by Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker. They argue that combatants were 'communities in mourning and communities of mourning'.[35] The 'circle' is the 'sphere of relationships' an individual exists within. It is an indication of the level of 'disruption' and 'damage' their death would cause by 'shattering the emotions' of the people in their 'circle'.[36] To consider soldiers as existing in a circle or community of mourning, social instability and chaos within their groups relating to bereavements

[29] David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. by Joachim Whaley (London: Europa, 1981), p. 195.
[30] Arnold, *Necropolis*, p. 247.
[31] Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *France and the Great War*, p. 71.
[32] George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 5.
[33] Ibid., p. 6.
[34] Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), p. 3.
[35] Ibid., p. 204.
[36] Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *France and the Great War*, p. 70.

must be established. This thesis will demonstrate how the military constructed social groupings with their own histories based on battle honours and ideas of glorious sacrifice in war, in the form of regiments and battalions.[37] Once at the front soldiers fought alongside these men, ate, slept and drank with them, risked their lives for others and trusted that the man next to him would do the same in return. This level of reliance and shared identity provided a strong foundation for soldiers' communities, where losses would lead to feelings of shared mourning.

A disproportionate amount of emphasis has been given to soldiers who developed shell shock or neurosis, even though it was a minority experience.[38] This is a gap in the literature this thesis seeks to engage with. Alexander Watson suggests medical research has demonstrated that humans have a 'considerate level of innate resilience', arguing soldiers were not as fragile as previous studies have suggested.[39] However, historians have acknowledged that those who did not receive physical wounds emerged from the trenches emotionally scarred by their experiences.[40] Witnessing death was one of the most destabilising experiences for soldiers. The death of someone else caused the most prolonged and intense reactions as it was grounded in reality, whereas the death of the self was abstract.[41] These feelings were intensified as young men thought they and their peers invulnerable and impervious to death. It was the destruction of this belief which left a permanent psychological mark on survivors.[42] This thesis does not argue that soldiers were entirely broken by their experience of war but were irrevocably changed by bereavement, although consideration has been given to a handful of soldiers who did suffer neurosis due to the loss of close friends.

In addition to witnessing death soldiers were also asked to break one of society's most sacred taboos, taking another life.[43] This was an aspect which complicated a soldier's return to civilian life. Michael Roper asserts that the soldier in

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[37] Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 63.
[38] Ibid., p. 6. Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldier of the First World War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 27.
[39] Watson, *Enduring the Great War,* p. 6.
[40] Sheftall, *Alters Memories of the Great War,* p. 154. J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), p. 27. Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 1.
[41] Cannadine, 'War and Death', p. 202.
[42] Todman, *The Great War,* p. 47.
[43] Watson, *Enduring the Great War,* p. 57.

the trenches, 'was more often a victim than perpetrator of violence'.[44] When soldiers recorded taking a life, they did so in a way that protected their moral identity.[45] Many did not shy away from recounting themselves or others taking a life. The absence of these events in soldiers' testimonies instead is a product of the reality of combat, with only a small number of combatants firing upon the enemy during times of danger.[46] This is due to an innate resistance to killing that the individual cannot overcome, often dying rather than acting.[47] The inability to act often led to feelings of guilt amongst soldiers, compounding mourning as survivors felt they had let down their comrades by failing to act. However, grief could compel an individual to take another life through an act of revenge. Both of these responses to killing affected soldiers when they returned from the war. Eric Leed has concluded the psychological impact of warfare created a sense of 'discontinuity' that prevented soldiers from fully returning to their civilian life.[48] Ex-servicemen ended up living two lives as the 'contradictions' of war were irreconcilable with their civilian selves.[49]

Due to societal expectations soldiers' grief was not recognised when they returned home. George Mosse argued that in the aftermath of the war 'mourning was general' but it did not 'dominate the memory' of the conflict.[50] Civilians had difficulty commemorating the acts of violent men, with war memorials forcing them to acknowledge that society had asked men to kill.[51] The memory of the conflict had to become a 'democratic myth', to allow the soldier's experience of death to be 'transcended', only then could society move on.[52] Lucy Noakes argues that part of this was bound up in the notion that 'good wartime citizenship depended… on a stoical acceptance of suffering.'[53] Commemoration sought to prevent an extended period of mourning, representing it as a betrayal of the memory of the dead, leading to the

[44] Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 4.
[45] Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 19.
[46] Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), p. 3.
[47] Ibid., p. 4.
[48] Leed, *No Man's Land,* p. 3.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, p. 6.
[51] Jon Davies, 'The Martial Uses of the Mass: War Remembrance as an Elementary Form of Religion', in *Ritual and Remembrance: Responses to Death in Human Societies*, ed. by Jon Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 154.
[52] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, p. 99.
[53] Noakes, 'Gender, Grief and Bereavement', p. 73.

repression of grief and mourning in the aftermath of the conflict.[54] Suppression of mourning alienated the ex-serviceman from post-war society and this marginalisation was furthered assured by the positioning of civilian grief above that of the veteran's.[55] As mourning practices are a cultural activity, dictated by social structures and expectations, society determined how soldiers should have reacted to their bereavements and battlefield losses.[56]

Although this research is not considering soldiers' responses to death through the lens of gender, ideas of masculinity certainly played an important role in their interaction with society. Joy Damousi argues mourning as a result of death in war is highly gendered by society and its expectations. Grief due to death in battle was reserved for women, whereas men, and particularly soldiers, were expected to remain stoic.[57] Furthermore, Jessica Meyer argues as combat was solely the occupation of men, they could not help but view war as a gendered experience.[58] Nevertheless, soldiers' wartime experiences contradicted with society's understandings of martial masculinity, making it difficult for them reconcile their reality with what was expected of them. The hyper-masculine image of the soldier is a cultural construction of civilian society. The idea of a hero does not arise naturally from violence but is necessary for civilians during times of war.[59] Graham Dawson stipulates that the 'Soldier Hero' represented an idealised understanding of male qualities, dictated by the nation, that could only be proved through combat.[60] Britain had a long tradition of 'heroic martyrs' who gloriously sacrificed themselves for the nation in combat that the First World War soldier was expected to emulate, such as Nelson and the troopers of the Light Brigade.[61] Furthermore, prior to the war, society believed men were able to control their emotional responses following a bereavement and could conduct themselves

[54] Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p. 9 and p. 179.
[55] Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, p. 51.
[56] Ibid., p. 20.
[57] Joy Damousi, 'Gender and Mourning', in *Gender and the Great War*, ed. by Susan Grayzel and Tammy Proctor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 212.
[58] Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 9.
[59] Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes: On War, Memory and Representations* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 122.
[60] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.
[61] Mark David Sheftall, *Altered Memories of the Great War: Divergent Narratives of Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada* (London and New York: I B Tauris, 2009), pp. 20-22.

without tears, whereas women could not.[62] The way society anticipated soldiers would react to bereavement was rooted in historical social constructions of martial masculinity and male emotions. Damousi suggests grief in wartime actually subverted societal gender norms with men also suffering from loss.[63] This thesis argues that soldiers could not construct their experiences and emotions in a way that satisfied society's expectations.

Therefore, soldiers belonged to two social groups; the martial and the civilian. Military communities at the front developed a new set of social structures, in which soldiers processed bereavements and practiced mourning. Soldiers could not exist in the two communities at the same time, as their societal expectations were incompatible with those of civil society. Even though the First World War soldier believed he was a civilian in uniform and his civilian identity was significant to his psychological survival, on his return home he realised he could no longer conform to societal expectations.[64] Forced to hide their bereavement, soldiers came to suffer from a state of 'disenfranchised grief', a term coined by psychologist Kenneth Doka. It refers to a bereavement that 'cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported because society's grieving rules do not afford the person a recognised right, role, or capacity to grieve.'[65] 'Disenfranchised grief' is a broad term which encompasses an array of mourners, including those who have a relationship with the dead that society deems invalid and groups excluded from commemoration or remembrance rituals.[66] Both categories applied to soldiers during and after the war. Marina Larson suggests this sense of disenfranchisement leads to an 'underclass of mourners' who are not publicly acknowledged and do not receive societal support for their grief.[67] Not only did soldiers have to process their bereavements, they had to mourn without support or acknowledgement from society. This compounded the difficulties they were already suffering as a result of witnessing violent death. However, it is perhaps not accurate to suggest that the repression of soldiers' grief was

[62] Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3.
[63] Damousi, 'Gender and Mourning', p. 212.
[64] Winter, 'Representations of War on the Western Front', p. 209. Gray, *The Warriors*, p. 27.
[65] Larson, 'A Disenfranchised Grief', p. 82. Marina Larson has explored the concept of 'disenfranchised grief' in relation to A.I.F. soldiers who died of their wounds in the inter-war period and did not qualify for official memorials.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

a conscious decision by society. Instead, this occurred as a result of the communal expectations in regards to masculinity and the structure of post-war commemorative rituals as outlined above.

The silence surrounding soldiers' grief in society after the war has meant that this aspect of the soldier's experience has not received detailed study. The existing historiography broadly acknowledges the traumas soldiers experienced at the front including bereavement. The reference to grief is often fleeting and appears alongside explorations of other hardships. For example, Niall Ferguson commented, 'even when they were not cold, dirty and wet, men in the trenches suffered. They grieved for friends who had been killed.'[68] Soldiers are understood to have been affected by what they had witnessed but not 'devastated' by it, as even the deaths of close friends had to be forgotten.[69] However, other historians have argued that despite societal expectations of stoicism, mourning was prevalent in the British Army and an individual's defences could not withstand the loss of a friend.[70] Soldiers struggled to come to terms with death in general as any corpse represented the fragility of the soldier's life.[71] Although personal losses could be quickly forgotten in exchange for self-preservation, it was not immediate and men often grieved during times of rest, with grief over the fallen sometimes as intense as that felt for a loved one.[72] There is a general acceptance in the literature that soldiers were in mourning for their friends but little study has been done in regards to this, certainly not in the same detail as for the Home Front. This research fills this gap by constructing an idea of how soldiers confronted death, suffered from grief and shared their mourning.

The bonds in the army are often conceptualised through the understanding of comradeship. Whether a soldier considered the deceased to be a friend or comrade had a considerable bearing on their response to a death. They are terms often used interchangeably and uncritically. Comradeship is used as shorthand for any relationships that existed between fighting men, whether their bond was based in friendship or military identity. It is found in the understanding that combat had the

[68] Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: 1914-1918* (London: The Penguin Group, 1998), p. 342.
[69] Todman, *The Great War*, p. 49. Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), p. 230.
[70] Damousi, 'Gender and Mourning', p. 222. Jalland, *Death in War and Peace*, p. 20.
[71] Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 132.
[72] Ibid., p. 187. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, p. 19.

power to transcend class and background, by bringing together men of disparate civilian identities through masculine endeavour. Comradeship was significant in the line as men realised they would have to rely on each other to survive, with the act of shared suffering leading to the willingness to endure.[73] The ever-present camaraderie of the trenches and ability to entirely rely on one another made war tolerable and occasionally enjoyable.[74] Conversely, Mosse argued for the French Army that close personal relationships were more significant to soldiers over comradeship, as it could be eroded by the boredom of the trenches. Instead, a soldier's principal loyalty lay with the small group of men who looked after each other's every day needs.[75]

Friendship and comradeship in war are bonds profoundly and deeply rooted in the notion of dying. Gray, a philosopher and veteran of the Second World War wrote, 'men are true comrades only when each is ready to give up his life for the other, without reflection and without thought of personal loss.' In Gray's opinion, 'it is nothing less than the assurance of immortality that makes self-sacrifice… so relatively easy.' To die a comrade fulfilled an individual's principal military duty, meaning he could live forever in the memory of his military community.[76] Conversely, Gray argued, friendship involves the retention of individual identity, with friends not believing in the ideals of self-sacrifice. Comradeship is the complete relinquishing of individual identity with the act of intentionally dying an expectation, whereas 'friends live for each other'. Friends understand there is everything to lose in death, as the reliance they have on each other cannot be replaced by another.[77] Comradeship strictly concerns military identity and combat; a necessary relationship to ensure the survival and cohesion of a fighting group. At the front, a man could not be a friend and a comrade as the expectations concerning dying were incompatible. Friendship during the First World War was the most intense bond a man experienced in his life and was often conceptualised through the understanding of familial bonds, especially fraternal.[78] Comradeship expanded a soldier's immediate group to those with whom

[73] Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 11. Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 18. Anthony Fletcher, 'Patriotism, Identity and Commemoration: New Light on the Great War from the Papers of Major Reggie Chenevix Trench', *History*, 90:30 (2005), p. 545.
[74] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, p. 5. Fletcher, 'Patriotism, Identity and Commemoration', p. 545.
[75] George L. Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of War Experience', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21:4 (1986), p. 495.
[76] Gray, *The Warriors*, p. 46.
[77] Ibid., pp. 90-1.
[78] Denis Winter, *Death's Men*, p. 21. Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 77.

he shared a military identity but did not know personally. Depending on his unit and the circumstances in which losses were sustained this could be his battalion, regiment or the army. It also extended beyond rank unlike friendship. It provided the remit in which officers were mourned by their men. Friendship and comradeship are entirely divergent in their expectations concerning death and should be deployed critically when considering the relationship between soldiers. By reconceptualising the informal bonds of the military as friendship, it is possible to understand why soldiers were unable to retain faith in the concept of sacrifice.

Generalisations of the First World War soldiers' experiences are difficult to determine. Simplifications are dangerous because there is not one 'typical' experience of warfare that can be applied to all soldiers, especially as emotional responses to combat are often contradictory.[79] Soldiers reacted to situations in line with their own personalities, influenced by those around them.[80] This thesis acknowledges the creation of a homogenous experience is virtually impossible. However, it has identified a series of events which appear repeatedly together and in the same order throughout soldiers' testimony. The phases are: an initial contact with death as a moment of realisation concerning the realities of war, followed by hardening towards these, then the rupture of this state as a consequence of intense bereavement, after which there is a sense of disillusionment ending with an attempt to mediate grief. These phases together form the Combat Grief Cycle. This concept forms the foundation of this study's understanding of the soldier's interaction with death and aims to unite the disparate experiences of individuals. Although soldiers responded to each phase of the cycle in line with their own personalities, the general underpinning of experiences of violent death correlated broadly amongst those who served during the war. This was not just in relation to the individual phases but also the way in which responses to death evolved over time.

Combat grief is a term which encapsulates the soldier's responses to bereavement on the battlefield, as it required a different and complex set emotions which cannot be defined within the usual parameters of grief. Death in the war was violent in the extreme, perpetrated against the virile youth of society and represented

[79] Ian Beckett, *The Great War: 1914-1918* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 299. Cannadine, 'War and Death', p. 208.
[80] Brown, *Tommy Goes to War*, p. 143.

a real threat to an individual's mortality. Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker assert violence is an essential component of war memory often overlooked by historians. It is a silence from the time that has subsequently spread to those studying the subject.[81] This thesis aims to right this imbalance by not only placing violence, but violent death at the centre of the soldiers' experience. These responses were compounded by the lack of agency soldiers felt, as they were forced to realise the belief in their ability to assert power over life and death was a fallacy.[82] Therefore, combat grief is the emotional response to a death experienced during participation in warfare, whether it occurred during combat or a quiet period in the line. The term 'cycle' relates to the series of events and responses caused by witnessing death in combat. Regardless of when a soldier arrived at the front they experienced the various points within the cycle in the same order as those around them, as well as those who came before or after. The speed with which soldiers moved through the cycle varied between men; some experienced all aspects of it in a short period of time, whereas for others it could take years. Many soldiers did not live long enough to see the cycle through to its conclusion but others became stuck in the rupture moment. The phases of the cycle provide the chapter structure for this thesis, with each one focusing on a part of the process. Chapter one begins by laying the foundations for which soldiers experienced each aspect of the cycle, demonstrating the significance of military communities, the nature of war and the emotional structures which allowed space for soldiers to grieve.

Chapter two focuses on how and why soldiers hardened themselves to death in war. Hardening refers to an apathetic state in relation to experiencing the death of others. Historians have argued that witnessing death on an industrial scale caused a degree of 'dehumanisation', with soldiers becoming 'immune' to normal emotions in response to violent death.[83] Therefore, a soldier can be considered hardened once they were no longer repulsed or upset by the death they witnessed. Conversely, this chapter demonstrates that hardening was an ambiguous state, which is often deployed uncritically to describe an element of a soldier's experience that was not fixed. It

[81] Andoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p. 17 and p. 43.
[82] Ibid., p, 39. Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granata, 1999), p. 14. Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Plimco, 1997), p. 56.
[83] Eric Cross, 'Death in War: Britten and the War Requiem', in *Ritual and Remembrance: Response to Death in Human Societies*, ed. by Jon Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 127. Cannadine, 'War and Death', p. 203.

explores how the process of hardening evolved, beginning with soldiers' first interactions and reactions to death. This event was significant as it often caused the realisation that indifference to the dead and dying was necessary for emotional and psychological survival, even if the deceased had been a close friend. This sense of indifference intensified during times of danger, as combat induced a chemical reaction that created a 'dream like' state that left no time for mourning.[84] However, this chapter considers that hardening was a necessary and involuntary state, as to grieve in the line would endanger the life of the survivors.[85] This work acknowledges that soldiers realised and accepted their ability to become hardened to death, but contends that this was not a constant and unshakable defence but a fallible state.[86] Hardening was a complex and multifaceted process entirely dependent on an individual's personality. The threshold to achieve immunity to their surroundings varied and for most was only a façade.

Chapter three outlines the second phase of the cycle; the rupture of hardening. This was the moment the death of an individual or members of the community broke through the state of hardening, leading to intense combat grief. This chapter explores how soldiers found space during times of relative safety to mourn their loses.[87] It demonstrates how at the moment of rupture, a soldier's defences to death were completely disabled and repressed grief poured outwards. The event which triggered this response varied. It could have been the death of a close friend, mass death in the military unit or an overwhelming interaction with the dead which made a return to hardening impossible. It was always an event that would cause soldiers to become a victim of the 'death imprint' leading to impaired mourning. This chapter considers how soldiers mourned both as individuals and as communities, making grief acceptable in the military. It establishes that soldiers did not shy away from demonstrating themselves as a group in mourning through their condolence letters to the home front and their publication.

[84] Winter, *Death's Men*, p. 181. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 67. Andre Loez, 'Tears in the Trenches: A History of Emotions and the Experience of War', in *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies*, ed. by Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (Boston: Brill, 2004), p. 218.
[85] Winter, *Death's Men*, p. 208.
[86] Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p. 204.
[87] Winter, *Death's Men,* p. 208.

Chapter four focuses on the collective outpouring of combat grief following battle, indicating military communities could experience a collective rupture moment. It also considers how mass death caused soldiers to mourn more widely for their military grouping outside their close friends, as they came to grieve for their regiments and battalions. This chapter explores how each cohort, regulars, territorials, volunteers and conscripts, underwent a collective moment of rupture during offensive action, depending upon when they arrived at the front. Historians have identified the Battle of the Somme as the watershed moment of the First World War. It has been considered as the offensive that shattered the belief in the glory of war, with 'idealism' perishing on the battlefields of Picardy.[88] However, this chapter demonstrates that it is more accurate to think of the Somme as one event in a series of watershed moments, as a soldier could not be influenced to this extent by an offensive he did not participate in. Each cohort had a relative experience based on the time of enlistment. Soldiers had their illusions shattered before and after 1916 with major offensives, and sometimes peripheral engagements, representing focal points of collective rupture for each cohort.

Chapter four also explores how disillusionment formed the penultimate phase of the Combat Grief Cycle prior to attempts of mediation. The rupture moment did not prevent men from fighting, as Modris Eksteins argued, the war dulled a man's senses, with the mundanity and routine of soldiering leaving no time for men to muse on the 'meaning' or 'purpose' of war.[89] Therefore, disillusionment became a central theme of a soldier's war experience. For example, the veteran and journalist C. E. Montague chose the title *Disenchantment* for his 1924 memoir. He charted how soldiers who had volunteered with great optimism and patriotic spirit returned from the front disillusioned with what they had witnessed.[90] For the purpose of this thesis, disillusionment refers only to disintegration of the soldier's belief in glorious death and sacrifice in war following the moment of rupture. Soldiers went to war believing death in battle was glorious and honourable, with some historians suggesting this

[88] Winter, 'Representations of War on the Western Front', p. 210. Brown, *Tommy Goes to War*, pp. 131-2. A. J. P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (London: Penguin, 1963), p. 140. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, p. 68.
[89] Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London: Black Swan, 1990), p. 240.
[90] C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1922).

provided a framework for soldiers to process their bereavements.[91] However, these beliefs ill-prepared men for the horrific reality of the trenches.[92] The sights soldiers witnessed confirmed to them there was no such thing as a beautiful death in war. Nevertheless, soldiers were institutionalised to such an extent that they could not turn their back on fighting regardless of their grief, leaving dissatisfaction and disillusionment as their only available option.

Chapter five outlines the final stage of the cycle; the mediation, or attempted reconciling, of bereavements, achieved through carrying out acts of mourning. Soldiers expended a great deal of energy conducting burials and funerals in an effort to bury their dead with appropriate rites, with rituals affirming belonging to the community.[93] Jon Davies argues 'a community without a properly incorporated relationship to its dead ancestors can be destroyed.'[94] This chapter establishes how the dead became an integral part of the identity of soldiers' communities through grave markers and battlefield memorials. For some soldiers, at least, ritual could abate the extreme effects of the rupture moment whereas, when burial was impossible, the bereaved could suffer impaired mourning. Many turned to writing, as will be demonstrated in chapters three and four, as a way to mediate losses and create a site of memory. Whether or not these acts of mourning allowed soldiers to move on fully from disillusionment is difficult to determine, as it was often fluid and did not always appear obvious to the soldiers whom it afflicted. Certain events and interactions could create pangs of disillusionment in the same way that grief revisits the bereaved over a lifetime. As chapter six explores, many veterans spent the majority of the post-war years attempting to come to terms with their bereavements; some successfully but others were affected until the very end of their lives.

Grief is an inherently emotional experience and although this thesis does not represent an emotional history, it has cautiously deployed the ideas present in this field of study to assess the emotional codes which existed within the British Army in

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[91] Jalland, *Death in War and Peace*, p. 16. Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter, 'Bereaved and Aggrieved: Combat Motivation and the Ideology of sacrifice in the First World War', *Historical Research*, 83:219 (2010), p. 147. Robin Prior, 'The Heroic Image of the Warrior in the First World War', *War and Society*, 23:1 (2005), p. 45.
[92] Jalland, *Death in War and Peace*, p. 16.
[93] Jon Davies, 'One Hundred Billion Dead', p. 25. Clive Seale, *Constructing Death: The Sociology of Dying and Bereavement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 30.
[94] Jon Davies, 'Introduction', in *Ritual and Remembrance: Responses to Death in Human Societies*, ed. by Jon Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 14.

relation to mourning. Emotional history has unique challenges as it is practically impossible to truly access an individual's emotions in the past.[95] Difficulties arise in differentiating between how individuals talk about their feelings and how they really experienced them in the past, complicated by ill-defined emotions which are highly subjective.[96] There is also a lack of agreement amongst psychologists and 'emotionologists' about how emotions should be read and interpreted. Cognitive psychologists have suggested that emotions are the product of the intellectual analysis of a situation; whether something is negative or positive will dictate the emotional response.[97] Conversely, emotionologists argue emotions are a result of societal expectations, 'cultural norms' and 'individual proclivities' dictated by an individual's community.[98] In reality, a combination of these two positions is perhaps the best way to assess a soldier's emotional response to bereavement. Susan Matt and Peter Stearns argue it is important not to focus on the 'hunt' for a single emotional code, but instead emotions should be used to identify multiple and different emotional codes in which people exist in and move between.[99]

Historians have found soldiers' emotions a particularly problematic area of study, as responses to war are often pathological resulting in contradictory emotions as soldiers moved rapidly between each one.[100] This thesis does not intend to reconstruct soldiers' true feelings. Instead, it will identify the presence of painful emotions caused by bereavement in order to establish that soldiers formed communities of mourning. Andre Loez's 'Tears in the Trenches', conducted for the French army, provides an important foundation for understanding the emotional structures within the military, particularly in relation to the presence of tears.[101] Loez suggests tears were caused by a number of emotions at the front, including happiness

[95] Adela Pinch, 'Emotion and History. A Review', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37:1 (1995), p. 101. Tarlow, 'An Archaeology of Remembering', p. 10.
[96] Adela Pinch, 'Emotion and History', p. 101. Vanda Wilcox. '"Weeping Tears of Blood": Exploring Italian Soldiers' Emotions in the First World War', *Modern Italy*, 17:2 (2012), p. 171. Tarlow, 'An Archaeology of Remembering', p. 108.
[97] Wilcox, '"Weeping Tears of Blood"', p. 172.
[98] Ibid. Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *The American Historical Review*, 107:3 (2002), p. 837 and p. 824.
[99] Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns, 'Introduction', in *Doing Emotional History*, ed. by Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 8.
[100] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 14. Joanna Bourke, 'The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914-1945', *Historical Research*, 74:185 (2001), p. 317.
[101] Loez, 'Tears in the Trenches', pp. 211-227.

at survival, anger and hunger.[102] He also asserts that the absence of tears indicates their unacceptability in the trenches. They represented a breach in the martial code as crying was a betrayal of the collective courage and the acknowledgement of the grief all were trying to suppress.[103] Conversely, this thesis argues that soldiers subconsciously created a code of language which indicated the depth of their pain and tears alone were not enough to convey the intensity of their grief. Bereavement was a deep emotional pain which did not bear resemblance to other emotions that elicited tears.

This thesis does not consider the role of First World War literature and poetry in the analysis of soldiers' responses to death, but the themes of this work are reflected in the literature of the time. For example, R. H. Mottram wrote in 'The Stranger', from *The Spanish Farm Trilogy,* the returning soldier understood why he felt alienated in the aftermath of war, as the dead had 'not relapsed into Peace in England, as he has. The War has survived them'.[104] This illustrates that literature provided a place where veterans could interpret their relationship with the dead. Mourning and disillusionment were also key themes of war poetry, for example Wilfred Owen's 'The Anthem for Doomed Youth' and 'Dulce et Decorum Est', as well as Siegfried Sassoon's 'To any Dead Officer'.[105] Literature from the war has been explored by Winter in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning,* covering in detail the role of soldiers' poetry and prose in relation to dead comrades.[106] Ideas surrounding literature as a window to horrors of war and disenchantment were considered by Brian Bond in *The Unquiet Western Front.*[107] Due to the abundance of literary material created by the war, the themes of this work in relation to this particular source base requires study in its own right.

Furthermore, this thesis has not considered soldiers' use of humour as a lighter way to process death as a juxtaposition to mourning, as it has long been an area of interest to historians. Tim Cook has explored how humour was an important aspect of soldiers' service, a way to endure the horrors they witnessed. He also suggests gallows

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[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., p. 212.
[104] R. H. Mottram, *The Spanish Farm Trilogy, 1914-1918* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927), p. 800.
[105] Wilfred Owen, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', in *Up the Line to Death: The War Poets 1914-1918,* ed. by Brian Gardener (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 136. Wilfred Owen, 'Dolce Decorum Est' in *Up the Line to Death: The War Poets 1914-1918,* ed. by Brian Gardener (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 141. Siegfried Sassoon, 'To any Dead Officer', in *Up the Line to Death: The War Poets 1914-1918,* ed. by Brian Gardener (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 97.
[106] Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning,* chapter 8.
[107] Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

humour was deployed to 'trivialise the terrifying'.[108] There is an abundance of evidence of soldiers' humour in relation to the horrors of their experiences, with a notable example being the *The Wipers Times*, a satirical trench journal produced at the front for soldiers' entertainment.[109] Another field this work acknowledges as important to the arguments present here but does not focus on, is the history of the body. The significance of the male body and its cultural representations in relation to war has been thoroughly covered by Joanna Bourke in *Dismembering the Male*.[110] Ana Cardon-Coyne has also considered the importance of the body in *Reconstructing the Body.* She considers how the destruction of the male body in war was a destabilising experience for soldiers and civilians. Following the war the soldier's body was reconstructed through ideas of classicism in war memorials, drawn from traditional images of the fallen warrior from the ancient world.[111] This thesis instead explores the emotional toll on the soldiers of seeing mutilated friends and shattered bodies.

This research principally draws upon the personal testimony of soldiers who served on the Western Front. To present general arguments for the infantry this thesis has taken evidence from approximately sixty regiments, as well as just over a hundred individual personal testimonies, in addition to trench journals and oral accounts. Of the personal accounts consulted, roughly thirty-five percent of authors were officers', with the other sixty-five written by ORs and NCOs. This thesis has chosen to focus more heavily on the experience of the private soldier, as the officers' war has often been the subject of many histories of the First World War. Furthermore, by exploring the ORs in greater detail this research has been able to consider the experience of men from a variety of different backgrounds, including class and geographical location. In addition to this, a broad spread of sources representing each cohort have been chosen. Around forty percent of the personal testimony selected are from regular and territorial soldiers, whose accounts provide evidence of the experience of death during the early years of the war. Approximately fifty percent of accounts were written by volunteers.

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[108] Tim Cook, '"I Will Meet the World with a Smile and a Joke", *Canadian Military History*, 22:2 (2013), pp. 49-56.
[109] Christopher Westhorp ed., *The Wipers Times: The Famous First World War Trench Newspaper* (London: Conway Books, 2013).
[110] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1999).
[111] Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

The rest of the accounts present in this thesis were written by men who could not be categorised or who were not part of the infantry. The large proportion of volunteer accounts is due to a lack of identification of the author's cohort. This is particularly problematic for soldiers who joined the war in the later years, as there was reticence amongst conscripts to identify as such. Only one soldier, H. L. Adams admitted to being conscripted in his account. However, he justifies not voluntarily enlisting due to his religious beliefs. As men continued to volunteer throughout the war it was easy for men who felt ashamed by their lack of willingness to participate in the fighting to hide their identity as conscripts. Therefore, although soldiers who joined the front in 1917 and 1918 are identified throughout the thesis it is not pertinent to guess at their status. Moreover, as conscripts and volunteers later in the war were simply sent where they were needed there was not the same sense of cohort identity as existed for regular, territorials and early volunteers.

Many archival catalogues do not categorise their material in relation to the principal themes of this research, in particular grief and mourning, further highlighting the marginalisation of these aspects of the soldiers' experience. As this research covers the majority of the British Army's time on the Western Front, sources were first identified by battle to obtain a spread of offensive action, as well as offering an array of experiences for each cohort, with a particular focus on the principal battles of the war. Further to this, in order to consider the British Army as whole, as many regiments as possible required representation within the thesis. Therefore, all soldiers were not only organised chronologically but also by military unit. This thesis has drawn equally from published and archived material, with private papers predominantly being provided by the IWM's collection. Due to the vast quantity of material held in this repository, alongside published accounts, this research was able to compile a variety of experiences and perspectives from different regiments, cohorts and battles. However, future research would benefit from the consultation of a range of archives, particularly regimental, in order to offer a focused account of individual military communities and how their particular traditions and culture influenced their soldiers' responses to death. Furthermore, as in the case of the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry, local archives can offer a wealth of material in relation to more peripheral military units which are less well-represented within more national collections.

A small number of soldiers who served in other arms have been used for their observations or in support of the point made by the infantryman. For example, Chaplain Eric Crosse and Dr Frank Steadman, due to their positions, were able to offer interpretations of combatants' behaviour as semi-outsiders not available in the testimony of soldiers. Previous studies have suggested there is a representational imbalance of rank in the documentary record. However, due to the increasingly literate wartime army, many personal accounts have been published and archived in the successive years, forming a more complete record.[112] Nevertheless, historians often lean on the most articulate accounts, making it difficult to extrapolate a general experience from the individual.[113] This research has used a variety of sources including diaries, memoirs, letters, trench journals, images and oral testimony with a view of constructing a more complete understanding of soldiers' responses to death from numerous different perspectives. Although this thesis has tried to offer balance in this area and draws from a variety of private soldiers' accounts, due to the nature of the subject, articulate accounts have offered the most fruitful evidence. This does not suggest that indications of grief and mourning were not present in less elaborate testimony, but they often lacked the detail necessary for analysis in respect to emotions. Therefore, in places, the articulate accounts of soldiers who were writers and journalists, such as Stephen Graham and Alfred McLeland Burrage, have been used for their detailed observations and intellectual interpretations.

The contemporary record, such as diaries and letters, give an indication of a soldier's immediate response to death, as diaries were likely to have been strongly influenced by the 'context' in which they were written.[114] They provided a space where soldiers recorded their fears and bereavements in more detail than in public outlets at the time.[115] This thesis will explore how the diary became a 'ritual of mourning', as the recording of death allowed the memory of the deceased to be preserved.[116] However, keeping a diary or journal was usually a middle-class pursuit, making this group more selective than those who wrote letters.[117] It was often officers

[112] Lyn Macdonald, 'Oral History and the First World War', in *A Part of History: Aspects of the British Experience of the First World War*, ed. by Michael Howard (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 137. Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 9.
[113] Todman, *The Great War*, p. 8.
[114] Ibid., p. 11.
[115] Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 57.
[116] Ibid., pp. 58-9.
[117] Ibid., p. 48.

who kept diaries due to their class and rank, whereas letter writing was common in the trenches as soldiers sought a connection to home and family. Soldiers were compelled to write letters as a way to share the realities of war with the Home Front, as well as providing an outlet for emotions they could not express in the trenches.[118] Although letters provided an important channel for dealing with emotions, this research will consider that communities, bonds and rituals men created at the front provided adequate space for them to process their emotions.

Significantly, memoirs, as Winter argues, were a place where ex-servicemen wrote in the voices of the dead, 'speaking for them, to them, about them'.[119] Those who participated in combat had a privileged position which allowed them to speak for the dead, with dead returning to the living through writing.[120] However, as personal testimony is always influenced by public narratives, it is, to an extent, reflective of what the reader expects to see.[121] Therefore, pressures from the civilian sphere to suppress the horrors of war, alongside the ex-serviceman's struggle to find the truth in his memories, always made accounts of war incomplete.[122] Post-war narratives also represented who the individual was at the moment of writing rather than an accurate retelling of their experiences, as people change between the event and the moment of recounting it.[123] Even though many veterans wrote their accounts for themselves or as a way to share their experiences with family members, the intended audiences still influenced the way the account was written.[124] However, some archived accounts are still franker and more honest than those which were published. This thesis is not concerned with accessing the truth behind the war experience, as it is incredibly difficult to reconstruct a true understanding of emotions in the past. Instead, it seeks to understand how soldiers recorded their experiences of death in war, remembered the dead and responded to their feelings of grief at the time of writing.

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[118] Ibid., p. 20 and p. 23.
[119] Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, p. 204.
[120] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 239.
[121] Michael Roper, 'Re-Remembering the Soldier Hero: The Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, 50 (2000), p. 183.
[122] Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society* (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1992), p. 12. Vita Fortunati, 'Writing as Testimony in the European Narrative after the First and Second World Wars', in *Memories and Representations of War: The Case of World War One and World War Two*, ed. by Elena Lamberti and Vita Fortunati (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), p. 47.
[123] Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 116.
[124] Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 128.

Trench journals are an important source of information regarding the communal response to death in war, but are problematic as little information is known about them.[125] They were edited by junior subalterns and NCOs from the battalion or regiment for whom the journal was for, with contributions provided by the men of the unit.[126] Journals were unique to the unit for which they were produced, representing their particular needs and requirements, with many concerned with fostering esprit de corps.[127] However, there is little indication of how wide the readership was for individual publications. This makes it difficult to determine the power journals had over the units they were produced for, but those which strove too obviously to influence the members of their units did not last long.[128] Although the history and popularity of trench journals remains elusive, the content of soldiers' publications offer an indication of how soldiers constructed their communities in relation to death and made mourning acceptable on the frontline.

Oral history interviews are used in chapter six as evidence of the long-term grief which ex-servicemen struggled to process. Although, oral testimony in relation to war has received criticism due to the limited knowledge of the individual serviceman, the incomplete nature of accounts as a result of trauma and the fading of memory, there is still valuable knowledge to be gained from them.[129] This thesis is not interested in using interviews to recover the 'truth' of what happened to a man during his time on the Western Front. Instead, it wishes to access his emotional response at the time of interview in relation to the lasting grief. As the interviews used in this thesis were conducted for the purpose of recovery history very few probed the soldiers experience of death. It was often a difficult subject the interviewers themselves were keen to gloss over. Few veterans offered detail in this area unless they were directly

[125] John Pegum, 'The British Army Trench Journals and a Geography of Identity', in *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History*, ed. by Mary Hammond and Shafquet Towheed, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) p. 129. Encyclopaedia 1914-1918 Online [online]. Robert L. Nelson, Soldier Newspapers, 2014 [cited 28 June 2020]. Available from: <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/soldier_newspapers>. Nelson gives an overview of trench journals for British, French and German soldiers.

[126] Pegum, 'British Army Trench Journals and a Geography of Identity', p. 134.

[127] Ibid., p. 130. J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 13.

[128] Beckett, *The Great War*, p. 304. Beckett has suggested that approximately a hundred different journals were in circulation during the war. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, p. 13.

[129] Rodney Earl Walton, 'Memories from the Edge of the Abyss: Evaluating the Oral Accounts of World War Two Veterans', *The Oral History Review*, 37:1 (2010), pp. 24-7. Macdonald, 'Oral History and the First World War'. Both Walton and Macdonald offer an overview of how veterans' oral testimony should be critically utilised in relation to the history of war.

asked about the subject, which happened on rare occasions. Conversely, some veterans, often unprompted, wished to discuss the pain they continued to feel in relation to bereavements.

The key framework of this thesis concerns the analysis of soldiers' language across all forms of testimony in relation to death. Paul Fussell argued that the English language did not provide soldiers with the necessary words to construct the horrors of war for the civilian sphere.[130] Furthermore, Eksteins stated, 'the war became so monumental in significance, like an unknowable, indefinable godhead, that words and ideas were useless.'[131] Words often failed soldiers as they did not have the power of language to convey the full horrors of battle.[132] However, Samuel Hynes argues with the use of the imagination and vast quantities of testimony the uninitiated can begin to understand the true nature of the soldier's experience.[133] This thesis does not strive to create a complete image of the soldier's experience and emotions but aims to only access one aspect of the horror of war. It is possible to identify a shared lexicon which reveals the deep pain that death in war created for those who served. Soldiers recorded, both publicly and privately, their grief, pain and tears, sometimes in excruciating detail. Grief, bereavement and mourning were made accessible to outsiders as they are feelings and experiences normal to human existence.

Writing became a way for soldiers to mediate their grief as they sought to understand their experiences. However, an important caveat must be acknowledged. As writing was largely the pursuit of the middle and upper classes, it was not available to all soldiers, particularly those of the working class, as a way to process the traumas of war. These men may have sought other ways to mediate their grief, some of which are explored in this thesis, such as funerals, burials, memorials and commemorative rituals. Others which require greater exploration concern the keeping of personal mementos and photographs. Furthermore, some may have turned to drinking or even suicide, potentially providing evidence that some men had suffered a trauma so great that it could not be mediated through the Combat Grief Cycle.[134] Equally, this should

[130] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 169.
[131] Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 240.
[132] Vita Fortunati, 'Writing as Testimony in the European Narrative after the First and Second World', p. 47. Meyer, *Men of War*, pp. 19-20.
[133] Hynes, *The Soldiers Tale*, pp. 284-5.
[134] Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Cinq Deuils de Guerre: 1914-1918* (Paris: Tallandier, 2013). Audoin-Rouzeau's micro approach to studying grief offers an alternative methodology for future research. By

not detract from the importance of writing as a form of mediation for many soldiers who served during the war, particularly when they possessed the skills of an accomplished writer. The more eloquent accounts present in this thesis certainly demonstrate the significance of writing as a form of mediation for the middle and upper classes.

Wilcox asserts the act of writing was a soldier's attempt to make sense of their emotions in relation to the trauma, with the text created for the benefit of the writer and not the reader.[135] Lilie Chauliaraki argues combatants of the twentieth century no longer identified with the ideals of glorious sacrifice, with their testimony representing an attempt to make sense of mass death through 'a new diction'.[136] She concurs with Fussell that soldiers accounts are constructed through a sense of irony, where men have to deal with the 'paradox of war'; despite vast technological advancements the human life mattered less than it did before.[137] The manifestation of this in the written word is the process by which soldiers view and record their experience through the prism of 'bitter experience', emphasising the futility of death in war.[138] Historians have suggested soldiers wrote to expunge their traumatic memories and replace them with ones that were easier to endure, as it became a type of 'therapy' for those who returned.[139] However, soldiers were often stuck between the need to forget their traumatic experience and the innate drive to remember; this meant that ex-servicemen were compulsively forced to relive the horrors of war.[140] Writing both during and after the war allowed soldiers to reimagine and reconstruct events in a way that helped them sanitise their memories and come to terms with the death they had witnessed. It allowed them to create a personal site of memory and ensured they would not forget the fallen. Through these testimonies this thesis has been able to build a greater

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focusing on the lives of small number of soldiers and reconstructing their long-term grief, nuance in relation to the individual experience of Combat Grief Cycle could be identified.

[135] Wilcox, '"Weeping Tears of Blood"', p. 173.

[136] Lilie Chauliaraki, 'From War Memoirs to Milblogs: Language change in the witnessing of war', *Discourse and Society*, 25:5 (2014), p. 602.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, pp. 43-4. Vita Fortunati, 'Writing as Testimony in the European Narrative after the First and Second World Wars', p. 47.

[140] Antonio Gibelli, 'Memory and Repression: Psychiatric Sources and the History of Modern Wars', in *Memories and Representations of War: The Case of World War One and World War Two*, ed. by Elena Lamberti and Vita Fortunati (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), p. 64 and p. 67.

understanding of the soldier's responses to death in war, with a view to assessing how war changed men but did not irrevocably break them.

Chapter One

Military Structures and Frontline Context: Soldiers' Communities, Violence and Emotional Frameworks

The formal military structures, alongside the social and cultural relationships which existed in the British Army during the First World War, had a strong bearing on how soldiers confronted and processed death. Regimental and Battalion communities dictated the way men formed their bonds at the front, both formally through the concept of comradeship and informally through friendships. It was within these structures that men formulated their communities in mourning, dictating how bereavements and losses were processed by their members. This varied between groups on the frontline due to the identity of the community to which they belonged. Initially, for the BEF, this was provided by the regiment and a broader identification with a smaller professional army. Later in the war for the volunteer and the conscript, the individual's communal identity was provided by the battalion only once the soldier had arrived at the front, usurping the regimental one they had been given in training. This informed the formal relationship men had at the front in terms of officer-man relations and comradeship, with close friendships forming within these between small groups of men. Bonds between officers and their men were also rooted within the official structures and friendships could only form between men of the same rank.

Not only will this chapter explore how these relationships affected soldiers' responses to death within their communities it will also consider that once at the front they existed against a backdrop of violent and random death. The nature of mechanical warfare and its extreme violence impacted on men's responses to death and how they mourned. This, coupled with their formal and informal military communities, governed the acceptability of emotional responses. This chapter will consider the language that soldiers employed in their personal writing to convey the deep sense of pain and loss that their bereavements had inflicted. This will reveal the complexity of responses to death that occurred in the British Army during the First World War. It

was these communities and their shared emotions which provided the foundation for the Combat Grief Cycle and its relevant processes, even down to the act of mediating grief through a shared and acceptable language.

Regimental and Battalion Structures: Formal and Informal Bonds

The regiments and battalions of the British Army provided soldiers with the formal structures for the creation of both their immediate and broader communities.[1] The principal outcome of military training was to strip soldiers of their civilian identity and indoctrinate them into a regimental one in its place to create a cohesive fighting unit. The military structure needed to ensure that men would put their needs second, including their survival instincts. Therefore, the army had to be certain that all men were socialised into the martial norms of army life and would leave behind civilian values. Regulars, for the most part, had already cemented their military identities before they were deployed to the front at the beginning of the war. Joanna Bourke suggests it was in the army's interests to foster 'a sense of group solidarity', merging 'individual identity with that of the battalion' before men entered combat, rather than assuming that men would achieve this for themselves once at the front.[2] Monty Ingram recorded in his diary after receiving his uniform, 'Have now lost my individuality and am officially known as No. 42110 Private N. M. Ingram.'[3] All aspects of military training were designed to remove the individuality of the soldier from clothing him in the same uniform to close order drill. As Ingram demonstrated, having received all he required to be a soldier, he was no longer his own man and swiftly identified himself as a soldier of the British Army. These regimes subordinated men into the same group and removed individual autonomy down to telling him 'to hold his body in a prescribed fashion.'[4] As Charles Tom commented in his diary written during the initial

[1] The seminal study of the structure of the British Army in the Twentieth Century is David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army and the British People c. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). In this text French covers in detail the workings of the British Army during the First World War. For a more detailed study of one Regiment and how battalions operated during the First World War see Mark Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!: A Regiment, a Region and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[2] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1999), p. 128.
[3] Monty Ingram, *'In Flanders Fields': The Word War One Diary of Private Monty Ingram* (Auckland: David Ling, 2006), p. 20.
[4] Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 57-8.

training phase, 'Practised "kick-step" turning slowly and quickly on the square. A perfectly ridiculous exhibition. Are we really men?',[5] this demonstrated that military training could be effective to such an extent it led some men to question their humanity. Tom's reaction was perhaps extreme and Ingram's more general. The removal, or the supposed elimination of civilian identity, was a significant step in creating a new community for soldiers who could be subordinated to the will and orders of the military.

The identity the soldier was expected to take on was not that of the army in general but of his particular regiment. These unique groupings were distinguished by different insignia and values, providing men with 'visible communities' with which they could identify and as separate entities they served their purpose in helping men adapt to army life.[6] In the course of training, shared rest time, sleeping, eating and drinking with each other, men came to form strong bonds. Therefore, the British Army was tribal in nature, with the regiment becoming highly important to its members.[7] This strong sense of investment in the identity of the regiment could lead to rivalries amongst them in the army structure.[8] They also created their own cultures which in turn influenced their relationship with their dead and these bonds were not the same for every unit. This, coupled with their unique group identity, would help to see them through the toughest aspects of the war.[9] These were the groups that provided the environment in which men responded to deaths both individually and collectively. The close-knit communities created the conditions in which death created the necessary social upheaval required to foster a collective state of mourning. As the war went on and the army expanded, the regiment remained significant to the formation of the soldier's identity. However, the unique structure of the British Army meant regiments did not serve together in the line. Therefore, it was the battalion which came to provide the soldier with his community and identity once deployed at the front.

In terms of the formal military structure the outcome of these regimental bonds was to ensure that disobedience was unthinkable and soldiers were 'inculcated with

[5] Guernsey, The Island Archives, The Tom's Family Collection, AQ 0359/03, 'Charles Tom's Diary', 13th February 1917.
[6] Watson, *Enduring the Great War,* p. 63.
[7] Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005), p. 84.
[8] French, *Military Identities,* p. 260.
[9] Todman, *The Great War,* p. 5.

new military allegiances'.[10] Commanders had to be certain that men came to fully identify with their regiments as R. Hugh Kynvette observed during his time in the army,

> ...men in a regiment or an army are not under the domination of their own will at all, but of the collective will of the whole. That is why some regiments are so anxious to keep alive their traditions, and emblazon their battles on their colours. That is why we devote so much time in the training of young recruits to the knowledge of the esprit de corps of the regiment.[11]

Esprit de corps is one of the stock military phrases used to indicate a strong sense of unity in a fighting group. However, it had different meanings for each man and each regiment, but for all it was to be fostered for the cohesion of the unit. The technical ideas which constructed an understanding of this concept were delivered to men in training. As Kynvette suggested it was often rooted in the insignia which adorned their uniforms and the desire to add to the history of the regiment. Conversely, to the individual, esprit de corps could instead be created by the shared experiences and friendships built whilst at the front. Overall, what this comprised did not matter. What was important was that it compelled men within their formal military unit to fight and sacrifice themselves for the war effort.

Although the tribal nature of the army meant that many rivalries existed, David French suggests when it came to fighting a common enemy men tended to invest their identity in the wider military unit, thus transcending their individual regimental identities.[12] This is a significant aspect to remember when considering mass death in the army during all critical engagements in the war. In this sense the wider military structure was their community at large, meaning that soldiers were invested in it to some extent. Despite the fact a man may have had a general sense of affinity for his fellow soldier, it was very difficult to bring together men from different military groups and press them back into action together.[13] A man might feel a sense of sadness at watching another man die in agony or be repulsed by a mutilated corpse, but that

[10] Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 57.
[11] R. Hugh Knyvett, *"Over There" with the Australians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 170.
[12] French, *Military Identities*, p. 261.
[13] Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), p. 150.

did not translate to risking his life for a soldier who he did not know and had no shared experience with.

Therefore, it is a misunderstanding to assume that men could be encouraged to fight well simply through the wider bond of the military. There were not just rivalries; some regiments were held in low esteem by other groups in the army. Captain Arthur Gibbs wrote in a letter to his father in early 1916 '...the Irish [Guards]... are a very bad regiment even in England and out here considered rather worse than some of the best line regiments. Far better get him into the Coldstreams, which is a fine regiment, or the life guards.'[14] Friction existed between units at the front and when fighting alongside each other, as some regiments had poor reputations for discipline and behaviour. As chapter four will go on to explore, despite this the regular army often mourned widely for the fallen regardless of regiment but there were always exceptions to the rule. By late 1915 regiments had become more significant to men at the front with the deaths of soldiers from other regiments greeted with a sense of indifference. Alwyn Bramley-Moore wrote in a letter to his wife, 'There was nothing left of one fellow but his boots, but he didn't belong to our regiment.'[15] He demonstrated that, even when death was violent in the extreme, if the man was from another regiment it was easier for men to process their interaction with it because they had no affinity with the deceased. Therefore, battalions and not the army as a whole, created the spaces in which men felt and processed bereavements. As Bramely-Moore suggested regimental affiliation was as far as a sense of loss would stretch for some men. Furthermore, by 1918, due to the size of the British Army and the number of men who had been through the ranks, any sense of a wider military community which had existed in the BEF had been lost. Consequently, a homogenous military community where grief for all dead individuals ceased to exist by the end of 1915, leading to misconceptions concerning widespread hardening within the army.

For some, particularly volunteers, military training did not entirely remove their civilian identity, and they saw their experience of war as a hiatus from their

[14] London, IWM, Documents. 12199a, 'Private Papers of Captain A. Gibbs MC', 20 April 1916.
[15] Alwyn Bramley Moore, *The Path of Duty: The Wartime Letters of Alwyn Bramely-Moore, 1914-1918,* ed. by Ken Tingley (Alberta: Alberta Records Publications Board, 1998), p. 65.

ordinary lives.[16] It was not possible to strip a man of his civilian identity entirely and this meant, whether the soldier was a regular or a volunteer, he would usually take aspects of his pre-war identity with him into active service.[17] Territorials and volunteers, particularly the Pals Battalions retained aspects of their civilian identity once at the front. As territorial battalions were locally raised and often had a long history prior to the war, their identity was strongly founded in relation to their geographical location. This meant civilian values could endure and cement these units together once at the front.[18] This was also the case for the New Army as men volunteered together from the same local areas. Community and local civilian identity were particularly significant to Pals Battalions. There are many famous examples of these types of battalions, such as the Manchester Pals and the Accrington Pals, groups of men who rushed to the colours in 1914 to serve shoulder-to-shoulder with friends.[19] The 17th Service Battalion, Highland Light Infantry, trench journal *The Outpost*, features heavily in this thesis as evidence of how civilian ties could cement a battalion together and support them through collective bereavement. Raised in 1914 by the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, regional civilian and military identity came to coalesce as connection to home remained significant to soldiers. The fact that entire communities of men could serve and die together at the front certainly intensified grief during times of heavy losses.[20]

These kinds of connections to the civilian self allowed soldiers to interpret the war as a hiatus from their ordinary lives. David Jones justified about the title of his memoirs *In Parenthesis*,

> The writing is called "In Parenthesis" because I have written in a kind of space between – I don't know quite what – but as you turn aside to do something; and because for us amateur soldiers… the war itself was a parenthesis – how glad we thought we were to step

[16] Jay Winter, 'Representations of War on the Western Front, 1914-18: Some Reflections in Cultural Ambivalence', in *Power, Violence and Mass Death in Pre-Modern and Modern Times*, ed. by Joseph Canning, Hartmut Lehmann and Jay Winter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 209.
[17] Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), p. 80.
[18] Helen B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 5. Helen McCartney has conducted a detailed study on the Liverpool Rifles and the Liverpool Scottish. Considering how territorial forces were influenced and retained connections to their civilian identities.
[19] Malcolm Brown, *Tommy Goes to War* (Stroud: History Press, 1978), p. 13.
[20] Ian Beckett, *The Great War:1914-1918* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 300. See Beckett for considerations on how losses weakened links to geographical civilian identity.

> outside its brackets at the end of '18 – and also because our curious type of existence here is altogether in parenthesis.[21]

Soldiers were driven to write by the need to make sense of their experiences in relation to the rest of their lives.[22] Jones pointed to characteristics of war which made him reflect on his feelings at the time, believing that he had simply had a break from civilian life to participate in the extraordinary. The very essence of being at war represented an interim period for the population and for the men who served, just the nature of being at the front was out of the ordinary. This idea of hiatus led those who survived to believe they could to return to their pre-war existence and in a sense 'pick up where they left off'.

For the volunteer soldier and the conscript the relationship with the military structure, particularly if they only saw themselves as having a hiatus from their ordinary lives, could be fragile. Lieutenant J. Nettleton revealed, 'It must be remembered that we were not soldiers, but civilians in uniform. We were in the army but not of it… nothing that they dared to do to us behind the lines was anything like as bad as the ordinary conditions in the line, so the powers of the authorities were to some extent limited.'[23] Nettleton demonstrates the army could not compel volunteers to fully subscribe to the structures of the army. Many soldiers still viewed themselves as civilians, only temporarily in the army, and did not want to be 'of it'. It was not necessarily a failure of army training but contact with the realities of modern war, its horror and brutality, that rendered the authority of the military structures powerless to force soldiers to obey. This sense of 'parenthesis' influenced the way men responded and viewed the deaths of their friends and comrades both during after the war. This understanding of hiatus created conflict in a man's identity after death and he became trapped between being a civilian and a soldier.

One of the key formal bonds which existed within the regimental and battalion structure were those between ORs and officers. Although not united fully united regardless of rank by a shared and universal experience of the trenches, Ian Beckett argues that we should not see officers and their men as completely 'separate spheres'.

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[21] David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p. xv.
[22] Vanda Wilcox. '"Weeping Tears of Blood": Exploring Italian Soldiers' Emotions in the First World War', *Modern Italy*, 17:2 (2012), p. 173. Lilie Chauliaraki, 'From War Memoirs to Milblogs: Language change in the witnessing of war', *Discourse and Society*, 25:5 (2014), p. 602.
[23] London, IWM, Documents. 12332, 'Private Papers of Lieutenant J. Nettleton'.

However, there were certainly clear divisions between officers and their men.[24] Gary Sheffield has offered a more complex deconstruction of officer-man relations in *Leadership in the Trenches.* He suggests there was scope for the structure to be more flexible and that some level of informality did exist between officers and their men. Conversely, he posits that NCOs had more informal relationships with ORs which bridged the gap between men and their commanders, often being more directly responsible for the welfare of the men in their charge.[25] Although the relationship between officers and their men was based on a shared understanding of their individual roles, it was not based on any substantiated intimacy. In reality officers only had a very small role in the life of the average private.[26] Equally, Sheffield has proposed that officers and their men did form much closer bonds on active service, although this should not be overplayed as officers did not share the hardships of the trenches in the same way as the NCOs.[27]

Importantly, the officer was instrumental in maintaining the morale within his unit but this was highly dependent on his qualities as a good leader and it was officers that understood their men fully who made the best commanders.[28] Even though they did not share precisely the same hardships as the ORs, they did live in the trenches ensuring they provided a constant level of contact with the men in their charge.[29] Beckett and Sheffield indicate that officers and their men did not form close personal friendships, which were necessary to facilitate an intense bereavement. However, the ORs relationship with an officer dictated the level of pain attached to the loss of a leader and not all commanders were mourned equally. Privates almost always mourned officers as a result of a formal military relationship, based on their loyalty to and quality of a leader, which created a distinctive type of combat grief different from that reserved for friends.

The formal military structures could only go so far to provide the basic needs men required to sustain them during war. Research into military structures have

[24] Beckett, *The Great War*, pp. 299-300. For an exploration of the importance of Junior Officers see Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 108-39.
[25] Gary 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, 2000), pp. 3-4.
[26] Ibid., pp. 11-2.
[27] Ibid., p. 93.
[28] Ibid., p. 42 and p. 80.
[29] Ibid., p. 93.

demonstrated that men formed informal friendships, which Tony Ashworth has argued, fulfilled 'emotional and material welfare' that did not come from the official structure, with small groups forming 'trench household'.[30] Usually formed between men in the same companies and platoons, these informal groupings provided welfare and exchange of particular services for their members outside the standard support offered by the army. These households and the services they rendered provided soldiers with many of the needs required to make the war, at the very least, bearable.[31] Chaplain Eric Crosse observed of men at the front,

> …the general level of unselfishness and comradeship astonished almost everyone. Forced as everyone was to live in very close companionship with men who they never would have known at all in civilian life… most men who served at the front found themselves at the end with a far wider circle of real and intimate friends than they had ever known before… our own judgements of others became far more charitable because we were all so painfully conscious of our need of their help.[32]

Although not every man was accepted into these close groups, men who would not normally form bonds of 'intimate' friendships in civilian life did so due to the necessity of survival. Crosse suggested the front made men more tolerant as they realised that they needed each other both in the military sense and as friends. This was not something that could be achieved through training at home. It was only by being in the conditions of the frontline that the atmosphere required could be created to cement initial bonds.

The strength of these bonds was grounded in an intense friendship and meant that soldiers mourned for each other as brothers and not just as friends.[33] The Canadian Ernest Black observed of relationships between soldiers, 'there is no tie in the world, aside from the family tie, which is quite like the tie of brother-in-arms.'[34] Although brotherhood may be a better indicator of the strength of relationship between soldiers, the 'brotherhood of arms' is stronger yet. Their relationships were fraternal in nature but these men were still united by an experience that stretches this concept to its

[30] For greater explanation see Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare: 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 155. Watson, *Enduring the Great War,* p. 66.
[31] Ashworth, *Trench Warfare*, pp. 155-6.
[32] London, IWM, Documents. 4772, 'Private Papers of Canon E. C. Crosse DSO MC'.
[33] Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 77.
[34] Ernest G. Black, *I Want One Volunteer* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965), p. 2.

greatest manifestation. As Black acknowledged, the bonds which were made by these men could only be reflected at home in the 'familial' sense. Traditional understandings of friendship did not come close to those formed at the front. These friendships were more intense than any formed in civilian circles and could only exist within the martial sphere, where men relied upon and needed each other more than they would at any other time in their life.

These were not sentiments unique to the C.E.F. and were reflected throughout the British and Dominion Armies. As John Mudd revealed to his wife. 'Out here, dear, we are all pals, what one hasn't got the other has, we try to share each others troubles, get each other out of danger. You wouldn't believe the Humanity between men out here.'[35] Men at the front understood the uniqueness of the bonds they had formed through shared hardship in the trenches, established within, but parallel to, the military structure. It was the relationships where men came to see each other as 'pals' and beyond the military sense of comradeship that bereavements were the hardest to process. Subsequent chapters will explore these were relationships that could not be replaced by drafts or other men within the company or battalion. Losses in these groupings could be catastrophic for the men who belonged to them, particularly if multiple losses were sustained over a brief period. Most importantly huge losses shifted the way soldiers viewed their units. French argues soldiers 'came to regard their unit not as an impersonal and enduring institution, but as a diminishing group of comrades.'[36] This was one of the circumstances in which these military units became bonded by their collective grief, not necessarily all grieving for the same individual, but united nonetheless in mourning for friends.

The friendships soldiers established were protected and maintained by them as they came to realise they were significant to the enjoyment of their war service, as well as their survival. Some men would forgo promotions to remain with close friends, to support one another and fight alongside one another once at the front. Ingram commented in his diary:

> Those of us who had received training as territorials were asked today whether we would care for 'stripes'. As this would necessitate joining special non-commissioned officers' training class and afterwards being distributed to different companies, several of us,

[35] London, IWM, Documents. 1174, 'Private Papers of J. W. Mudd', 22 October 1917.
[36] French, *Military Identities*, p. 284.

> who had come from the bay of plenty and had pulled together, decided to stick to the ranks and keep together.[37]

Ingram was an Australian soldier and travelling halfway around the world to go to war was a more daunting prospect than it would have been for the ordinary British soldier. A support network of this kind was far more necessary as there was no chance of home leave. As Alistair Thomson has concluded, the Australian soldier's experience of fighting a war a great distance from home meant he came to rely intensely and wholly on his fellow 'diggers' for support, not just as mates but as family. This meant that they came to identify their units as based on distinctive and unique bonds.[38] As Thomson acknowledges, this was not entirely exceptional to the A.I.F.[39] Ingram demonstrated more generally that there was a deep connection between men who signed up together from the same place and it was achieved before they left for the front. This was true whether they were from a small town in England or Australia and certainly would have been accurate for the Pals Battalions. These close bonds made men less willing to take promotions and they turned down the opportunity for career advancement, better pay and a chance to receive staff jobs, in favour of staying in the danger zone with friends. It is important not to underestimate the bonds soldiers could make with each other and how this would impact their lives once they found themselves on the frontline. Shared experiences from training became more significant to men who constantly found themselves in mortal danger as they knew they could rely on each other. Once these bonds had been severed there was nothing that could replace them. The informal bonds of friendship made within the formal structure of the military became more important to soldiers' than self-preservation or promotion, and it was within these parameters which men mourned for their friends.

Once at the front soldiers did not want to be separated from the men they had served with since training. As the war went on the British Army struggled to recover from their losses leading to the breaking up of regiments and battalions in order to redistribute their soldiers. W. J. Martin commented '…it is very nice to be able to stick to my pals all the way through, it would be hardlines if we had to separate after being together for nearly two years.'[40] Although there is a tone of acceptance in Martin's

[37] Ingram, *'In Flanders Fields'*, p. 20.
[38] Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 43.
[39] Ibid.
[40] London, IWM, Documents. 2554b, 'Private Papers of W. J. Martin', December 1916.

writing he demonstrated little desire to be parted from the men he had a wealth of shared experiences with. William Shanahan illustrates why this was the case, 'to be among strangers was an experience nobody cared for.'[41] It was not simply the process of separating an individual from friends but the act of placing him with men he had not served beside, and therefore had no bonds with, that was daunting. Comradeship was not something which purely existed between all men in arms instilled by the military structure. Shared experience was everything when it came to fighting motivation as well as mental and physical survival. However, not all battalions stayed together, as Dunham records, 'we were all very sorrowful, as the break-up of the Battalion meant a lot to us, we all had our pals.'[42] Loss of a battalion, and therefore close friends, had an emotional impact on the men who were serving in it. These incidences where men were separated, or almost removed, from their military units demonstrated the strength of the bonds men had formed at the front and how heavily they came to rely upon them.

As the soldier-philosopher J. Glen Gray explored about his own experience during the Second World War, just forcing men together was not enough to create strong and reliable bonds, 'the feeling of loyalty, it is clear, is the result, and not the cause, or comradeship.' Men needed to feel some kind of natural affinity with each other to be able to rely on those around them during battle. It was not something the military structure could force only attempt to foster.[43] Being present in the martial sphere could not alone create the connections necessary to build a reliable fighting unit. It is a combination of these, and the informal bonds which men created, that built a community or series of communities that could be deeply affected by the loss of one of their own.

Military Bonds and the Experience of Combat

Training and shared experience at the front could only achieve so much. Only combat could achieve the strength of bonds desired within a fighting unit, with both formal

[41] London, IWM, Documents. 6312, 'Private Papers of William David Shanahan'.
[42] Frank Dunham, *The Long Carry: The Journal of Stretcher Bearer Frank Dunham*, ed. by R.H. Haigh and P. W. Turner (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970), p. 121.
[43] J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), p. 40.

and informal relationships giving soldiers the motivation to fight.[44] Men did not always engage in battle to uphold the long and glorious traditions of their institutions but instead fought for their comrades.[45] Although soldiers could be motivated to fight in pursuit of the same goal, for the most part men were more concerned with the desire not to let comrades down.[46] During times of great danger men would often forget their training and prioritise their self-preservation, and, as Watson asserts, they often did this by 'sinking their identities further into their fighting organisations'.[47] Men saw the only means of survival as becoming more dependent upon the group they served with, meaning that the realisation it had then been destroyed was too much for some to bear. These bonds were formed and cemented through a reliance on one another that could only be achieved through the shared experience of combat, providing the unique context in which men were forced to confront their bereavements within the martial sphere.

A soldier only needed to see a fellow comrade, or at the very least be aware of his presence, to maintain morale.[48] The significance of being in combat with close comrades is illustrated by soldiers who found themselves alone on the field or with men from different units. W. Hall recorded about the Battle of the Aisne in 1918,

> My feelings were altogether different from what I had experienced on other fronts. Then, one always went up to join a well ordered line, continuous in extent, where one has the comparative feeling of safety in numbers… One had altogether a different feeling about this time; we were just an isolated body of troops here and there.[49]

These feelings of isolation caused the desire to participate in combat to fade. As Hall demonstrated, in times of danger, particularly during the German Spring Offensive when the British were forced on to the back foot, men needed to feel the support of the men with whom they served. This was not necessarily about feeling pressure from others to continue fighting but concerned the security and comfort men provided for each other.

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[44] Ibid. p. 44. John Ellis, *Eye Deep in Hell* (London: Croomhelm, 1976), p. 97.
[45] French, *Military Identities,* p. 283.
[46] Gray, *The Warriors*, p. 40.
[47] Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 57.
[48] S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), p. 42.
[49] London, IWM, Documents 4845, 'Private Papers of W. Hall'.

As this bond between men of the same unit held such strength, Marshall concludes that a solider is 'sustained by his fellows primarily and by his weapon secondarily'.[50] As Sidney Rogerson testified, 'to share dangers with others was bearable, to be alone was terrifying.'[51] A man, if forced with the choice, would be more likely to rather face the enemy unarmed surrounded by their comrades, than armed and alone.[52] This kind of reliability could not be provided by regimental identity alone but grew out of close relationships formed through the experience of battle. Therefore, losses within in these units could leave men feeling isolated for the rest of their time at the front. As this work will go on to demonstrate men would have to find different motivations to continue, and this mostly concerned fighting in the name of the fallen.

Not all men could be compelled to find their strength within the fighting unit and this was dangerous for his comrades. Lieutenant J. Nettleton recorded about one such man,

> He was obviously no use as a fighting soldier and in conditions in which each man's morale depended so much on his comrades, he was a public danger as well as a public nuisance. No man could put up with that sort of life we were living merely through his own strength. Everybody depended on everyone else and the common stock of strength was greater than the sum strength of the individuals and anyone who took away from that common stock was a danger to all.[53]

The concept that men were stronger as a unit if all men could be trusted to hold it together under pressure was not a fact lost on the First World War officer. The cohesion of the unit was important as fear or uncertainty could quickly spread through the ranks. For Nettleton, he did not the shame the man who was clearly not up to the task; his only concern was that his men were in the position where they could draw strength from each other.

It was important to soldiers that they shared the experience of battle together and continued to endure it with each other. As they continued to serve together men came to embody the history and nature of the unit at the front, a state which could not

[50] Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, p. 43.
[51] Sidney Rogerson, *The Last of the Ebb: The Battle of the Aisne, 1918* (London: Greenhill Books, 2007), p. 32.
[52] Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, p. 43.
[53] IWM, Documents. 12332, Lieutenant J. Nettleton.

be imbued in new recruits in training. Due to the destructive nature of battle the military took steps to preserve the identity of units by leaving a number of men, including a senior officer, behind the line.[54] This had consequences for the men who were left behind, not least because huge losses would create feelings of grief for the survivors. It was also a moment when soldiers were left out of a significant experience for their units. However, some men desired to be selected for the core groups left behind, as A. S. Carter acknowledged, 'it used to be most men's ambition to get picked for "nucleus" at some time or another, but luck was seldom with you.'[55] This does not highlight that the OR had a propensity to 'shirk' but demonstrates, especially as they were consistently rotated in and out of battle, that being left out of one certainly would not have been hardship.

Conversely, Eric Crosse observed for officers who had the choice between those who stayed and went, it was not always an easy decision to make. Some decided it was best left to chance, 'I can quite well remember being asked to spin the coin between company officers as to which should go into a given battle. The men were spinning for their lives, and they knew it.'[56] There were clearly many different emotions at work when it came to being left behind that depended on the individual and perhaps the point of his war experience he was at. A soldier who had not experienced his first taste of battle would be keener to go to the front than a man who had been over the top several times. Crosse does not make the distinction between this being the case, or whether these were men who would rather sacrifice their own life to save another. Arthur Gibbs reflected these complex and conflicting emotions in a letter home to his mother,

> I know you will be relieved to hear that in the event of us having to do a show, I am one of the unfortunate ones who are to be left behind at the transport. Rather bad luck on me as I have had the training of the company for so long. A certain proportion of officers are left behind, and I am among the number. I am very disappointed as I was rather looking forward to get into a good scrap. But still, I suppose I have got to do as I am told, and make the best of it, and realise I have little better chance of living through the war, although it does away with any chance of getting honours or medals.[57]

[54] Brown, *Tommy Goes to War*, p. 145.
[55] London, IWM, Documents. 11606, 'Private Papers of A. S. Carter'.
[56] IWM, Documents. 4772, Cannon E. C. Crosse.
[57] IWM, Documents. 12199a, Captain A. Gibbs, 6 July 1916.

Gibbs wanted to put his training into practice with the men he had spent a great amount of time with and it was, after all, the reason why he had joined the army. He was being deprived of the opportunity to test his mettle as a soldier in the field. Although he accepted that this was his best chance of living through the war, he also wanted to achieve individual glory by having the chance to win medals. For some men winning a medal was worth making the ultimate sacrifice. There was never any anger directed at the army for this; most men understood the importance of this system and accepted it. Soldiers who were left behind during an offensive missed out on a formative experience for the unit, as well as suffering from the anxiety that accompanied waiting for news, followed by the grief the casualty list brought. This could be compounded by knowing that if they had not been left out of the battle, they may have been able to save or sustain one of their comrades' lives or, in the extreme, have died in his place.

For some officers being away from their unit, either in the nucleus or on courses, caused feelings of guilt if they were separated from their comrades at a dangerous time. Roland Mountford was on a course when he was informed that his unit had suffered under a heavy bombardment,

> In a way I must congratulate myself on being here for the other night they had a wicked strafe. At the time I feel that I should like to be with my pals if they have to go through it… I am anxious to know how the rest of them are for we only have the names of those killed, and not wounded.[58]

The strength of these bonds could lead to a complex set of emotional responses, especially as for Mountford his initial response concerned being grateful that he was not there. Nevertheless, the relationships established through military training and shared hardships at the front ultimately drew soldiers towards their comrades during times of danger. This could be heightened for officers. Mountford acknowledged it caused concern over not knowing who had been killed. Moreover, as for the men who found themselves in the nucleus, grief could be heightened as the soldier who was not present would never know what he could have done to sustain the lives of the men who had been killed. Although these instances do not reflect survivor guilt in the traditional sense, Mountford indicated guilt in the sense of not being with men who relied upon him in a time of mortal danger.

[58] London, IWM, Documents. 10404, 'Private Papers of R. D. Mountford', 7 May 1916.

The Effects of Reinforcements on Military Communities

Losses to units were an inevitability and manpower had to be replaced. However, just because a new recruit was in a regiment did not mean he was automatically part of it. Not only did these men lack the shared experience of the unit they were joining but they were replacing the men who had. This could be further complicated if the men had been trained in the identity of a different battalion or regiment. Attitudes towards reinforcements were fluid and changed over the war as the various cohorts began to rotate through the line. At the beginning of the war, as J. G. W. Hyndson recorded in his diary, soldiers at the front were grateful for drafts,

> During these few days we are so much heartened by the arrival of small drafts from England. They are fine looking men from the Reserve and Special Reserve. They fill our depleted ranks, make us feel more square, and are one and all imbued with a determination to uphold the magnificent record of the Regiment, as already our name is a household word in England.[59]

The importance rested at this time in the knowledge that replenishments had been provided by their own regimental reserves and, therefore, had been inculcated with the correct identity and values. The gap in experience seemed to be of little consequence because there was a desperate need for reinforcements as the British position at the front was critical. It was important that men at the front could rely on the idea that those replacing their fallen comrades came to the front instilled with the same values and fighting qualities as the men who had been lost.

The ready acceptance of reinforcements was something that seemed to be unique amongst the regular regiments of the British Army as the war went on. As Stephen Graham observed about the structures of his battalion in the Guards Regiments,

> In the great story of the battalion it may be seen that the accumulations of battles and of sufferings from month to month and year to year begets a spiritual atmosphere. Each new man posted to the battalion is posted to the historical and spiritual inheritance of the battalion also…The battalion gives him its style, its stamp and impression, as he breathes the regimental air he swears the regimental oaths. The spirit, however, is born of many sufferings and endless patience.[60]

[59] J.G.W. Hyndson, *From Mons to the First Battle of Ypres* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1933), p. 64.
[60] Stephen Graham, *A Private in the Guards* (London: MacMillan, 1919), p. 180.

Graham described here an understanding of new recruits in a regiment which had a long history, not just prior to the Great War, but had made a name for itself on the Western Front. The Guards had developed a new military identity, situated within the history and battle honours that were created during the war and could be learned by soldiers only when they reached the front. Graham demonstrated that a man could not be admitted to this community immediately; he had to suffer and share hardships. Only by being in a battalion of the regiment at the front and earning his place through the shared experience of the frontline could he truly become a Guardsman.

These concepts and ideas did not apply to all battalions and as depleted ranks caused regulars and volunteers to mingle difficulties arose. This had tangible emotional and spiritual consequences for a battalion as reinforcements could have an impact on the cohesion and structure of the unit. P. H. Jones wrote about his experience of this,

> We returned from the woods yesterday to find that our reinforcements had arrived – 250 of the 2/2nd London Regt., from Egypt and Gallipoli. They are a fine lot of fellows, but they are the Queen's Westminsters! Hitherto the battalion has been kept going by our own reserve battalion, but those days are past now. The arrival of these men marks a period in the history of our regiment – "the old order has changeth" and our traditions will soon be forgotten. Only the name will remain – merely a name born by strange men who are not us. If it is necessary, there is nothing to be said – we must submit.[61]

Jones recorded these thoughts in May 1916. Even before the Somme battalions had already suffered a level of destruction which changed the composition of military groupings irrevocably. Men would have to come to terms with the fact that, not only would their units not be made up of the men they had trained with, but they were also men who did not share the same military identity. As Timothy Bowman has posited, caution should be applied when considering how well the regimental system cemented drafts together, as it was only designed pre-war to create cohesion within a small group of men and was not prepared for the task of rebuilding whole units.[62] It was not the case in the minds of some soldiers, that these men could have their identity changed to come in line with the battalions in which they now served. Jones shows, and as will

[61] London, IWM, Documents. 12253, 'Private Papers of P. H. Jones'.
[62] Timothy Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 24.

be explored in more detail, men could mourn for their military units. He sees his unit as irrevocably changed and that ultimately, the integrity and 'traditions' of the Westminsters were lost. This may have its grounding in the fact that these men were being provided from the New Army into the Old Army, meaning that through the nature of their voluntary service these replenishments did not have the same values and outlook on war as the professional soldier.

Some battalions, particularly if they were locally raised, were not willing to accept geographical outsiders even if new recruits had been subjugated to the identity of the regiment,

> Slowly our non-Durham reinforcements were becoming accepted, but several did not feel happy or accepted. I felt particularly sorry for three – two school masters from Swindon and Reading and a London Underground train driver. It was a blessing when two were wounded (not too badly) within a few weeks; the third was killed early on… The attitude of the Durham folk could be very irritating – they were genuinely puzzled about how we in the South earned our keep… thought we were "bloody parasites". Agriculture and farming were not, in their view, real work.[63]

These men faced a dual problem when being deployed to this battalion. They were joining a tightly knit group, as all drafts did, but they were not of the right sort to be accepted. For some, even sharing the hardship of the trenches, was not enough to be allowed into a battalion fully. This demonstrates the complexity which existed within the military structure and how the informal groupings in a unit could affect overall cohesion amongst men. This did not necessarily influence responses to mass death but demonstrates that in order for men to be grieved, those who survived needed to feel that themselves or the unit in general, had lost someone integral to their community.

At a communal level there is evidence to suggest that soldiers, especially officers, were aware of the difficulties that units faced, when rebuilding themselves after offensives, with the addition of new men. Trench journals, on occasion, carried articles in relation this subject. *The Brazier* in May 1916 published,

> To anyone who saw the remains of the battalion, the morning after its march out of Ypres just a year ago… it must have seemed that the regiment was shattered beyond repair. The new drafts which within a few days swelled the depleted ranks… excellent in themselves did not seem likely to conduce to the unity of the

[63] London, IWM, Documents. 14980, 'Private Papers of W. J. Parkin'.

> regiment, coming as they did from all parts of Canada… with never a touch of the Highland about them… In the long succeeding months of trench work… all those small differences were wiped out. Now in spite of the addition of many new drafts and of numerous changes in the personnel of the officers, instead of being weary and dispirited after long service at the front the 48th is fresher than ever, consolidated and unified with a strong regimental spirit. It is not now quite so much the 48th Toronto, but it is the 48th of Canada and Flanders – a battalion with an enviable war record and war spirit.[64]

The journal was produced by the 16th Battalion Canadian Scottish but rather than focusing on the battalion identity, the writer and editor choose to focus on the broader regimental identity instead. This was significant because the men they received had not come from Toronto where the regiment was originally raised, nor did they possess any of the Highland identity important to the Canadian Scottish. However, after long months in the line, the new drafts, along with other changes in the regiment and battalion, had made the unit stronger than they were before and the unit was once again bound together by regimental pride. Therefore, this article may have been published with the view to cementing the power of these bonds and to ensure that esprit de corps was solidified heading into the new campaign season. On the other hand, with more battles and losses on the horizon, it was perhaps intended to be a reminder to soldiers that their unit would continue to thrive regardless of the casualties they would sustain over the coming months.

The Cohorts of the British Army

The regular, territorial, volunteer and conscript armies all had varying experiences of the Western Front due to variations in background, training and the times they were deployed to the fighting.[65] Beckett has identified that there were divisions throughout between the different arms and areas of service but not least between the different cohorts at the front. As the war continued and casualties were high, these distinctions became blurred as men were deployed where they were needed, regardless of the area they were recruited from.[66] Although the divide between the principal groups on the

[64] 'The 48th of Canada Still Going Strong', *The Brazier: Printed at the Front by the 16th Battalion Canadian Scottish,* 20 May 1916, p. 1.
[65] Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches.* Sheffield has explored through his work how the background, training and officer-man relations varied between the different cohorts of the British Army.
[66] Beckett, *The Great War*, p. 300.

frontline became less significant, conscripts continued to maintain their identity as second-rate soldiers.[67] Those who had knowledge of military structures prior to the war experienced life at the front differently to volunteers and conscripts, harbouring a different understanding of what belonging to the military community meant.[68] Watson has argued that the men of the regular army, who had seen a long service, were heavily invested in the identity of their regiments, so much so, that they came to see them as a type of 'religion' but this kind of 'devotion' was uncommon amongst volunteers.[69] It has been noted in the aftermath of the war that there was a difference in the way that volunteers and conscripts were remembered; the volunteers were the heroes of the war, with conscripts being thought less of and not accepted as readily into the military structure as the groups which had proceeded them.[70] Although this mirrored part of the interaction at the front, it was the men of the pre-war regular army who were the heroes. The integration of reinforcements up to the time when ranks were being bolstered by the volunteers ran smoothly albeit it took time to accept those who had enlisted at the outbreak of war but once they were blooded, they were admitted into the brotherhood. The same cannot be said of the conscript army and the value which was placed on their lives. The way that soldiers viewed themselves as part of a specific cohort and how each group viewed each other, had a significant impact on the way soldiers viewed death within their own and other groupings.

Culturally, the original BEF has been understood to be not just well-trained but experienced as well. Therefore, their approach to war and responses to witnessing death should have been stoic and they should have been unaffected by what they saw. It must be remembered that the Boer War, was the last military campaign the British Army had been involved in prior to 1914, twelve years previously in 1902. Many of the men who served in the first few months of the war had never seen combat before as they were too young to have served in Africa. However, for those who had served during the Boer War the conflict was fought in an entirely different manner to the opening months of 1914. Ernest Haddon Owen illustrated this point in his diary, December 1914,

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[67] Ibid., p. 301.
[68] French, *Military Identities*, p. 283.
[69] Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 63.
[70] Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), p. 187.

> There are strong rumours that we make a fairly big move this week. I shall be glad of a move anywhere. We ought not to be impatient: in the South African War some fellows never had a shot fired at them and most men at one time or another have gone for weeks and weeks, miles away from the enemy, where as we at any rate are still close up.[71]

Haddon reflects the stark realities between the two conflicts; the men who had served in both wars had not necessarily witnessed, let alone participated in, combat. Therefore, it is a fallacy to believe that all men of the original fighting contingent were hardened to death and would not have gone through the same processes relating to losses as the completely green men of the volunteer and conscripted army.

In spite of this, the men of the original BEF considered themselves to have a privileged position as a regular army soldier. The celebrated cartoonist and writer, Bruce Bairnsfather recorded in his memoir,

> People who read these yarns of mine, and who have known the war in later days, will say "Ah, how very different it was then to now."… My experiences since that date were very interesting, but I found much of the romance had left the trenches. The old days, from the beginning to July, 1915, were all so delightfully precarious and primitive. Amateurish trenches and rough and ready life, which to my mind gave this war what it sadly needed – a touch of romance… Way back there, in about January, 1915, our soldiers had a perfectly unique test of human endurance against the appalling climatic conditions. They lived in a vast bog, without being able to utilise modern contrivances for making the fight against adverse conditions anything like an equal contest. And yet I wouldn't have missed that time for anything, and I'm sure they wouldn't either… Those who have not actually had to experience it, or have not had the opportunity to see what our men "stuck out" in those days, will never fully grasp the reality.[72]

Bairnsfather helped to establish through these words the idea that the original BEF inhabited a unique position compared to those who would follow. None of the men who were deployed after the initial period of fighting had ceased would have understood the perils and traumas of fighting a war of movement. The men of 1914 and the beginning of 1915 were a unique group within the experience of the war which could not be understood by men of later years. The only other group who could understand the trials of the early years of the war were those who served in 1918.

[71] London, IWM, Documents 7365, 'Private Papers of E. H. Owen', 4 December 1914.
[72] Bruce Bairnsfather, *Bullets and Billets* (London: Grant Richards, 1917), pp. 124-5.

However, mostly volunteers and conscripts by then, these men were not viewed in the same capacity as their predecessors. Modern warfare had moved on in the four years since the war had started; it was a different beast, not 'primitive' in the sense it had been for those who experienced it in its infancy.

The unique position of the original fighting force was also reflected by the men who served after them in 1915. W. R. H. Brown commented, 'At this time we looked upon these men of the East Lancs, who were regular soldiers as heroes – and, indeed, the men of the "Contemptible" Army were heroes in every sense of the word.'[73] For Brown the men of the original BEF were to be valourised. As already acknowledged, the Somme is considered to have been the watershed moment of the conflict; the principal event in which everything changed for those at the front and at home. The accounts of Brown and Bairnsfather demonstrated the war had a series of 'watershed' moments, with the decimation of the 'Old Contemptibles' and the beginning of trench warfare representing the first of these. Lieutenant A. D. Gillespie reflected in a letter home,

> In fact, none of us who came out in the spring will ever know what those autumn and winter months were like, when we were always fighting against heavy odds, both in men and guns; and there are few enough left to tell, but it is those men and their traditions who have really won at Neuve Chapelle, and will win again in these coming months. When I see these long lists of names, I like to think that they are more recruits for the greatest army of all, which is worth far more to men still fighting here, than any reinforcements in flesh and blood.[74]

Gillespie acknowledged the privileged position of the men who fought the initial months of the war as a passage of the conflict he could never understand. As a soldier in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders he was sent to the Western Front to reinforce the Regular Army battalion in early 1915. He was therefore in a position to observe how the men of the original force conducted themselves, and was able to identify with and participate in a wider sense of grief over losses sustained within the primary group. He documented the significance of the older troops that had led the British Army to victory at Neuve Chapelle but not just this, it was the memory of the soldiers of the regular army that had been killed, which became the true military strength of the

[73] London, IWM, Documents. 4566, 'Private Papers of 2nd Lieutenant W. R. H. Brown'.
[74] Lieut. A. D. Gillespie, *Letters from Flanders* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1916), p. 73.

British fighting force. At this early stage in the war Gillespie came to understand the significance of the dead. Their supreme sacrifice made them the sacred of the war and Gillespie echoes the power the Old Contemptibles had to inspire survivors and new recruits. This demonstrated how death within the broader military community became a motivator for continued fighting.

Conversely, as differences and rivalries had always existed in the army it is no surprise that they occurred between the regular army and the volunteer army. As already established the men who came out after the first few months of the war were already at a disadvantage. Brown commented,

> There was considerable ill-feeling between the Territorials and Kitchener's men in France in the early days… However, this soon died away, and no distinction was made or thought of between the Regulars, Territorials and Kitchener's. After all, we were all doing the same job, in the same way, against the same enemy.[75]

The importance of earning battle honours applied across the entire army. As soon as a battalion had been properly tested at the front they could be admitted fully into the army, an honour that would not apply to conscripts as the war went on. It seems that mutual respect between the regulars, territorials and volunteers came into existence, allowing a wider military community to establish itself but this process took time and volunteers had to earn respect. It was under these terms, after large scale offensives such as the Somme, that the dead of individual battalions were mourned broadly within the army.

Conscripts were never going to fare well in an army of men who had already volunteered to lay down their lives. Many men, who from their age and enlistment date were clearly conscripted into the army, rarely acknowledged this in their own writings. Therefore, it is difficult to construct a sense of shared experience for men compelled into service and who served throughout the ranks of the army. Soldiers who were already serving at the front when the conversation on conscription was ongoing had already formed their opinions of this group. W. Nicholson commented in a letter to one of his male relatives in October 1915, 'I see you are thinking of joining the army. Well I would if I was you as one volunteer is worth ten pressed men as I think

[75] IWM, Documents. 4566, 2nd Lieutenant W. R. H. Brown.

it will be conscription before too long.'[76] Opinions such as this from Nicholson would set the tone for the men who served in the army in the final stages of the war. Conscripts, who did not come to the war with the illusions of a glorious sacrifice, due to being forced into service, felt their lives and deaths devalued. They were not considered to be of the same calibre as the men who went before them. Although it is undeniable that men had a concept of the army as a wider community, it did not mean that they came to see their time at the front as a shared experience with all five million men who served. Responses to death on a wider scale were influenced by the soldier's own opinions of the group he served with, as well as interactions the other cohorts serving at the front.

Violence and Agency

Violence and violent death were the principal shapers of soldiers' interactions with dying at the front. Therefore, it is important that this research does not shy away from the impact that the weapons of this war had on the human body. There was no comparison to some of these ways of dying in the conflicts which had proceeded the war.[77] For the men of the regular army, who saw their first actions at Mons, the Marne and the Aisne, any previous service at the turn of the century, as already discussed, could not prepare them for the destruction they would witness. The account of stretcher bearer David Lloyd Bunch stated, 'My first case was a poor Dragoon a part of his back has been blown away and he died before I could remove him. The sight of seeing dead and wounded lying about was terrible, horses guns wagons blown to pieces.'[78] This account demonstrates the violence of the injuries the men retreating from Mons were sustaining as well as an idea of the devastation men were passing through. This was an army experiencing together for the first time the horrors of industrial warfare and learning the painful lessons of its cost. This was only the very beginning of the violence and it would escalate throughout the war as men dug in and new weapons were developed.

[76] London, IWM, Documents. 8401, 'Private Papers of W. Nicholson', 27 October 1915.
[77] Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p. 24.
[78] London, IWM, Documents. 1423, 'Private Papers of David Lloyd-Burch DCM', 1 September 1914.

Malcolm Brown offers a compelling summary of what death was like in the trenches, 'Death in fact was rarely tidy; rather it was ugly, degrading and dehumanising'.[79] Soldiers were aware of the many ways in which they and their fellow comrades could be killed, as Shanahan acknowledged in his memoirs,

> One almost got inured to seeing death in its most horrible aspects. Some died by shell fragments, bullets, drowning or gas. Some died by being shot and died instantly. Others were badly mutilated and died a lingering and painful death by internal injuries. Others simply vanished from sight, disintegrated by shell bursts when caught in the open, sometimes on the march near the lines.[80]

Less spectacularly men were also killed by the concussive force of shell, leaving the body intact, sat in positions as if still alive. As Michael Roper has noted it was sometimes the men in life like poses which could cause the most distress.[81] Soldiers were almost constantly surrounded by death, even some distance from the actual fighting, with the variation of the violence in which death was dealt disturbing. Although Shanahan suggested that men became accustomed to the sights of violence, it was something that they could never become completely indifferent to. This myriad of violent deaths was not only visually omnipresent for the infantry but a reminder of the constant possibility of personal demise.

Artillery was responsible for the largest proportion of deaths and, therefore, the most feared by soldiers.[82] Instant death rarely occurred as a consequence of a single bullet to the head.[83] Artillery and large calibre shells caused the worst damage to human flesh, leaving the wounded with the most gruesome injuries of the war. These deaths were rarely immediate despite the violence with which they were caused. Moreover, friends were often forced to look on knowing nothing could be done to save the dying man.[84] Men were sliced in half and eviscerated and a direct hit could evaporate a man, leaving little trace of his existence.[85] Charles Douie commented on a direct hit from a Minenwerfer, 'a man becomes as though he had never been born.'[86]

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[79] Brown, *Tommy Goes to War*, p. 160.
[80] IWM, Documents. 6312, William David Shanahan.
[81] Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 249.
[82] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Pimlico, 1976, Pimlico ed. 1991), p. 264.
[83] Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Plimco, 1997), p. 69.
[84] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 4.
[85] Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p. 24.
[86] Charles Douie, *The Weary Road: The Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry* (London: The Naval and Military Press, 1929), p. 94.

The impact of artillery on the human body, both as the cause of death and post-mortem, meant that many of the bodies which littered the frontline were unidentifiable. As Douie attested a direct hit could leave no trace of a man and remove any evidence he had ever existed. It was not only a disturbing sight for men to witness on the battlefield but the realisation that they themselves could be killed, without a trace, was deeply distressing.

The images created by shells were violent in the extreme. Body parts from a number of men could be blown across a wide area and into trees leaving only a few remains that were put into a sandbag.[87] Wilfred Heavens recorded the impact of a shell on a group of men. '…three men had been killed instantly and were in a terrible mess. They had been blown to pieces and parts of their bodies were blown into some barbed wire, and were hanging on it. We collected the pieces, put them in a sand bag and buried them in a shell hole.'[88] One of the themes which runs through many of the reactions men had to death, particularly if they concerned unknown men, was that it demonstrated to them the many brutal ways in which they also could be killed. Not only was the force in which the violence was perpetrated on the human body horrifying, the scenes of devastation left in the wake of a shell were traumatic for men to gaze upon.

Deaths of the kind described by Heavens also meant that soldiers were forced to touch the mutilated and scattered remains of comrades, putting them in direct contact with broken bodies, forcing them to confront a more intimate interaction with the dying. Men who witnessed these kinds of deaths caused by shells often recorded the violence and the impact the blast had on the body in detail. These deaths could often be sudden and happen without warning. John O'Sullivan wrote in a letter home to his mother, 'Crawley… who had been standing at the entrance took the full burst of a shell and his head and upper body were just pulverised… I glanced at my notes and saw the 'wetness' to be nothing less than blood and bits of brain.'[89] For O'Sullivan it was a multisensory experience; not only was he a witness to a violent death he was also involuntarily forced to interact with the violence of it through touch, feeling the body matter that the blast had created. Santanu Das in his work *Touch and Intimacy*

[87] Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 28.
[88] London, IWM, Documents. 17485, 'Private Papers of W. Heavens' 7 February 1917.
[89] London, IWM, Documents. 7155, 'Private Papers of J. F. B. O'Sullivan', September 1916.

in First World War Literature, suggests soldiers demonstrated through their writing an obsession 'with tactile experiences'. Das identifies touch as the most intimate of the senses as it actually requires, unlike the other four senses, direct contact with the human body, suggesting that touch can reveal the deepest emotions. Touch was also the most accurate way men could convey the horrors of war in their writing as it represents a complete violation of personal space.[90] It was this complete intrusion of violent death that made losses at the front difficult to process, whether the deceased was a friend or stranger.

Deaths from shells could also be out of the ordinary, piquing a man's curiosity first rather than revulsion. Captain Charles Weld recorded a strange incident in his diary, 'Another extraordinary thing occurred today. An enemy shell struck one of our men in the stomach passing clean through without exploding. The unfortunate man walked three yards before dropping and when help arrived he was dead.'[91] Weld's response to this violent death was one of surprise. This type of injury from a shell was uncommon and men were not usually killed by duds. Furthermore, what made this scene more curious was the fact the man who had been injured survived for a few moments after the impact. Not all gruesome and violent deaths at the front were considered repulsive and some deaths were greeted with a morbid curiosity. Therefore, men were forced to confront an array of deaths which were all obviously violent but in diverse ways and to different degrees.

It was not just these individual encounters that left their mark on soldiers but the volume in which mutilated bodies littered the field of battle. The massive tissue damage caused by many of the weapons on the Western Front created, in Roper's words, 'an unprecedented number of critical wounds'.[92] Lyn Macdonald described the scene in the aftermath of the Somme, 'few bodies that littered the battlefield lay in the classic attitude of the Fallen Warrior... the vast majority had been tossed, mutilated, dismembered, decapitated by monstrous splinters of shells.'[93] This is further

[90] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), introduction. Das in his book looks soldiers' recordings and literary constructions of sensory experiences as another way to access the world of the trenches.
[91] London, IWM, Documents. 16651, 'Private Papers of Captain C. Weld', 7 January 1916.
[92] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 213.
[93] Lyn MacDonald, *Somme* (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 270.

highlighted by the words of L. I. Wyn Griffiths and the scenes he looked upon at Mametz on the Somme,

> There were more corpses than men, but there were sights worse than corpses. Limbs and mutilated trunks, here and there a detached head, forming splashes of red against the green leaves, and, as in advertisement in horror of our way of life and death, and of our own crucifixion of youth, one tree held in its branches a leg, with its torn flesh hanging down over a spray of leaf.[94]

Men often selected from mass death those which were violent in the extreme, as Roper described 'where a man's insides were no longer enclosed and protected within the carapace'.[95] Griffiths was deeply affected by the scene he was party to during the Somme. For the men who fought in woods during the war they often cited these moments as the most horrific of their war service due to severely mutilated bodies mingled with a devastated landscape. Furthermore, Griffiths was most affected by the way it demonstrated to him the undeniable brutality of the situation he found himself in and the waste of the youth of society. Such bloody and violent scenes were not easily forgotten and haunted men like Griffiths for many years after the war was over.

Due to the destructive force of the artillery, in the chaos of attack or retreat, it was impossible to be sure if a man had been obliterated or taken prisoner. Roper has asserted that for those at home it was a missing body which caused the most trauma. In the absence of the corpse providing conclusive evidence that the deceased were really gone, it left behind hope that the soldier may return, making grief impossible. For the men at the front, Roper argues, it was 'unidentifiable' deaths that left men having to shovel partial remains in the sandbag which were most affecting.[96] It was actually a combination of these two occurrences that affected the soldiers' mourning process. The absence of a body, even for a soldier who had witnessed his friend killed, could lead to denial, as it did for the Home Front, and prevent a soldier coming to terms with their grief.[97] The unidentifiable deaths (which also did not provide conclusive proof of who had been killed) were not always related to those obliterated by shells, as in the general circumstance of trench life soldiers would have a reasonable idea about who the remains belonged to. It was in fact the men tasked with clearing

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[94] L. I. Wyn Griffith, *Up the Line to Mametz* (London: Faber and Faber, 1931), p. 223.
[95] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 257.
[96] Ibid. p. 209.
[97] David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death,* ed. by Joachim Whaley (London: Europa, 1981), p. 207.

the battlefield or those who found severed limbs that the unidentifiable dead became distressing. This reaction was often compounded by the volume in which men came into contact with the mutilated and decomposing bodies of the unknown.

Many of the examples used throughout this thesis, in terms of soldiers' reactions to death, concern the ways in which men died, or were in fact, killed. The First World War introduced new ways in which men died and one of the most feared was poison gas.[98] Suffocation as a way of dying in war ran counter to the traditional ways in which soldiers died gloriously, by shedding their blood.[99] The fear of this way of dying was seen when gas was first used on Canadian and French Colonial troops in early 1915 during the Second Battle of Ypres, causing the colonial soldiers to abandon the field and leaving the Canadians to halt their advance.[100] The reverence and glory which was lavished upon these Canadian soldiers was rooted, to an extent, in the way they had laid down their lives in the full horror of modern warfare. The same revulsion and fear was also reserved for the use of flame throwers and being burnt alive. These ways of dying and the impact they had on the grieving process for soldiers will be explored through considerations of the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle.

For those not killed instantly by their injuries, lung or head wounds would often leave the stricken man suffering for a period of time. They often died in agony, sometimes surrounded by their comrades. Even though the dying man might have quickly become unconscious and spared the agony of a long drawn out death, the men around would have to listen to the sounds of a protracted dying, forced to wait for the man to die knowing that there was nothing that could be done to save him.[101] This, coupled with Roper's notions that death was an assault on the senses, particularly if a man wanted to attempt to sustain the dying, made for complex encounter with death for the living. Frank Dunham as a stretcher bearer was the best placed to assess the impact of violent death on those trying to sustain the injured,

[98] Tim Cook, 'Creating the Faith: The Canadian Gas Services in the First World War, *The Journal of Military History*, 62:4 (1998), pp. 755-786. Cook in this article explore the terrors of gas warfare for Canadian soldiers and how approaches to the use of this weapon changed.
[99] Leonard V. Smith, Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 89.
[100] The experience of the CEF at St. Julien and its cultural impact on Canada's understanding of the war is covered in Nathan M. Greenfield, *Baptism of Fire: The Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada* (Toronto: HaperCollins, 2007).
[101] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 206.

> I found one of our chaps badly wounded… he was literally peppered all over with small pieces of shrapnel; some had even passed through both his cheeks. Frankly, I did not know where to start bandaging him up and from his appearance he seemed to be almost past human aid, so I made him as comfortable as I could and bathed his face wounds… It was unpleasant watching death steal over a person... In a very short time he commenced to twist and twirl himself about in the bottom of the trench. I tried to hold him still but failed and from inarticulate sounds, his voice turned to groans which sounded horrible coming through a mouth of full blood. This rather upset some of his pals… and they all went further out of hearing distance, leaving me alone with him. I would probably have gone with them had it not been my job to stay. I was indeed relieved when the poor fellow's end came.[102]

Dunham found himself, as the other soldiers present in this work did, having to comfort a wounded man who they knew was beyond aid. The most affecting consequence of the violence was the sounds coming from the injured man, mingled with the blood from his wounds. Dunham also revealed that these types of protracted and violent deaths could be too much for a man's friends to witness. Knowing that their 'pal' was being tended to and that there was nothing they personally could do, in the form of aid or comfort, could remove themselves from the situation in order to ease their own pain. This demonstrates the complexity of reactions to death, particularly if the wounded man was stranger; death could be seen as a relief both for the injured and the living.

The extent of the wounds and the types of death friends at the front witnessed was significant due to the notion expounded by Roper, that 'the emotional pain suffered by the bereaved was believed to bear a close relation to the physical pain suffered by their loved ones.'[103] These are concepts usually reserved for the Home Front, both at the time and in historical study. As Dunham attested some friends of the wounded could not bear to watch them die in agony. Men had to confront the impacts of violent deaths, from the stench of blood and excrement, to brutality of the wounds themselves. All of which could leave a lasting impact on the men who experienced them. Due to the closeness of the bond which was established by the military structure and shared combat experience, relationships were of such a strength between soldiers that the reactions Roper identified in relation to loved ones are applicable to the way

[102] Dunham, *The Long Carry*, p. 21.
[103] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 213.

soldiers grieved or suffered impaired mourning. It is through witnessing violent deaths such as this that men became locked in the 'death imprint', unable to move on as they could not reconstruct a youthful and undamaged image of their dead friends.

In addition to the violence of modern warfare, the removal of a soldier's agency over the death of others, as well as their own, made losses of friends and comrades more difficult to process. As men were trained to believe that once at the front they would have the power over life and death, they came to the frontline singularly unprepared for the realities of the battlefield. The type of warfare engaged in on the Western Front meant that the notion war relied on could not endure; 'that not all war was murder'.[104] This was not only an idea that applied to killing the enemy but also related to the brutality of life on the frontline. It meant that men saw the deaths of their friends not as a glorious sacrifice but the result of having been killed in cold blood. Gray has argued there is a vast gulf between death in war and peace, he suggests that it was not just the increased possibility of dying which separates them. Death in war is not accidental; it is members of the same species, for sometimes no clear reason, killing the youth of society.[105] A belief that dying in war was murder meant that the trope of sacrifice, relating to the idea that death on the battlefield was a choice the individual could make, could not endure and allowed the space for disillusionment to take hold.

It was not just the nature of warfare that made existing at the front unbearable, it was the accompanying shock of being unprepared for witnessing the horrors of modern warfare that took the biggest toll on men. As Edwin Campion Vaughan confirmed, 'it was very different attack from what we had imagined we would experience: terror and death coming from far away seemed much more ghastly than a hail of fire from people whom we could see and with whom we could come to grips.'[106] Written in 1917, Vaughan demonstrated that men were still going to the front unaware of the type of fighting they would face. His struggle with agency began in an unrealistic conceptualisation of what fighting a war would be like. This was compounded by the faceless enemy, who they could not see and therefore, were unable

[104] Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918,* p. 92.
[105] Gray, *The Warriors*, pp. 110-1.
[106] Edwin Campion Vaughan, *Some Desperate Glory: The World War Diary of a British Officer, 1917* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 199.

to fight against. When death came it was 'often arbitrary and unforeseeable',[107] and as Hynes has argued, it 'was no longer a fate you chose, for your cause or country, or because it was your job, it was something done to you, an accident, as impersonal as the plague.'[108] This sense of powerlessness for men who had been trained to understand they would have the power to take life, especially in order to preserve their own and their comrades', added a layer of hopelessness to already painful bereavements.

However, the loss of agency did not harden men to the fortunes of war but the lack of power to prevent the deaths of others served to heighten their grief. These were not feelings and realisations which were unique to men who had volunteered in the early phase of the war. C. Reuben Smith recorded about an incident which occurred in 1915, how an extreme experience of powerlessness psychologically damaged soldiers,

> Captain of D Company, who had been buried up to his neck for 16 hrs, was brought in on a stretcher, he was half insane, he had seen his men burnt alive, and wounded riddled with bullets, and realising his own helplessness, had driven him half mad, he was sent to England but never recovered the shock, and afterwards discharged.[109]

This account reflects the relationship between witnessing the violent deaths of men known to the soldier and shell shock. It was not simply an event where a soldier witnessed his friend die and ultimately recovered to return to the line. This man was considered mentally broken and no longer fit for service. Knowing that soldiers had been burnt alive had a great impact on the emotions of men, as this came to be considered one of the most violent and abhorrent ways soldiers could be killed. The violence of the death was compounded not only by the number killed, but by the fact the Captain of D Company was powerless to do anything about it. A man's realisation that he had no agency over death at the front often engendered an emotional crisis when it came to bereavement. The complete removal of any agency that prevented a man from even attempting to act, in some extreme cases, could lead to a complete mental breakdown.

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[107] Edward Madigan, *Faith Under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 85.
[108] Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale,* p. 170.
[109] London, IWM, Documents. 8486, 'Private Papers of C. R. Smith'.

The soldier's sense that his choice to sacrifice himself for the war effort had been removed had an enduring impact on how they processed their losses in war, as well as the value of their own life to the military. As Alfred McLelland Burrage wrote in his memoir of the war, 'few of us have killed a man, and we are slowly realising that the job of the infantry isn't to kill. It is the artillery and the machine-gun corps who do the killing. We are merely there to be killed. We are the little flags which the general sticks on the war-map to show the position of the frontline.'[110] A writer by trade both before and after the war, Burrage's memoir *War is War,* published under the pseudonym Ex-Private X, contains more of a literary and philosophical undertone than the writings of ordinary soldiers. However, he can help explain the feeling at the front. Supported by the strong sense of disillusionment present in the writings of other soldiers, Burrage suggests that their agency as fighting men had been completely stripped away by modern warfare. They were not there at the front to participate in the killing but only to be killed. The lack of agency felt by the infantry created a sense of devaluation of their lives, heightening the feelings of waste and unnecessary losses that made bereavements difficult to process. It also meant that an understanding of the fragility of their own mortality was almost impossible to confront as their death would mean little in the pursuit of victory. The ideal of the glorious sacrifice of war that would have offered comfort to the grieving soldier in the past, ceased to exist due to the removal of any sense of agency.

Soldiers needed to find means in which they could confront and process this harsh reality of war. Some found comfort, or at least tried to, by cultivating a belief in notions of fate. These ideas were directly tied to the understanding that soldiers as a collective had no agency over who lived and died. One such man was William Fraser. He recorded in late 1917: 'was thinking about poor Fleming today. It's odd – some shells (one in a thousand perhaps) are forged to kill, destined to become not mere pieces of metal, but the servants of destiny with the power over the destiny of a man. Do they look any different in the furnace, I wonder?'[111] Fraser credited the shell itself with the responsibility for the kill, not the man or gun which fired it. He saw shells as having power over a man's fate, forged to decide his 'destiny' and reflected the more

[110] Ex-Private X, *War is War* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1930), p. 82.
[111] William Fraser, *In Good Company: The First World War Letters and Diaries of the Hon. William Fraser, Gordon Highlanders*, ed. by David Fraser (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1990), p. 146.

common fatalistic trope of a bullet with a man's name on it. Most fear of mortality at the front concerned the fact that man had no agency over his own death and there was nothing a man in the trenches could do against shellfire. Therefore, soldiers had to find ways to comfort themselves in moments of fear and grief. Fraser did not see the enemy opposite as having the agency to deliberately target and kill individuals and did not blame the Germans for the death of Fleming. Some men responded to the randomness of death at the front with hatred and feelings of revenge, whereas some men such as Fraser bore bereavement passively.

As already suggested the principal means by which a soldier could exercise his agency was by killing the enemy, or at least firing upon them. The primary purpose of a soldier's training was learning to take another human life, one of society's greatest taboos and an element of service often ignored by the civilian sphere. It was with this certainty of training in mind, as well as the knowledge of their own and their comrades' demise if they failed to act to protect themselves, that men entered the theatre of war. However, when the opportunity to kill presented itself many soldiers would fail to act, demonstrating why killing was often absent from soldiers' testimonies. R. Knyvette recalled, 'I know scores of men who have been months in the trenches and over the top in several attacks who have never fired a shot out of their rifles. In fact, it is very, very rarely that the man in the trenches gets a chance to aim at an enemy at a greater range than a hundred yards.'[112] Knyvette suggests that firing upon the enemy and taking a human life were not central experiences of every soldier's war, but this does not mean there was a silence surrounding killing. Those who did kill or saw other men fire upon the enemy, particularly in revenge, recorded this in their private papers. The repercussions of the fact men had little opportunity of engaging with the enemy meant soldiers had little agency when it came to protecting themselves and those around them. This truly reflects Burrage's assertion that the role of the infantry was to wait in the trenches to be killed without any chance for retaliation.

Examinations of killing in conflicts throughout history, as well as the twentieth century, have shown a lack of willingness amongst soldiers to take a life even if the opportunity presented itself. Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Grossman suggests 'the enemy

[112] Knyvett, *"Over There" with the Australians*, p. 167.

causes many soldiers to posture, submit, or flee, rather than fight'.[113] This was not a fact that the soldiers of the trenches were unaware of, as R. Kynvette also testifies to, 'the average man does not take exact aim before firing, and nearly all shots go high. If it were not for bombs and machine-guns the enemy could always succeed in getting to our trenches with very little loss.'[114] Grossman acknowledges it is not a straight forward choice for a soldier to avoid killing as he becomes trapped by a 'tragic Catch-22'. If a soldier overcomes his natural human reluctance to kill and takes the life of an enemy soldier, 'he will forever be burdened with blood guilt'. Conversely, if he decides not to, or cannot act, then the 'blood guilt of his fallen comrades and the shame of his profession, nation and cause lie upon.'[115] However, with few chances to be tested in the conditions of the trenches this is a conundrum which did not exist for many First World War soldiers. Instead, they experienced a different array of emotions towards killing the enemy, in peaks of revenge, sniping from a distance and during offensives. The lack of opportunity coupled with the inability to take when the chance arose, compounded the loss of agency generated by the nature of industrial war.

The Emotional Structures of Military Communities

The military communities outlined above had to learn to function within the violence of their surroundings whilst processing their lack of agency over life and death. As with broader society, military communities, and the situation they found themselves in, dictated the emotional reactions that were acceptable. Although this is not an emotional history of the British Army, the identifying of certain emotions denotes the presence of a bereavement and the continued grief it caused. Moreover, the perceived acceptability of emotional responses, such as tears, are an indicator of the widespread understanding amongst soldiers that the army was an institution in mourning for what had been lost. Andre Loez offers one of the most thorough reference works of military social structures which created and denied space for emotional responses. However, this is solely for the French Army and needs to be expanded upon.[116]

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[113] Grossman, *On Killing*, p. 29.
[114] Kynvett, *"Over There" with the Australians*, p. 167.
[115] Grossman, *On Killing*, p. 86.
[116] Andre Loez, 'Tears in the Trenches: A History of Emotions and the Experience of War', in *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War*, ed. by Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle, *Studies* (Boston: Brill, 2004).

Too much of the focus on soldiers' emotions in the trenches concerns the gendered space inhabited by these men. Loez has argued that in the 'military and martial society, the shedding of tears is interpreted as a sign of weakness'.[117] Although this may be true in some military groupings, emotional responses in the trenches were not always governed by perceived masculine values but were instead influenced by the situation men found themselves in. The extremes of their experiences would bring out certain emotions that men were not usually expected to display. Moreover, Loez suggests that men would move 'cautiously' to avoid the gaze of others whilst they were crying or felt that they could not break this code.[118] As social conventions of the time perceived crying as a feminine response, even to a bereavement, some British soldiers may have hidden their tears for fear of being judged negatively by their peers. However, this thesis presents evidence throughout to suggest that this was not the sole reason men may have hidden their tears at the front. Emotional displays for the loss of a friend were often a private moment when men began to process their bereavements. Conversely, other men were comfortable displaying their emotions in front of comrades, particularly at the moment of a shared loss.

Loez does suggest that recording of tears, or the presence of tears in the trenches, could represent a number of aspects of the experience; from the hardships of living in the trenches to bereavement, and there were moments when these open displays of emotions were acceptable.[119] Furthermore, he suggests it was the presence of sobbing that demonstrated that 'thresholds of suffering' were surpassed and tears could not be prevented. Although Loez argues that sobbing was an exception to the rule in the trenches the documentary record would suggest otherwise, particularly at the moment of bereavement. The trenches were a place where death was omnipresent and therefore the various reactions to these deaths were allowable. Loez also suggests that men in their accounts of the war attempted to hide their emotional responses by avoiding the words tears or crying, instead opting for 'emotioned' and 'moved'.[120] A caveat must be posed here; an absence of tears, crying or sobbing is not an indication of an absence of grief and bereavement. Men may have chosen to leave out an indication of emotional displays, and instead revealed more in the language they used

[117] Ibid. p. 211.
[118] Ibid. pp. 211-212.
[119] Ibid. pp. 212-3.
[120] Ibid pp. 213-5.

to describe the men they had lost and how they had died. Soldiers' accounts can demonstrate the complexity of emotions and their outward displays within the martial sphere. Men chose to hide or show these emotions depending on the situation they found themselves in and the cause for their response, as well as the audiences for their testimonies.

Soldiers constructed and demonstrated the power of their bereavement through patterns of language which appear across their accounts. Samuel Hynes has argued that men who wrote war memoirs were concerned that they would not be able to accurately reconstruct their war experience due to the fading of their memories.[121] Not only this, they believed that those who had not shared their experience of combat would never be able to understand what war was really like.[122] Equally, Hynes himself has suggested that through the compiling of survivor testimony and use of the imagination, outsiders can at least create a reasonable understanding of the realities of war but it is not possible from a single account.[123] The aim of this research is not to reconstruct the horrors of war in their entirety but to access one specific aspect of it. Hynes has posited that war memoirs are 'communications among the members of that secret army, the men who have been there and understand'.[124] It is this idea which lends credence to the notion that the soldiers created a lexicon which represented their true feelings of bereavement, with this being accessible by the outsider, prepared to open their mind to the darker side of war. It relies on the notion that grief is a universal experience within society, especially in the immediate aftermath of the war, which allows even the uninitiated to empathise with the deep pain losses on the battlefield caused soldiers. Harry Adams recorded in his memoir about the death of a friend that it was of 'great grief' to him,[125] with Parkin writing that he was 'very saddened' to learn of the death of a close friend.[126] Lieutenant William St. Leger wrote in his diary after finding one of his Sergeants dying after a battle a sense of 'sorrowful horror'[127] and Second Lieutenant Charles Tennant recorded about the loss of his friend that it

[121] Hynes, *A Soldiers' Tale,* p. 25.
[122] Ibid., p. 283.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] London, IWM, Documents. 4300, 'Private Papers of H. L. Adams'.
[126] IWM, Documents. 14980, W. J. Parkin.
[127] London, IWM, Documents. 20504, 'Private Papers of Lieutenant W. B. St. Leger MC', 31 July 1917.

caused him 'great sorrow'.[128] T. L C. Heald documented that the death of a friend was 'the worst day of my life' and 'it upset me frightfully'.[129] Weld wrote that loss of his first close friend 'worried him a great deal'.[130] As well as commenting on their own responses soldiers also noted down those of other men, with St. Leger writing in his diary that an officer had been 'very cut up' on witnessing the death of a friend.[131]

The other over-ridding emotion that the individual soldier presented on the loss of a close friend or, in some cases the loss of a number, was loneliness. Nettleton, an Artists Rifle, recorded on hearing that his close friend had been evacuated wounded, that he felt 'like a stranger in a strange world'.[132] When his last friend from training was killed, he wrote that the death has made him feel 'very lonely'.[133] Fraser reflected on the loss of his good friends that 'one misses them at every turn'.[134] Moreover, the same patterns of language were employed to demonstrate a sense of communal mourning and, although soldiers often gave little detail, this sense of shared loss was conveyed through a number of stock phrases. Alfred Cecil Arnold commented about the death of a Corporal that it 'upset everybody very much indeed'.[135] Will Bird recorded on hearing the death of a particularly well-respected officer that 'his death more than shocked us'.[136] Frank Richards commented in his diary on the death of an officer, 'We were very cut up over his death';[137] with H. R. Williams recording the collective response in his unit on hearing about the mortal wounding of one officer and the death of another, 'All thought of eating was banished from our minds at this tragic news'.[138] These soldiers, taken from all aspects of the war experience, demonstrated how soldiers constructed the ideas of collective grief and mourning, both at the time and after the war. As will become clear from other examples present here some men recorded their feelings and the responses of others through the recording of

[128] London, IWM, Documents. 8046, 'Private Papers of Second Lieutenant C. G. Tennant', 21 March 1915.
[129] T. L. C Heald in *Subalterns of the Foot: The World War One Diaries of Officers of the Cheshire Regiment*, ed. by Anne Wolff (Worcestershire: Square One Publications, 1992), p. 57.
[130] IWM, Documents. 16651, Captain C. Weld, 26 September 1915.
[131] IWM, Documents. 20504, Lieutenant W. B. St. Leger, 27 September 1916.
[132] IWM, Documents. 12332, Lieutenant J. Nettleton.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Fraser, *In Good Company*, p. 183.
[135] London, IWM, Documents. 15023, 'Private Papers of A. C. Arnold', 14 August 1915.
[136] Will R. Bird, *Ghost's Have War Hands: A Memoir of The Great War 1916-1919* (Canada: CEF Books, 1997), p. 99.
[137] Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die*, p. 131.
[138] H. R. Williams, *An Anzac on the Western Front: The Personal Reflections of an Australian Infantryman from 1916 to 1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2012), p. 66.

tears, with others opting for alternative words to convey the collective sense of loss. All these men constructed a sense of deep pain, regret and grief over those who were killed.

These are all accounts which did not include words related to tears or crying. However, not all men shied away from openly recording emotional responses to loss. This work postulates that soldiers constructed their own code of language to convey how deeply their bereavement had affected them; tears were simply not enough to demonstrate the true depths of pain soldiers were caused by witnessing the violent loss of their friends at the front. Soldiers did not simply lose friends but were deprived of the support network they required, not only to enjoy the war, but to survive it. The act of crying simply could not demonstrate fully enough the grief and sorrow these men in mourning had to confront. This work posits, in opposition to other work done on the emotional responses of soldiers, that it was not about hiding openly emotional reactions. Instead, tears represented the initial involuntary reaction to a loss and words were the next necessary step to convey the intensity of a bereavement. The constant use of language such as this, which often does not allude to the presence of tears, demonstrates a community of individuals that suffered great pain and turmoil in the loss of friends. It often seems these men also did not know how to process the emotions they felt, partly explaining an over reliance on euphemistic language to convey their grief. The above examples create the sense that there was a code amongst soldiers and their writing was designed to indicate to the reader the grief they had experienced. The act of crying, common in other circumstances of war such as victory, defeat or frustration, was not a powerful enough tool to establish that they were a group in mourning.

Therefore, there were times in a soldier's war service where openly emotional responses were acceptable. This was particularly true for officers when mass death had ripped through ranks during an offensive. As Private J. Green recorded during Passchendaele, 'There were guides to show us our meeting place. I think our officers cried as we staggered into camp.'[139] Although this is a theme this work will return to later for the purpose of considering the military's emotional structures it must be explored alongside other examples. The significance here is the fact that all the troops

[139] London, IWM, Documents. 15531, 'Private Papers of J. Green', 16 September 1917.

were exhausted and had sustained significant losses; tears over grief are allowable. Importantly it is the tears of the officer recorded and not the ORs. The fact these emotions come from those of higher ranks gives a power to the emotional responses. Its acceptability to the ORs justifies and represents the community of mourning they inhabited.

Understanding that soldiers would be affected by losses amongst the men with whom they served was an accepted part of the war, as Roland Fielding recorded in a letter to his wife, after his unit had suffered heavy losses, 'General Pereira came and saw me this morning, and stayed some time. He was more kind and consoling than I can say.'[140] There was a time and place in the army for the 'stiff upper lip' in the face of losses, and as this work will explore this often occurred organically during battle and in times of danger. In the safer and securer moments of war, when men did not have to be prepared to fight, there was a space where deaths could, and had to be, processed. Fielding demonstrated that there was a general understanding that men who had suffered required sympathy and support where possible. Fielding's letter suggests that this was an understanding present throughout the ranks of the army and within the command structure. The informal military structure allowed for men to be emotional about their losses. This did not always have to involve an emotional display such as tears, but just a general feeling of sadness.

Conversely, emotional responses were complex and were brought about by numerous different hardships related to military life. By briefly exploring these incidences a broader picture can be determined for the emotional structures which existed in the army. John McIlwain, a regular soldier who served with the initial BEF, recorded an occasion in his war service when he could not control his emotions. After a long retreat, a fellow soldier, starved, took more than his allocation of bread leaving McIlwain to go without,

> "I'm sorry about that bread Mc.I". A sudden wave of emotion came over me and I wanted to blubber. Was it the contrast between the generous consideration of a gentleman, himself hungry, and the meanness of the mob? A plausible rationalisation now, years after.

[140] Rowland Fielding, *War Letters to a Wife: France and Flanders 1915-1919* (London: The Medici Society, 1929), 20th February 1917.

> But is it a true analysis of an involuntary emotional reaction? I distrust such convenient explanation. I don't know.[141]

Men from all cohorts lived and existed in an unfamiliar and dangerous atmosphere that, as MacIlwain demonstrated created a range of reactions and emotions with unidentifiable sources, even for the men who were experiencing them. MacIlwain was upset because he had been let down by a comrade who had acted selfishly. Part of his reaction was motivated by his hunger, but the other aspect which most likely played was a feeling that he had been betrayed by a man he had trusted in battle to look after his welfare. His emotional response here demonstrated the level of anger this kind of incident created as it broke trust between fighting men. He also conveyed a sense that even those men of the regular army struggled to cope with the severity of the situation they found themselves in, and this could be overwhelming. Therefore, these moments also served as an opportunity for emotional release in safer zones away from immediate danger, not just as tears of exhaustion or frustration but proxy grief. They were not events where men were simply crying 'over spilt milk', but represented an emotional reaction over the trivial as a way to more safely confront the emotions caused by battle. Soldiers did not understand the complex world of emotions and acceptable responses they moved in. They were often confused by their emotions; tired, hungry and bereaved, men struggled to fathom not only what was acceptable to themselves, but how their comrades would react to their emotions.

This chapter has explored the communities in which soldiers moved and created their relationships, both formal and informal. It was these military and social groupings which provided the foundations for soldiers to suffer bereavements both individually and collectively, in relation to friendships and a wider martial identity. The responses to these losses were governed by a man's interactions with the violence of fighting and the loss of agency in modern war. At the front, not only did soldiers have to endure the horrific and bloody deaths of friends, they were also forced to realise that there was nothing the individual could do to prevent it. Following losses, it was a soldier's immediate military community which provided the space for him to begin to process his grief. Although there were some battalions which had their individual codes of behaviour relating to emotions, there was an overall acceptance throughout the army

[141] London, IWM, Documents. 5537, 'Private Papers of John McIlwain', 27 August 1914.

of how soldiers could and would express their feelings. However, there were some differences in how the different cohorts viewed each other. Subsequent chapters will go on to explore the subtle differences in how these groups confronted death, particularly in large numbers, with the principal elements of Combat Grief Cycle remaining applicable to all.

Chapter Two

Hardened to Death?: The Nature of War, Indifference and Façade

The concept of soldiers being hardened to the horrors of battle is synonymous with the men who served during the First World War. The previous chapter outlined and constructed the complex and multifaceted communities in which soldiers served at the front. These same groupings and military pressures dictated how men outwardly responded to the fear of death and the loss of friends or comrades. Soldiers had to an extent, out of necessity, hardened themselves to the horrors of war and it became a significant stage of the Combat Grief Cycle for all cohorts of the British Army. As Pat Jalland has argued, the only way they could cope with the harsh realities of combat was to suppress emotional responses – to 'behave like a man' – this was vital for a soldier's survival.[1] Antoine Prost also supports this line of enquiry suggesting that men could only survive the 'horror' through acquiring a sense of indifference.[2] Militarily speaking, it was desirable to the command structure that men became hardened to the sights of battle so they would continue to follow orders.[3] Therefore, a certain amount of 'indifference to death could be a blessing', as this would help men to process their fears concerning mortality.[4] It became a necessary state of mind in order for soldiers to survive mentally and physically. Learning to become hardened, or cultivating a façade of being unaffected, was a significant process in a soldier's service. It was not just for show for those around them but it was also important for soldiers to convince themselves they had not been affected by what they had seen.

[1] Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 18-20.
[2] Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society* (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1992), p. 21.
[3] Joanna Bourke, 'The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914-1945', *Historical Research*, 74:185 (2001), p. 325.
[4] Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 88.

Denis Winter has suggested soldiers had to concern themselves with only the most immediate matters, such as self-preservation, and to mourn for every death would have made psychological survival impossible.[5] It was not something which could be taught in training but was a state of mind that could only be acquired through contact with death at the front. It was often the first contact with death that made soldiers realise that any other response would be detrimental to personal survival. However, for some men being hardened concerned meeting the perceived expectations of the martial sphere; this was often a secondary reason, if present at all.

Becoming hardened to the sights of war and death was a process and certainly, for most, did not happen instantaneously. The first contact with death was the moment a soldier realised grief compromised their chances of physical and emotional survival, however it took the complete immersion in the horrors of war for soldiers to complete a state of real indifference or create a façade. The evidence in relation to these ideas has often been used to suggest that soldiers had developed a callous outlook towards the dead. Richard van Emden suggested, a man's reaction was often influenced by a soldier's relationship to the deceased.[6] For the most part, but not always, if it was a stranger who had been killed a soldier could be unaffected by it, accepting death as part of war. Yet if it was a friend or comrade, men were often incapable of remaining indifferent. In reality hardening was a fallible state, if it had been achieved at all; not all soldiers were capable of being completely apathetic to the scenes of war. This chapter will explore the initial contact men had with death. How fatalism as a type of hardening was adopted at the front as a means of survival and how a soldier's interaction with the enemy demonstrated an existence of callousness towards human life. Finally, evidence of hardening as a façade will be considered. These various explorations of the different manifestations of hardening and its fallibility will demonstrate the complexity and the ambiguity of this term.

[5] Denis Winter, *Deaths Men Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 228.
[6] Richard van Emden, *The Quick and the Dead: Fallen Soldiers and their Families in the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 57.

The First Contact with the Dead and Dying

A soldier's first interaction with death and his reaction to it was determined by the nature of the event. As Mark Hewitson has identified, a soldier's 'baptism of fire' had the power to entirely shape an individual's service and their recollection of it.[7] Some initial contacts were violent with numerous causalities, others were the deaths of individuals, either known or unknown to the onlooker, or the sight of a corpse. The situation in which the event took place also varied; it occurred in the trenches, on the way up to the line or during an offensive. When a soldier's introduction to death was not violent or they did not witness the actual process of dying, men could remain unmoved, even to their own surprise. Edwin Campion Vaughan recorded about his first encounter with corpses,

> Lying flat on their backs, with marble faces rigid and calm, their khaki lightly covered with frost, some with no wound visible, some with blood clotted on their clothes, one with a perfectly black face, they lay at attention staring up into the heavens. This was my first sight of dead men and I was surprised that it did not upset me. Only the one with the black face has stayed with me. The thick, slightly curled lips, fleshy aquiline nose, cap-comforter pulled well down over his head and the big glassy eyes have become stamped on my brain.[8]

Although Vaughan was not upset by the sight he witnessed at the time, this is not evidence to suggest that he was, or other men were, hardened to death at the front from the beginning of their war service. The men he came into contact with were not mutilated and did not show signs that they had suffered a violent death. If it had not been for the slight traces of death, the expressions on their faces and the blood, they could almost have been sleeping peacefully. This was a gentle introduction to the reality of war for Vaughan. Although he was not saddened or distressed by what he saw, the image of one man, due to the nature of his features stayed with him for many years after the war. The long-term impact of witnessing death at the front was complex and the impact of it may not always have been immediate or distressing.

Furthermore, a soldier's first contact with death and the dead created a number of varied responses, from revulsion to curiosity, regardless of the circumstances in

[7] Mark Hewitson, 'German Soldiers and the Horror of War: Fear of Death and the Joy of Killing in 1870 and 1914', *History*, 101:346 (2016), p. 409.
[8] Edwin Campion Vaughan, *Some Desperate Glory: The World War Diary of a British Officer, 1917* (London: MacMillan, 1985), p. 32.

which it took place. The initial experience of death at the front was a significant moment in the career of a soldier; it was a moment in which men for the first time had to learn how to deal with violent losses in the theatre of war. It was also an instant of increased fear but an event in which soldiers had to recover their composure and accept death as part of the daily routine.[9] This provided soldiers with the impetus for the hardening process to begin as it filled them with a sense of helplessness. Furthermore, it conveyed to them that emotional responses were futile and they could not carry on actively grieving if they themselves hoped to survive. H. G. Perry recorded in his diary in January 1915, 'My draft suffers badly first day in: Also first day in, Sgt Pallman shot through the head right beside me. My first taste of war, grim and terrible.'[10] A soldier's first experience of the trenches could shape his outlook on the war in general. For many, the first stint in the line could be uneventful and did not include an interaction with violence or death. However, Perry's introduction to war was extremely violent. He demonstrated that these kinds of violent initiations did not have to come through one of the large offensives. This could make losses feel more futile as men who had their first taste of war through a set piece battle were at least prepared, if only through a perceived understanding, for the potential losses. Moreover, the interaction with the violence of injuries shattered a soldier's belief in the glorious nature of war as they realised, for the first time, that death in the field was not beautiful. Although Perry does not go into great detail about the events witnessed or the number of men killed, it is clear from his response to it that his unit suffered badly. This led to the realisation that war was violent and brutal, not a glorious adventure.

The experience of loss for the first time was a moment when feelings of grief could extend beyond the close friendship that were usually required to create a sense of bereavement. As P. H. Jones recorded about his first experience of death in the trenches, in November 1914, '…I raced down the trenches only to find poor old Buxton lying stone dead with a bullet through his brain. He had been hit while sitting in his dug out well under cover from all but ricochet bullets. We buried him in his blanket that night and were all rather cut up over our first casualty.'[11] The first loss was shocking to soldiers impacted by it, particularly because they were not yet aware

[9] Helen B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 200.
[10] London, IWM, Documents. 7244, 'Private Papers of H. G. Perry' 13 January 1915.
[11] IWM, Documents. 12253, P. H. Jones.

of how to process bereavement. Incidences like this, where one man was killed by a ricochet, made men realise how precarious the chances of their own survival were. This was particularly pertinent in Jones' experience as the soldier who was killed was considered safe from all direct fire. In cases like this soldiers had to learn to process the unfairness and arbitrary nature of war, demonstrating to the soldiers involved that they were never safe from death, even if they thought they had taken all precautions against it. Men were aware of the emotions that their comrades were feeling, suggesting that men did not try to hide how they had been affected by their first interaction with death. The first contact with death was the moment soldiers became a community in mourning, united by their collective loss.

Witnessing violence for the first time was where soldiers were forced to confront the true reality of warfare, as well as their own mortality. As Stormont Gibbs testified, 'This string of wounded men took the stuffing out of me a bit. Like most people I had not fully realised that the horror of war is wounds, not death. I had thought of people being killed perhaps, if they weren't lucky enough to get a nice little wound at first.'[12] Gibbs was aware when he made it to the front that death was a possibility, although he suggests that this was a distant thought rather than a real fear. These kinds of scenes were something training could not prepare soldiers for. However, it was not his initial contact with death that shocked him the most but the violence and 'horror' of the wounds men sustained. He himself, even as a soldier, had bought into the cultural trope rife in British society at the time that injuries which led to death during war were neat and clean.[13] Therefore, initial contact with the horrors of war was not always solely concerned with the realisation of death but revealed the extent to which men could be wounded and maimed. These encounters bought home to the green soldiers the fate that potentially awaited them. Many men revealed in their accounts that they were more afraid of being horrifically wounded and maimed for life than they were of being killed. It was only through witnessing sights like this that men reached conclusions concerning fears of their own fate and had to process the consequences of realising the horrors of war.

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[12] Captain Stormont Gibbs, *From the Somme to the Armistice: The Memories of Captain Stormont Gibbs MC*, ed. by Richard Devonald-Lewis (Norwich: Gildon books 1992), p. 43.

[13] Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 206. Roper explores how soldiers' condolence letters were partially responsible for this understanding on the Home Front.

Alongside the process of having to confront the reality of their own mortality and that of their comrades, soldiers had to learn how to come to terms with the violence of the wounds that inevitably killed men at the front. Not only this, but the assault on the senses this caused could be difficult to overcome at the first time of asking. Horace Reginald Stanley recalled his first visit to the trenches and his first casualty,

> This first impression had rather a nauseating effect upon me. I remember now the smell of warm, steaming blood and as the stretcher bearers lifted him none too gently the blood can be heard dripping to the ground like rain dripping from a broken gutter. No flash was observed and the bullet did not come from the direction of the line, it must have been the sniper that Pat had warned us of. It is depressing and with no means of retaliation.[14]

Stanley's response of nausea was created by an assault on his senses brought about by being close to the man who was killed. As Stanley was making his way up to the trenches in the dark he could not see the man who had been killed but only smell and hear the effects of the wound on the stricken body. It is likely, that given the situation Stanley was in, his senses were already heightened causing the effect of the sudden death to have an even stronger impact on him, creating feelings of unease. Moreover, this first encounter with death was also more disturbing for Stanley as they could not discern where the fatal shot had come from. This left him feeling precarious and fearful for his own safety, heightening the smells and sounds that were coming from the stricken man. This was a difficult initiation for Stanley to the war and he had to find a way to overcome his anxiety. As Stanley continued on his way to the trenches he was forced to overcome his fear and harden himself to his surroundings, beginning his education in how to process the realities of war.

The combination of the repulsion caused by violence and the fear it generated caused men to experience an array of emotions when coming into contact with death for the first time. Harold Baldwin wrote about his introduction to the trenches, 'Crack! And down fell Tommy, and a fraction of a second later, Slaughter, holding his hand to his jaw, slid forward slowly and convulsively into the trench. It was my first experience with the reality of war and my feeling was one of horror, then curiosity at what a stricken man looked like, then blind fury at everything German.'[15] Although

[14] Horace Reginald Stanley, *Grandad's War: The First World War Diary of Horace Reginald Stanley,* ed. by Juliet Broody and Heather Broody (Cromer: Poppyland Publishing, 2007), p. 20.
[15] Sergeant Harold Baldwin, *Holding the Line* (Chicago: A C McClurg & Co, 1918), p. 102.

neither men were killed, at the moment they were both injured, Baldwin could not be sure they would survive due to the severity of their injuries. Baldwin indicated the complexity of emotions this kind of event caused. His reactions were similar to those of more experienced men but they were usually felt over a longer period of time after a bereavement, rather than altogether, as men became more used to death at the front. His initial response was one of repulsion at the scene which conveyed to him the realities of war; men forced to watch their comrades killed in extremely violent and sudden ways. Yet this feeling was swiftly replaced by curiosity, something he does not shy away from admitting in his memoir. Michael Roper states, 'morbid curiosity' was not an uncommon response for soldiers during their initial interaction with the dead or dying. For men new to the front, it was a moment when they learnt how they might die, and what it might feel like to die.[16] The final, and perhaps overriding response, was one of anger towards the enemy. These are all responses that will be explored in greater detail. Baldwin demonstrated how confusing the reaction to experiencing the horrors of war for the first time could be, and it was often a struggle for soldiers to manage this at first.

Although the type of initial contact with death and the reaction to it varied amongst soldiers, for many it ultimately led to the same conclusion; they could not survive if they allowed their reactions to losses to overcome the preparation to fight. For some men this understanding was instant and was the result of one experience of bereavement. Norman Ellison recorded in his memoir his first experience of death,

> Early next morning five of us were around a brazier in the frontline, frying some bacon, when a shell exploded among us. Clarke was killed outright, Fisher so badly wounded that he died an hour or two later… It was a pretty grim introduction to trench life. Poor Fisher had the top of his head sliced off like an egg and I was bespattered with his brains. I wanted to be physically sick, so did Frank Evans, but we quickly realised that would never do, so we carried on. I cleaned myself up a little and managed to swallow some breakfast.[17]

This was an extremely violent introduction for Ellison to the trenches. Physical reactions and vomiting were one of the many varied reactions to violent death. Ellison and his comrades were carrying out the everyday, mundane activity of making

[16] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 18.
[17] Norman F. Ellison, *Remembrances of Hell: The First World War Diary of a Naturalist, Writer and Broadcaster Norman F. Ellison – "Nomad of the BBC",* ed. by David F. Lewis (Shrewsbury: Airlife, 1997), p. 40.

breakfast. The combination of the food juxtaposed with the exposed brain and splattered body matter created a scene that turned the stomach. These types of experiences on their own do not lead to overall hardening; that was a longer process which relied upon constant exposure to the horrors of war. Instead, these experiences led to the initial recognition that in order to survive men would have to learn to become indifferent to sights such as this. The shared experience and realisation made this particular incident easier to rationalise for these men, rather than those whose initial interaction was experienced alone.

Conversely, not all men were able to suppress the need to vomit after their first contact with the dead, nor did this physical reaction always cause men to have the same realisation as Ellison. Experienced soldiers demonstrated understanding towards the difficulties green recruits needed to go through to become hardened to the realities of war. H. R. Williams commented in his memoir about another man,

> Upon returning to my post, I heard a man being violently sick in the bottom of the trench. He told me that he was one of the reinforcements that joined the company only the night before, and these were the first dead he had been called upon to handle. I saw that he was only a lad, so I said, 'I am really sorry sonny, that I took you on that job. But I did not notice that you were a newcomer when I detailed you in the darkness.[18]

Williams as a more experienced soldier did not deride the new recruit for being sick after dealing with the dead for the first time. This suggests that soldiers who had been in service for a while were understanding of the processes that new recruits needed to go through when it came to confronting death. Although Williams was an Australian soldier this was an attitude not unique to A.I.F. soldiers. However, some groups of new soldiers were detailed to deal with the dead as a means to hardening them, although these incidences seemed to be few. Unlike Ellison, the green soldier's first interaction with death was not witnessing the killing of a comrade but it concerned handling and burying bodies for the first time. Williams further demonstrated his understanding of the situation by admitting if he had known the status of the man, he would not have given him the job. Therefore, soldiers did not become hardened to the plight of men new to the trenches, even if they struggled to accept them into the ranks,

[18] H. R. Williams, *An Anzac on the Western Front: The Personal Reflections of an Australian Infantryman from 1916 to 1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2012), p. 74.

and understood the difficulties faced when men had to learn how to survive their surroundings.

When it came to a soldier's indoctrination to the realities of war, feelings of sickness were not just used to denote the physical state but a term also used to indicate being 'fed-up' with the war. Having experienced his first taste of death at the front Harry Drinkwater recorded in his diary, '… he was our first casualty and our first experience of death. We were all very sick about it and thankful to leave the trenches that night for a night's rest in camp. On arrival I lay down and went to sleep in my clothes, tired out, and with the death of Horton, sick of everything.'[19] 'Sick' in Drinkwater's account was used as euphemism to reflect his section's grief over their loss and reflect the impact that their first casualty had on the collective. Drinkwater made this entry into his diary of Christmas Day, 1915. The contrast between death and the season of goodwill may have exacerbated the sense of loss that the initial contact with death often caused. Drinkwater also used the concept of sickness to demonstrate the fact this first encounter was enough to cause a sense of disillusionment with fighting. These thoughts and feelings about death, for many soldiers, were an important reaction as it started the process of learning to cope with life at the front. Drinkwater went on, following a number of deaths within his section, to become hardened.

However, some soldiers never really became hardened to death. Although their initial contact with the dead or dying sparked a move towards indifference, the more they experienced of war the harder detachment from its realities became. Richard Holmes asserts, most soldiers in any war never truly achieve 'professional detachment'.[20] C. M. Bowra recorded in his memoir,

> Against these valuable lessons which I learned from the war must be set its endless menaces. As I saw more of its realities, I found that, instead of becoming hardened to them, I disliked them more and more, and though I accepted fatalistically the possibility of death, I was increasingly frightened of being gravely wounded with no hope of rescue as one dies in slow agony. I managed to control

[19] Harry Drinkwater, *Harry's War: The Great War Diary of Harry Drinkwater,* ed. by Jon Cooksey and David Griffiths (St. Ives: Edbury Press, 2013), p. 28.
[20] Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), p. 181.

> and hide my fears, but the memory of the carnage and filth has never left me.[21]

Bowra demonstrated the immense conflict of emotions soldiers experienced at the front. Although more detailed and revealing than other testimony, Bowra offers a window into the fallibility of a soldier's psychological defences. The control of fears surrounding death and violence was a state soldiers could learn but never truly perfect, as the everyday horrors of war, including the constant threat to their mortality, were all pervasive. Not only does Bowra present evidence of a façade he also indicates the folly of interpreting fatalism as anything more than a coping mechanism masquerading as hardening. Numerous soldiers admitted to fearing for their own mortality but this did not always just concern death itself; many could accept the inevitability of it after time. However, some such as Bowra, failed to come to terms with all the ways they could be killed and feared, more than anything, being left alone to die in agony. The accounts presented here prove the existence of hardening but suggest for most soldiers it was ineffective defence when confronted with death. It is the complexity of this term in practice which merits greater study.

The Nature of War and the Violence of Combat

The nature of the war and the violence of the surroundings were influential in the way soldiers processed and rationalised their losses. The nature of battle often necessitated soldiers to harden themselves to the death of others, as they fought against their fears concerning their own mortality. Often an involuntary reaction to their environment, these indicators were a chemical reaction created by the body as response to heightened danger. Although men were ordered not to stop and help the wounded during an advance, the very nature of the chemical reaction created by the body meant that men operated under their own adrenalin, often unaffected by what they had seen once over the top. Entering a situation of extreme peril caused men to cease to function on a conscious plain and their actions and responses became overridden by the need to survive.[22] This often meant that men would pass by the wounded and dying comrades without much thought; an involuntary act of self-preservation and because the tide of battle pulled them on. Edward Liveing testifies to this fact in his memoir,

[21] C. M. Bowra, *Memories 1898-1939* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1966), p. 91.
[22] Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 67.

'I nearly trod on a motionless form. It lay in a natural position, but the ashen face and fixed, fearful eyes told me that the man had just fallen. I did not recognise him then. I remember him now. He was one of my own platoon.'[23] Liveing's response to coming into contact with a man of his section who had just been killed was not the reflection of a man who had become insensitive to losses. Instead, as his mind at the time was mobilised for battle, he did not even have the sense that the soldier was a man he knew. Liveing demonstrated that once demobilised from battle men began to process their losses, suggesting that although hardening did exist is was at times a temporary, but a necessary and involuntary, state.

As well as being a group in mourning there was also a sense of collective denial, whereby men would attempt to rationalise losses by forgetting those who had died in order to forge on with the war effort. Gerald Brenan testified to the idea, 'But in war one can see and forget things that in peace-time would leave a scar on the mind.'[24] The unique situation in which these men found themselves, in comparison with their civilian lives, would ultimately colour the way they saw the world around them. Scenes that would have shocked them before the war became normal, as the sights of everyday civilian life had been before they enlisted. The carnage they witnessed at the front concerned an unimaginable violence but through the mundanity of its omnipresence it became their norm. William Shanahan was only deployed to the Western Front in August 1918 and recorded in his memoir, 'To see one's mates killed shocked one, but was soon forgotten.'[25] It would be easy to ignore the Combat Grief Cycle for the men of 1918, especially as some men did not see fighting until after the German Spring Offensive. The process occurred at varying speeds for different men depending on experience and personality. This meant some members of the 1918 cohort had time to move through all phases of the cycle. The ability to forget was a significant part of the process as soldiers realised they could not continue to fight if they wallowed in their grief.[26] Periods of indifference to the general sights of war are not enough to argue that the men of the British Army were not affected by the deaths they witnessed, especially when soldiers themselves realised the significance of this

[23] Edward G. D. Liveing, *Attack: An Infantry Subaltern's Impression of July 1st 1916* (London: William Heinemann, 1918), p. 64.
[24] Gerald Brenan, *A Life of One's Own: Childhood and Youth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), p. 189.
[25] IWM, Documents. 6312, William David Shanahan.
[26] Tony Walter, *On Bereavement: The Culture of Grief* (Buckingham: Open University, 1999), p 40.

state. Conversely, not all soldiers who were deployed to the front in 1918 exhibited the same response. Shanahan had joined the fray when the feeling in the British Army was more buoyant, with victories having been won and the German Army in retreat. Consistently on the move and fighting did not give men time to take heed of their losses. It is clear from his comments that he had seen men die and he confirmed this later on in his memoir. Although he had witnessed violent death, 'yet the war went on'.[27] Shanahan did not record in his memoir a moment when his hardening gave way to grief, suggesting that a state of indifference could survive if a soldier had a relatively short service during a successful period at the front.

Losses in battle were expected and often did not shock soldiers in the same way they did during quiet periods in the trenches. Men often prepared themselves prior to offensives for the possibility of their own demise and that of their friends. Many wrote their last letters or attended church services and carried out rituals,[28] others elicited promises from friends that the survivors would write to their families in the event of their death. These acts were carried out by both new and old recruits but once into the fighting most soldiers were able to put their fears out of their minds. J. G. W. Hyndson commented in his diary, 'Soon several men fall, shot by invisible riflemen, but hardened to losses, we push on steadily until we reach the position slightly to the rear of the trenches.'[29] Hyndson recorded these thoughts at the beginning of November 1914, during the First Battle of Ypres, having experienced the Retreat from Mons, the Marne and the Aisne, his unit had already sustained heavy losses. Particularly at the height of battle men needed to be able to ignore the fallen in order to protect themselves and carry on the advance. However, Malcolm Brown has asserted that the ability for men to 'carry on' in battle despite losses should not be mistaken as indifference towards the dead.[30] Hyndson also supports Brown's assertion that heavy losses could provide a certain 'anaesthetic' against the pain.[31] Moreover, losses became easier to ignore if men were recycled in the line repeatedly with little chance for rest. This was the case for the original BEF who served in the first few months in the war, as they were reused in the fight to halt the German advance. They, as Hyndson

[27] IWM, Documents. 6312, William David Shanahan.
[28] Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 46.
[29] J.G.W. Hyndson, *From Mons to the First Battle of Ypres* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1933), p. 110.
[30] Malcolm Brown, *Tommy Goes to War* (Stroud: History Press, 1978), p. 162.
[31] Ibid., p. 161.

demonstrated, became oversaturated and therefore hardened in their outlook towards further losses. As the moment of rupture in the Combat Grief Cycle will explore, the mobilisation of the mind for battle would come to an end during a period of reduced danger, creating a space for soldiers to take stock of their losses and recognise their grief.

In the immediate aftermath of battle the roll call created conflicting emotions. As will be explored later this, for many, was a moment of mourning but for others it was a lesson in hardening. F. E. Harris recorded about the Battle of Arras,

> Yes, this roll call shakes you, chum! To such an extent as to almost freeze your blood – you've to brace yourself – acknowledge that, after all, this is war – you've to compel yourself that you've to be brutal, callous, harsh but maintain a balance of sanity, otherwise you may as well give up the ghost.[32]

Again, this is consistent with Brown's argument that witnessing mass death could serve as an anaesthetic against further bereavements. Harris suggests that soldiers needed to steal themselves against the emotional impact of a roll call, which initially established how many men were killed, wounded or missing. He also testifies to, at the same time, how powerful the impact of witnessing how many men had been lost after a battle was, demonstrating a sense of façade. Harris suggests that he understood the importance of cultivating a 'callous' outlook on losses in order to survive his experiences mentally. The period after combat was a confusing time for soldiers. Not yet fully demobilised and oversaturated with contradictory emotions of pain caused by bereavement and happiness over their own survival, hardening oneself against negative emotions was the most logical response to protect the mind.

Moreover, the same involuntary reaction occurred away from offensives when men found themselves under heavy fire and in mortal danger, again expecting death at any moment. Drinkwater commented in his diary whilst on the Somme,

> The night was a perfect inferno, shrapnel crackling overhead. The man in front of me staggered and dropped with a piece through his head. This was one of those affairs when I was within inches of a known death. I stopped and turned him over, found him beyond our help and went on. It was no time for formalities, shrapnel was

[32] London, IWM, Documents. 14979, 'Private Papers of F. E. Harris'.

> raining down and in the indistinct light we could see the dead and wounded lying about in all directions.[33]

During times of heightened tension men were more willing to accept their losses and choose not to put themselves in harm's way if a man was already dead, although, as this work will go on to explore there were some losses so potent it cut through the need for self-preservation. Men quickly came to realise that battle and heavy bombardments were not an appropriate time to lament the dead, and there was time to console each other over losses in the comparative safety of the rest area. By 'formalities' Drinkwater was likely to be referring to a burial or funeral for the deceased, or at least the removal of his paybook and identification. However, during times of danger soldiers would have to accept that nothing could be done to care for the dead and would have to hope someone else would be able to carry out the task for them. A lack of sentiment in regard to this should not be taken as indifference for what happened to the deceased, and it appeared soldiers learned a degree of pragmatism whilst at the front which has often been portrayed as hardening.

There were moments during the war when men enjoyed themselves at concert parties or estaminets that could be mistaken for feelings of indifference after combat. These periods also made those who observed the lives of soldiers consider men to have become hardened to the deaths and horrors of the war. Frank Steadman, a dentist who served with the Royal Army Medical Corps, recorded one such scene,

> The scene was a weird one; the hall was packed with Scottish soldiers. A fine band was playing. Motor lorries are sent up to the trenches to bring back a few men off duty to see this show, and when it was over they are taken back again. Fancy, some of the men laughing at the jokes may (and sometimes do) come back again to the field ambulance wounded, and some killed, before the next day breaks. I shall not forget that scene in a hurry.[34]

The way of life for soldiers at the front could be strange, not only for outsiders to observe, but also for non-combatants to be part of. As a dentist Steadman was privy to the life of the infantry but not a part of their experience of combat. It was difficult for him to treat the men who had only been laughing and joking the previous evening.[35]

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[33] Drinkwater, *Harry's War,* p. 122.
[34] London, IWM, Documents. 18927, 'Private Papers of Major F. St. J. Steadman DPH MRCS LRCP LOND LDSRCS ENG', 4 July 1916.
[35] Emma Hanna, *Sounds of War: Music in the British Armed Forces During the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). See Emma Hanna's work on music during the First World War for a detailed study on the importance of music in soldiers' lives at the front. Greater study of music on the

It was, therefore, hard for him to understand why men who were fated to be killed or wounded once back in the trenches, would be able to enjoy themselves in their brief respite from the line. This was especially poignant for Steadman as he recorded these thoughts only four days into the Battle of the Somme.

A scene that seemed strange to a man who did not belong to the infantry can be illustrated by a soldier with first-hand experience of heavy fighting. B. W. Chenery wrote about his time behind the lines at Passchendaele, 'These little happenings made life for us a little more bearable, it made us forget the sad bits.'[36] After taking part in the offensive, Chenery spent some time behind the line at concerts, estaminets and enjoying himself with comrades. He demonstrated the importance of these moments to soldiers, when they were not in danger, as a reprieve and break from the darker side of the war. To survive the war and the sights they witnessed, men needed to find solace in the safe and quiet moments of their service. As Williams recorded, it was the men with whom he served and their camaraderie which provided this, 'we sat round the fires singing and telling stories as light-heartedly as if we were on a picnic. It was the companionship of men with hearts of gold, learning to live only for the hour, which enabled us to conquer the utter misery of these surroundings.'[37] This does not suggest that these men were hardened to death or the horrors of war, but instead demonstrates that men often needed to look at the lighter side of their experience to find some happiness in the destruction of war. It was through shared experience and understanding of the fragility of their own mortality that they created a sense of 'companionship', not founded in a sense of shared hardening but instead allowed them to live with and briefly forget the horrors they witnessed.

It is undeniable that it was favourable for the command structure that soldiers became hardened to death and their surroundings. As chapter one explored, the stripping of a man's individual identity was one of the primary outcomes of military training. Once at the front this process intensified as the infantry had come to terms

frontline would provide more evidence for the variety of ways soldiers confronted death and processed their bereavements. Furthermore, studies of soldiers' concert parties and marching songs that parodied death at the front would offer fruitful evidence of how dark humour could form part of the Combat Grief Cycle, particularly in relation to hardening and how soldiers coped with death in different ways.

[36] London, IWM, Documents. 14206, 'Private Papers of B. W. Chenery'.

[37] Williams, *An Anzac on the Western Front,* p. 64.

with their position as cannon fodder. Some men were aware that this was the case, as Alfred Mclelland Burrage demonstrated in his memoirs,

> Do you forget, some of you fools with red tabs, that some of these ignorant men to who you speak will survive even your plans of attack and become private citizens again? And what kind of private citizens are they going to make when they have been taught by you to weigh a human life against half a tin of Fray Bentos.[38]

Part of the hardening process concerned men coming to see their lives and those of their comrades as devalued. Through the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle this work will demonstrate how this could have a negative impact on the way men grieved for their losses. Although it was possible for men to view the lives of the many in the way Burrage describes, these thoughts did not extend to the men they had close bonds with. Despite the fact that hardening was a fallible state, this way of thinking could leave men irrevocably changed in their outlook on life and death, even after they returned from the front.

This devaluation of human lives made certain practices at the front easier to rationalise, such as taking items from the dead, regardless of what it might have been. Frank Richards recorded in his diary, 'There was hardly a fire bucket in the trenches and fire wood was equally scarce… We took the wooden crosses from lonely graves that we found here and there. They were no good to the dead but they provided warmth for the living.'[39] Richards does show that there was an understanding that the needs of the living at a time of war outweighed the desires of how to treat the dead. Richards' behaviour is not reflected by those who volunteered or were conscripted. His attitude seems to be one of an old soldier who had a professional serviceman's outlook on the reality of war. Although this could be taken as evidence that the regular soldier was completely hardened to death, Richards throughout his diary, as he loses his close friends, cuts a figure of a man in deep mourning for those who had died. However, Richards does demonstrate that the regular soldier was more hardened to the realities of war and what needed to be done to survive. As an exploration of burial will show, the remembrance of the dead in perpetuity with marked graves was not a priority for

[38] Ex-Private X, *War is War* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1930), p. 108.
[39] Frank Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die* (Lincolnshire: Philip Austen Publishing, 1994), p. 217.

many soldiers. They could be content knowing that soldiers were buried decently, and if possible, would at some point receive a permanent headstone.

Not all acts appear as callous as this and it was often useful items which were taken from the bodies of dead men, such as food or clothing. Richards recorded in his diary during the First Battle of Ypres, 'If a dead man's clothes or boots were in good condition we never hesitated to take them off him.'[40] In 1914, the soldiers with whom Richards served had not been supplied properly for the war they fought. They had been given boots the wrong size, seriously hampering the retreat from Mons, and there was also a shortage of uniforms. However, this behaviour of taking items from the dead was not unique to regular soldiers. Guy Chapman, who volunteered in 1914, recalled in his memoir removing spare socks from the packs of the dead.[41] Men were not afraid to remove items that were still useable from the dead if they were needed by the living. Furthermore, during battle throughout the war men did not shy away from using corpses to reinforce their parapets and gun positions,[42] indicating that when men became desperate they were prepared to undertake acts in relation to the dead that would have repulsed them in ordinary life.

The recording and recalling of the callous behaviours of soldiers during the war often created a sense that soldiers were indifferent about their fellow man. At the end of August, 1914, McIlwain recorded the attitude of his comrades in his diary, 'Hunger makes men cantankerous and intolerant. These fellows would have been quite content to fill their bellies with good bread, whatever the cost. The knowledge that men had risked their lives, or had even died to provide them, would not have affected their appetites in the least.'[43] McIlwain demonstrated the nature of soldiering, not just for the cohort of 1914, but for the rest of the war. Though cold-hearted in their outlook soldiers had to prioritise their own survival and ability to endure combat. As the old saying goes 'an army marches on its stomach' and men became acutely aware of their need to eat in order to ensure their basic survival. Therefore, they had to ignore those who had died to sustain them and cultivate a pragmatic approach to the loss of men

[40] Ibid., p. 42.
[41] Guy Chapman, *Passionate Prodigality: Fragments of an Autobiography* (Berkeley: I. Nicholson and Watson, 1933).
[42] George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 6.
[43] IWM, Documents. 5537, John McIlwain, 27 August 1914.

they did not know. McIlwain sets himself apart from these men in judgement of their conduct, suggesting that not all men could become hardened to this extent. However, this extract was taken from his self-edited diary that was philosophical in nature. In reviewing and preparing his testimony in the post-war era, his present self may have been judging his actions and feelings during the war.

The attitudes demonstrated by Richards and McIlwain for the 1914 professional soldier continued later into the war, becoming part of the experience of the volunteer soldier as well. Burrage wrote,

> We have become grossly selfish. We think only of our bellies and our own skins. It has to be that way or our hearts would break if we shouldered the burdens of others and let our minds dwell on their agonies and deaths… When a man is killed we rush to him to see if he's got any food in his haversack or, that priceless possession, a safety razor.[44]

Burrage also suggested that men needed to learn to harden themselves to the situation in which they found themselves in order to survive. He did not intimate that men were emotionless or callous at heart, but they could learn to be out of necessity when it came to the basics of existence, such as food. Burrage reflects the comments of the old soldier Richards, suggesting that it was not just the pre-war professional soldiers who were prepared to take belongings from the dead. This is perhaps not dissimilar from soldiers splitting the contents of a package that had arrived for man who had already been killed. After all the living could benefit from belongings that the dead had no use for. All three of these men established that the need for sustenance could override any sense of repulsion to death or the dead. Men had to learn to harden their outlooks on the realities of war to eat and survive. Therefore, taking items from the dead of both friend and foe was a practice which occurred throughout the war.

It was important for both officers and ORs to develop a sense of hardening to their surroundings in order to process the death and destruction they witnessed. Officers also had to harden themselves to the plight of their men to command effectively. Roper argues it was more important for officers to appear to bear losses stoically as they were expected to be unaffected by the hardships of battle.[45] Captain Lionel Ferguson was told by his commanding officer after heavy losses at

[44] Ex-Private X, *War is War*, p. 81.
[45] Roper, The Secret Battle, p. 175.

Passchendaele and a poor performance from the remaining soldiers, 'Ferguson I am here to treat you as an officer, not as a human being, you must treat your men likewise.'[46] Especially during offensives, the formal military structure saw it as important that both men and officers were not treated with compassion. Instead, officers needed to learn that to lead their men effectively they had to rid themselves of sentiment and no longer see themselves or their men as 'human beings'. Hardening and indifference such as this during offensives should not be taken as evidence of overall callousness throughout the ranks of the army; men came to understand that there was no place for grief during these times of danger. These attitudes could have a long-term impact on the way men viewed themselves and each other. As chapter one began to explore, the devaluation of human life could lead to disillusionment and resentment surrounding the value placed on losses by military command.

Conversely, not all officers behaved insensitively towards men in battle. It was part of their remit as leaders that they needed to compel or even force men into battle or forwards if they were showing reluctance. As Seabury Ashmead-Bartlett testifies to, 'Poor fellows – all of them were tired, most of them badly shaken. One or two asked to be allowed to remain behind, but war is an inexorable master and demands the ultimate sacrifice from all, so I had to harden my heart.'[47] The 'poor fellows' he was referring to had become separated from their units during the Hundred Days Offensive and, as an officer, Ashmead-Bartlett was bringing these men together to put them back into battle. He did not go about this with derision or indifference for his men. By referring to them as 'poor fellows' he demonstrated an understanding for their plight, or at least on reflection in his memoir he did. Through pressing this group of men forward towards the enemy he was aware that he may have been sending them to their deaths. Ashmead-Bartlett demonstrated, that to carry out this act, he needed to harden himself to the possible fate these men faced in battle. He understood it was a necessary trait for an officer to possess, not only to give impetus to the war effort but also to mentally survive the responsibility officers had to bear for losses.

Due to the very nature of war the official structure was forced to maintain a system of coldness when it came to the humanity of the men who were under their

[46] London, IWM, Documents. 7154, 'Private Papers of Captain L. I. L. Ferguson', 4 November 1917.
[47] Seabury H. Ashmead-Bartlett, *From the Somme to the Rhine* (London and New York: John Lane, 1921), p. 21.

control. For most soldiers life still went on at home, especially if they had a wife and children, and an unfortunate few had to deal with grief and tragedy within their families. Even though men had been indoctrinated into new communities in the army the loved ones they had left behind had not diminished in importance. Roland Fielding recorded one such incident in a letter to his wife,

> How sad the world is! One of my men has just been before me, almost in tears. He handed me a letter, just received, telling him that the eldest of his two little girls has been run over and killed by a motor-car… the commanding officer… has promised to forward the application for special leave for this man; but it will probably fail. There are so many hard cases, and the Higher Authorities are likely to argue, in this one, that, since the child dead, the father can do no good by going home; - which is logical, if brutal.[48]

Officers were more likely to understand the ways that military structure worked than ORs and accepted the outcomes of its harsh reality in these circumstances. However, it did not stop Fielding sympathising with his soldier. As identified in chapter one, Gary Sheffield argues officer-man relations were not always formal, particularly in the trenches. Although officers did not have close relationships with their men, being in the trenches could blur the lines and they forged a closer understanding with each other. Sheffield also suggests that a good officer was one that cared about his men.[49] Fielding indicated that he understood the man's grief and supported his need to be with his family, but he was also aware of the brutality with which the military needed to operate. Every man was vital to the war effort and as there was nothing he could have done to change the nature of the situation at home, he may as well have remained at the front. Fielding here demonstrates the general sense of callousness which existed out of necessity within the martial sphere, but that did not mean it extended to the men and the communities which existed within its influence.

Fatalism

Hardening oneself against the deaths of others in war was, for some, a state easily achieved. As Edward Madigan has argued, fatalism became an important doctrine and

[48] Rowland Fielding, *War Letters to a Wife: France and Flanders 1915-1919* (London: The Medici Society, 1929), 15 August 1918.
[49] Gary 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, 2000), p. 92.

way of life for soldiers as it helped them establish a sense of order within the chaos of war. More importantly, by accepting that an individual's fate was preordained it allowed men to remain focused on the present 'with a degree of calm, or at least resignation'.[50] It usually accompanied battle exhaustion as men sought to rationalise their existence following offensives, as well as to make great losses bearable.[51] Ultimately, the concept of fatalism allowed men to process their grief and mediate the panic surrounding their own fragile existence. It was not always achievable and can be easily mistaken for hardening.

The theme which becomes obvious when collating testimony concerning death at the front, is the fear for oneself and one's own mortality. Fatalism was one way men processed the concept of their own death and it was the reality of life at the front that created the need for it within the ranks of the British Army. C. Weld wrote in his diary on returning to the front,

> Although one rarely thinks of such things one can't help thinking when parting from relations and returning to France that it may be possibly the last time to see them. In this game where hundreds of lives are laid down weekly one cannot tell the moment when one's turn may come.[52]

Weld indicated that men did not think about their own demise often but on some occasions they could not help but acknowledge the possibility. Due to the random nature of death, which came to most men anonymously, most soldiers were unaware their 'number was up' until it was too late. Accepting that there was little they could do, and the ability to push anxiety in relation to their mortality to the back of their minds, became paramount to men's psychological survival of the war and finding the motivation to continue fighting.

Moreover, fatalism was a state that soldiers could not achieve before their deployment to the front but was learnt through contact with death, either in the trenches or during offensives. J. G. Mortimer recalled in his memoir about the first day of the Somme,

> This was my first experience of going over the top and what an experience it was. To see a shell burst at a man's feet and the effect

[50] Edward Madigan, *Faith Under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 185-6.
[51] Holmes, *Acts of War*, p. 240.
[52] IWM, Documents. 16651, Captain C. Weld, 25 March 1916.

> it had on them as it destroyed or maimed them was a sickening sight. The fact that it could happen to me I did not realise straight away, but when I did I trembled with fear. I forced myself to keep up with the others and as I became fatalist in my mind, the trembling ceased to a degree as I adopted the attitude "what has to be, will be."[53]

Mortimer demonstrated that fatalism was a state of mind which did not always take a long time to develop but could be almost be instantaneous during times of great danger, with its foundations in the chemical reaction which accompanied combat.[54] As his first encounter with battle was violent with abundant losses, Mortimer's introduction to the realities of war was sudden, along with his realisation of the fragility of his own life. Not just this, but as he came to realise his death could be imminent, it was likely that he would be obliterated by a shell if his 'number was up'. In order to continue to push forwards and allay his fear, he felt compelled to accept that whatever happened, even if it was his own death, there was nothing he could do. Mortimer offers no indication as to whether or not he became permanently fatalistic, or if this was a tactic he employed to motivate himself to move forward. At one time or another both conclusions were most likely applicable to the majority of soldiers.

As well as becoming indifferent to their own fate soldiers needed to become hardened to that of the unknown dead. As men became increasingly surrounded by the dead and became immune to their presence, they were forced to confront the realities of life and death constantly. Charles Douie in his memoir explored how he became fatalistic about his own life because he had become indifferent to the deaths of others,

> …as I watched the sunshine on the marshes, how death, once so strange and terrible, had become almost a matter of routine. A dead man lay outside the door of my headquarters dug-out... He excited no more attention than if he had been asleep. When all lives were forfeit, the prospect of losing one's own life before another dawn did not present itself as a great misfortune.[55]

Again, Douie reflected the arguments of Malcolm Brown, that a large number of losses could numb soldiers to witnessing more death. Therefore, Douie demonstrated the natural human response to being oversaturated with the sight of the unknown dead. As with all things, once it became a part of everyday life it was unremarkable. As a routine

[53] London, IWM, Documents. 7449, 'Private Papers of J. G. Mortimer MM'.
[54] Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 67.
[55] Charles Douie, *The Weary Road: The Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry* (London: The Naval and Military Press, 1929), pp. 199-200.

part of life it confirmed that all men had the potential to die and it could happen to any man at any time. Douie felt that the mystery of dying was being stripped away to an extent that he was no longer terrified by the prospect of his own demise. All soldiers, even officers, at least for a period of their service, came to realise they were not special and could be killed at any moment. The omnipresence of the unknown dead was instrumental in the creation of a fatalistic outlook. A further consequence of this oversaturation was that some men even lost their curiosity concerning the dead indicating an almost complete desensitisation to death.

Although it is probably true that a handful of men went to war with little regard for their own safety, with no fear over whether they lived or died, others would have to find a way to cope with the possibility of their own demise. They would also have to hide their fear from those at the front and protect those at home. As Lieutenant M. Holroyd commented in a letter home, 'Of course, with all paraphernalia [referring to waders], I blow the expense; when one may well be dead or disabled in ten days time, it would be an insult to one's intelligence to spare, even to save, one's kit for fishing in 1918.'[56] Part of the hardening process was tied up in a sense of outward bravado and finding ways to play off fears. Written in January 1915 and given his status as an officer, as well as the subject of the letter, this attitude is also a reflection of his position and class. Holroyd was aware that his family at home would be afraid for his safety, and he chose to deal with these concerns by not shying away from the realities of his situation. By openly confronting and accepting the possibility of his own death he was trying to wrestle back some sense of agency. He tried to achieve this principally by living in the moment and enjoying himself, instead of focusing on a future that held no certainty.

As with all responses to life and death at the front fatalism was not a universal state of mind. It did not appeal to all men and for some men, as with hardening, it simply could not be achieved. Drinkwater mused in his diary,

> Some fellows were born fatalists and would clinch all arguments by saying that if a bullet or shell had got his name written on it, he would have to have it when it came along. It was an argument in a way that was very satisfactory because, argued the fatalist, if the fellow referred to came through a battle uninjured, "your" shot had

[56] London, IWM, Documents. 7364, 'Private Papers of Lieutenant M. Holroyd', 11 January 1915.

> not been fired yet. If he got knocked out, the fatalist said, "I told you so."[57]

Drinkwater demonstrated that there were those who were predisposed to fatalism and it helped them to explain many of the quirks of the randomness of death at the front. However, as he goes on to discuss there were other types of thinking,

> But there was one side of the mind complex which had little or no part in the thoughts of the average soldier and that was pessimism… The general line of thought on this question was, I think, this. That if one went about looking for trouble by unduly exposing himself, he very soon got it, whether he was a believer in fate or fatalism or not, and it was very sound line of thought to take. It, at least, showed a healthy mind. The argument was not necessarily finished from the fatalist's point of view for, he argued, what of those times when no sort of cover is available and yet some individuals will go through affair after affair and come through with a whole skin… Generally speaking, the reply lay in the fact that these narrow escapes were the common lot of all the infantry when they were in action, often facing a hail of shells and machine-gun bullets. Under such conditions, death comes very near and yet passes by… It was not unusual to find men who attributed their safety to divine interference as being the most reasonable construction they could put upon the fact that they were still alive and when one reviewed the circumstances, it often did seem the most reasonable.[58]

Drinkwater suggested that for those who had religion or at least believed in some kind of divine intervention, fatalism was not a necessary way of life for them to adopt. Belief in this outlook could offer an explanation for all instances of life and death at the front. Furthermore, it did not matter which system of belief a soldier subscribed to, but due to the strange twists of fate often witnessed at the front, men needed to adopt some form of ideology which could explain why men died whilst others lived. By coming to a state of understanding that their fate was not in their own hands, it was not necessarily hardening or indifference men achieved, but instead they had developed a tacit acceptance for the realities of war. However, neither state could endure the loss of a close friend.

[57] Drinkwater, *Harry's War,* pp. 259-60.
[58] Ibid.

Opinions of the Enemy

Soldiers came to the front knowing that their sole purpose was to kill the enemy, although very few infantry men did. Joseph Garvey wrote about his initiation into the war at the Retreat from Mons, 'Down went the target, men and horses… I had taken a human life for the first time. I was only concerned at that stage in obeying orders from my superiors and doing the work I was sent to do with zeal and efficiency.'[59] Garvey's first experience of killing the enemy created a sense of hardening towards his primary duty. His first contact with killing came in the chaos of retreat when he would have been able to differentiate between the men he had hit and those killed by others. Later on in the war, death, where the infantry was involved, was meted out through sniping or at close quarters. Garvey was able to find comfort and morale in his action as he had followed the orders he was given at a critical moment in the early stages of the war. The reflective nature of his account suggests that his opinion concerning these actions changed upon reflection. He was only 'concerned' in that moment with carrying out orders, indicating that once the danger had passed he was not as comfortable with his actions.

Moreover, due to the nature of war men found it necessary to cultivate a thick skin when it came to killing the enemy or watching them being killed. War, and particularly a war of attrition, relied on the concept that to win one side must kill more of the enemy than the other and by any means necessary. W. R. H. Brown recorded after witnessing a mine detonated under German trenches, 'A considerable portion of the German trench went up, and several German dead were to be seen lying around. It was a dastardly act, but it might have been us instead of them, and in war one takes no more chances than are necessary.'[60] Brown acknowledges that the act of using mines was immoral and not an honourable act of war. It certainly, in principal, was not one that he approved of. He demonstrated an understanding that the Germans would have used the same means against his fellow soldiers, and it was better that they killed the enemy rather than waiting to be victim of German aggression. As with other aspects of war discussed in this chapter, killing the enemy reinforced the need for self-preservation. Rather than becoming hardened to the enemy dead, it was about an

[59] London, IWM, Documents. 16762, 'Private Papers of J. Garvey'.
[60] IWM, Documents. 4566, 2nd Lieutenant W. R. H. Brown.

acceptance of the nature of war itself in which men had to be cold-hearted towards these acts.

However, feelings towards the enemy could be complex and conflicting, particularly for the infantry who often watched the enemy killed from a distance by artillery and machine gun fire. As Robert Cude recorded about one such incident,

> See quite a number fall. Artillery are very pleased with their work. It was a wonderfully cheering spectacle, although now and again I am forced to think thus "Every Boche has a mother or wife, or at least someone he holds dear, and they all mourn for him". Still such thoughts do not do on "Active Service".[61]

Cude demonstrated that not all soldiers had a callous outlook on the German soldier, recognising his humanity at the moment of his demise, or at least the plight of his family at home. He also suggested, that as the deaths were being caused by the artillery and not himself or the infantry, with distance from the act killing making it easier not to dwell upon the consequences. It also balanced out any sense of compassion, as it was important for the morale of the infantry that enemy lives were taken by accurate artillery fire. Cude goes on to expand upon this idea later on in the war, 'in the morning the dead make a fine spectacle for jaded nerves.'[62] The concept of winning a war of attrition was dependent on one side killing more than the other. Therefore, in order to assess whether an offensive or a barrage had been a success or a failure was dependent upon the number of dead. It was also important for soldiers to see that the other arms they relied on for their safety were effective.

Officers who gave the orders to kill the enemy had a level of responsibility not borne by the ORs. As with general hardening towards death in war, giving orders to kill the enemy without letting it play upon their conscience was a state that many officers achieved. Ashmead-Bartlett recalled using gas on the Germans in his memoir,

> I received a telephone message saying that the projection had been successful. This probably meant that a certain number of men who hate the war, had nothing to do with starting it, and only want to get back to their wives and families, were even then suffering a lingering and most painful death. Yet I received this news with a

[61] London, IWM, Documents. 129, 'Private Papers of Robert Cude', 15 October 1915.
[62] Ibid., 22 February 1916.

> feeling of pleasure and at once turned over to go to sleep again. What brutes the war makes us![63]

Ashmead-Bartlett offers an interesting perspective on the war as he was only deployed in 1918, therefore in comparison his experience was limited. He demonstrated that when it came to winning the war it did not take some men long to adopt a callous attitude towards the death of the enemy, even if their death was horrific. Ashmead-Bartlett gives no indication in his memoir that he was ever on the receiving end of gas, a reason perhaps for his lack of compassion for the enemy. With the war drawing to a close and the end of the stalemate, this type of fighting seemed to have the power to brutalise men faster, as Ashmead-Bartlett acknowledged it had done to him. With victory coming closer every day men perhaps became more hardened to the death of the Germans, as each loss or success on the field brought them one step closer to victory. As the *Chronicles of N.Z.E.F.* commented in June 1918, 'The Division is in splendid spirit, though sad sometimes at the death of fine comrades, takes its troubles philosophically.'[64] References to hardening in the face of death in trench journals were rare, beyond the articles which were written with the express purpose or boosting morale after losses or through satirical and humorous articles. The editorial as a whole was written to spin all losses within N.Z.E.F. for the duration of the war into a positive. Although it acknowledged that soldiers were saddened by their losses, with the end at hand, men were encouraged to rationalise them as necessary for victory. This suggests the second half of 1918 represented a change in attitude as the Germans retreated and the allies gained the upper hand. Anxiety over mortality and feelings of grief were superseded by the increasingly tangible possibility of survival.

However, a certain amount of compassion did exist for the enemy, which may have been surprising to those in the civilian sphere. E. Fairbrother recorded an incident where he ventured into no man's land to bring in a German soldier, 'Go on listening post with 6 more of our fellows and it is a dangerous job as it is only a few yards away from the Germans. There is a poor devil in front crying out for water and I believe he is a German, but no matter he is only human. I get permission and crawl out and bring him in.'[65] Fairbrother showed that some soldiers, whether the wounded was friend or

[63] Ashmead-Bartlett, *From the Somme to the Rhine,* p. 83.
[64] 'From the Editorial Bivvy', *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F.: Records of Matters Concerning the Troops and Gazette of Patriotic Effort*, 7 June 1918, p. 195.
[65] London, IWM, Documents. 8577, 'Private Papers of E. Fairbrother', 9 October 1914.

foe, would risk their life to prevent another man's suffering. Significantly, he recorded this incident in October 1914, suggesting that professional soldiers of the original BEF were not all hardened to the suffering of the individual German soldier. Although this is in contradiction to the evidence presented from Richards, as chapter three will explore his sense of hardening was not fixed. Fairbrother was very close to the German line when he left the relative safety of the trenches to save the life of a man who was his enemy. He showed that soldiers had the ability to retain their humanity in the most difficult of circumstances and were not always interested in the body count of the enemy. Moreover, this man, if brought in for treatment to save his life would still be taken out of the war as a prisoner and did not have to die if it could be helped. Although in part this could have been considered professional curtesy rather than an absence of hardening, it is Fairbrother's lack of concern for the nationality of the wounded man that demonstrates his humanity prevailed over any sense of self-preservation which normally accompanied indifference.

The Soldier's Façade

Hardening to death, therefore, manifested itself in a number of different situations and reactions. Evidence for its existence can be found in soldiers' day-to-day need to survive, their adoption of fatalism as a way to process the omnipresence of death and attitudes towards the enemy. As already indicated, hardening to the realities of war was a fragile state and could not always be achieved or endured. Some soldiers, through their personal testimonies, recorded the moment where their indifference to the dead did not last or was never reached in the first place. Hardening towards the realities of war was essential if men were to survive mentally and protect their morale. However, it was easier for a man to look upon the unknown dead and feel apathetic towards the fallen, than it was to see the dead of their regiment or battalion and remain unmoved. Stephen Graham, as a journalist, was well poised to record and analyse the attitudes of the men he served beside. He recorded in his memoir,

> The greatest number of soldiers had become indifferent to the horror of death, even if more intensely alive than before to the horror of dying themselves. In many an extraordinary callousness towards dead bodies was bred. They would kick a dead body, rifle the pockets of the dead, strip of clothing, make jokes about the facial expressions, see wagon wheels go over corpses, and never be

> haunted by a further thought of it. Only if the dead were British, or if it were known to you, the dead body of some one in the same regiment, there seemed to be a sadness and a coldness, a sort of presentiment that you yourself would perish before the end and lie thus in trench or battle-field, cold and inanimate, soaked with rain, uncared for, lost to home and dear ones.[66]

Graham highlights, that given the large number of dead men confronted whilst serving, it was impossible for some men not to become indifferent to bodies of soldiers they shared no bond or identity with. Conversely, due to fear of their own mortality, as Roper has argued, the shattered body at the bottom of the trench reminded men of the violent fate they potentially faced.[67] Moreover, if it was a soldier they did not know but could actively identify with due to a shared interest, this would make the possibility of their own demise more real. Soldiers came to understand that they could not survive the war if they became haunted by every deceased soldier they saw, no matter how horrific or macabre the scene was. This brutal indifference did not only come from a place of utility but a hatred for the dead as a constant reminder of the fragility of life. Even behind this façade, even as death penetrated a man's own regiment, his grief was still punctuated by this hatred. Hardening, therefore, became an important state to all soldiers as the war went on, even if it was fallible and often broken by bereavement.

As Graham demonstrated, soldiers at the front were aware that their responses to death could be varied based on who the dead represented to them. Outside of those they had close bonds with, whose deaths affected their day-to-day lives, they could learn to be unaffected by it. However, as Richard Holmes asserts, 'denial is a fragile armour'; a man's understanding that he was hardened to the sights around him could be easily broken by the death of a close friend,[68] as W. Clarke revealed,

> You became hardened in the trenches, you got fed up with being frightened and hungry, cold, wet and miserable and often you didn't care whether you survived. Seeing so many corpses just become another sight. Often when you moved in the trenches you trod and slipped on rotting flesh. Your feelings only come to the fore when it was a special mate who had been killed or wounded and then it would quickly go away.[69]

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[66] Graham, *A Private in the Guards* (London: MacMillan, 1919), p. 239.
[67] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 245.
[68] Holmes, *Acts of War*, p 181.
[69] London, IWM, Documents. 1377, 'Private Papers of W. Clarke'.

Clarke suggested that there was more to being generally hardened to war than just living with the dead. Men became overwhelmed and desensitised to the general living conditions of the trenches. Miserable with the constant fear of death and uncomfortable nature of life at the front, a lack of regard for personal survival may come across as indifference. Whereas in reality, as the exploration of fatalism demonstrated, men needed to find ways to cope with the nature of war. The volume of dead and decomposing body parts, often with a lack of identifiable features, became just another sight of modern warfare. As Clarke's testimony suggested, it was only when a close friend was lost that men were affected by what they had witnessed. Unfortunately, due to the nature of life at the front, as with everything else listed by Clarke, men had to move on. Graham and Clarke both demonstrated that hardening could never be completely achieved, as men could not remain indifferent to the loss of soldiers they had formal or informal bonds with.

Curiosity as a natural human response to encountering death for the first time has already been considered. Even as men experienced more of the war, some men did not lose this curiosity when it came to the dead and dying. Due to the nature of death in Britain in the early twentieth century, and the ages of the men who were serving, many were unlikely to have seen a dead body before. Furthermore, they would not have seen the types of injury sustained and levels of decomposition found at the front, not to mention the curious attitudes in which many of the dead lay. As Roland Fielding confided to his wife,

> The dead seemed to have a strange and subtle fascination for the living. I noticed that at Loos. When we were advancing over the old fought-over ground the whole Company would turn and look each time we passed a dead body. Perhaps they were thinking that they might soon be looking like that themselves; but they would not touch the bodies.[70]

Fielding reflects many of the concepts which were present in other soldiers' accounts. This curiosity was not based on callous voyeuristic tendencies that the war supposedly created in soldiers. Instead, the obsession with studying the dead which they passed in alarming abundance was a reminder of their own potential fate. As previously

[70] Fielding, *War Letters to a Wife*, 12th October 1915.

outlined, it was not just death itself men wanted to understand but the ways in which they could die that attracted them to the dead.

Fielding ensured there was no misunderstanding in his letter; men were not degrading the dead with their staring, they had such a fearful respect for them that they did not want to touch them. The tension between curiosity and repulsion of the dead is evident in the memoir of Max Plowman, 'the living men have an innate respect for the dead and avoid touching a corpse, or even walking over it if possible.'[71] Responses to death that may have seemed alien or cold-hearted in the civilian sphere, were motivated by the idea of the hardened soldier which was culturally constructed during the war and has endured ever since. Instead, Fielding and Plowman demonstrate that the dead commanded a level of respect, boarding on sanctity. This may have had, for some men, underpinnings in superstition or for others, fear based on that fact their own mortality was being demonstrated to them, that physically coming into contact with the dead made it more real. Whatever reason the individual had for this response, men did not treat the dead of their own army with disrespect unless they needed their possessions or the corpse was needed to ensure their own survival.

The state of hardening as a façade is difficult to identify in soldiers accounts, particularly if they were not recorded in an emotive lexicon and it is important not to confuse other emotions with those of indifference. Curiosity is a response to a wounded friend or comrade which is often recorded by soldiers amongst other emotions and reactions. Stanley records in his diary in early 1915,

> …there lies poor H with his head among the broken glass of the wardrobe mirror, lips thick, his face pallid with death and a bloody mess oozing from his head. There is no doubt that his life has passed from his earthly frame, poor chap. We seem clumsy in his presence, with the cold sun gleaming on his face. Well we must remove his pay book and personal belongings to send to his parents with a short letter telling them death was instantaneous and there could have been no pain. We drag him under cover and a bullet splutters through the wardrobe, a warning to take cover. My comrade undoes the buttons of his breast pocket. I watch his face. It is gruesome but I cannot remove my eyes. His lips move and his eyes roll, a gurgling groan comes from deep in his throat. My comrade nearly throws a fit of fright and looks to see if I am playing a trick on him. He glares

[71] Mark VII, *A Subaltern on the Somme in 1916* (London and Nashville: The Imperial War Museum, Department of Printed Books and The Battery Press, 1996), p.159.

> at me. Another gurgling rattle and our eyes nearly protrude from their sockets. Can this be the death rattle we have heard about?[72]

Stanley demonstrated here the innate voyeuristic tendency of human nature. The scene is violent and horrific but he could not remove his gaze from the stricken soldier. He also had his curiosity peaked by hearing the 'death rattle'. Even as early as 1915 soldiers were aware of the impact of a violent head wound on the human body. It seems the death rattle was something that soldiers were curious about, something of interest to them, but it was also disturbing. It also indicated to the men that despite the catastrophic head injury the soldier had sustained he was still alive, even though they were preparing procedures to register his death and inform his family. It meant that his death was not instantaneous. Within the curiosity Stanley feels towards the sight of the stricken man, the passage is littered with indications that this did not reflect indifference towards death, or that this kind of death was a matter of fact situation. He described H in a way that makes him seem angelic. They feel out of place in the presence of his stricken body, as if they are incapable of the reverence required in the presence of a mortally wounded comrade.

It was not always possible for soldiers to cover the slipping of their façade, and after a difficult time in the line evidence that soldiers' hardening had been broken was clear to see. Even the stoutest and best divisions could not withstand what they witnessed. As Cude outlines in his diary in February 1916, 'It must be hell itself in the line as we can soon ascertain from the small steady stream of wounded coming down. Hardened as the 7th Div are in attacking, the last 2 days have left their mark on the faces of the men.'[73] It was understood amongst soldiers that every man had his threshold of violence and there was only so much fighting an individual could withstand. As many accounts attest to, the impact of a battle could be read from a man's face. A man could repress an overtly emotional response but his suffering was almost always obvious from the way he looked. Men who were affected by their experiences in the line and had their façade of hardness breached were not looked down upon but were, on some level, pitied by those who did not take part in the attack. This was because the men who witnessed soldiers returning from the line would have to join the fighting at some point, either in the same offensive or the next. It

[72] Stanley, *Grandad's War*, p. 25.
[73] IWM, Documents. 129, Robert Cude, 22 February 1916.

demonstrated to them the brutality of what they would face up the line, particularly if the unit affected was one that was generally considered battle hardened. The hardening and expected hardening of the soldier was an important military process. However, the breaking through of this state as unacceptable or impossible is a civilian structure imposed on soldiers, it was not one present in the martial sphere, where if a man had been through 'hell', he was not expected to hide it.

Therefore, the façades men created could not always be maintained. Those who were on the fringes of the infantryman's experience and who were not soldiers, such as Steadman, were in a position to observe how combat impacted on the men who survived. Whilst on the Somme in 1916, Steadman wrote in a letter to his wife, 'We passed the kilts coming out – two battalions I could not help wondering what a lot they had been through during their four months of holding the line here. The men looked grave and stern; you almost feel what a lot they had suffered.'[74] The very process of being through an offensive outwardly changed men's attitudes to war, hardened to war by their experience of battle but broken down by their losses. Those who saw men before and after their baptism of fire were able to see how the intensity of battle could irrevocably change men. It is undeniable that men had to learn to become hardened to battle and its assault on the senses and the emotions, that they were able to put their losses behind them, but it obviously irrevocably changed the soldiers' outlook on war. Later chapters will go on to consider how these experiences affected soldiers on a personal level, as well as creating communities in mourning.

It is important to add balance to this idea about a war where death was random, and feelings surrounding death at the front were not binary nor universal. Burrage records in his memoirs about the death of one of his officers:

> Then there is Trewaren, a Cornishman, about the most unpopular of us all. He was a Lance-Corporal in England, and used to try to bluster like a sergeant-major. He worshipped spit and polish and used to suck up to Captain Jinks in England by inventing new stints for cleaning up. He dropped his stripe when coming out to France, and now most of us won't speak to him. He is to die bloody – for which I, even now, can feel no honest regret. Since most of us had to die, it was just as well he should be one.[75]

[74] IWM, Documents. 18927, Major F. St. J. Steadman, 13 July 1916.
[75] Ex-Private X, *War is War*, p. 58.

This illustrates why the best and the brightest trope seemed to endure throughout the war and after. Through his comments Burrage suggests that men who were not well thought of in life were not well thought of in death. Through his stark and brutal comments Burrage suggests that as men were to die, there is no question about this, then it might as well be the men who were disliked. This goes some way to indicate why men recorded a small handful of deaths with great emotion in their writings, whereas many were merely just reported as having happened. Not only were some men not heroes they were not respected by the men with whom they served and therefore not all deaths were mourned. These are not feelings which demonstrate the callousness of soldiers, but are instead a reflection of human nature.

Finally, soldiers who served in the trenches were not unaware that an image of him as being hardened to death had culturally been constructed in the civilian sphere, not as a positive connotation of strength of character but as a negative outcome of their war experience. John Charles Barrie reflected on this in his memoir, 'They were used to seeing men killed, and went on with the job as of nothing had happened. Though I knew they never grew callous and hard-hearted as most people think, they simply had to put it out of their minds, else they would never be able to carry on.'[76] Barrie suggested that men did not deal with the deaths of their comrades by becoming hardened emotionally or from oversaturation of witnessing the dead and dying. Instead he argues that, as this chapter has already covered, they simply learnt to forget what had happened, or at least they understood the pointlessness of dwelling on it when they had a job to do. As Barrie demonstrated it was a mistaken understanding that soldiers had become 'callous' and did not care about their losses.

Hardening therefore, is a complex and complicated state to define and identify in soldiers' accounts, both contemporary and reflective. It was an outlook, often involuntary in nature, but of great significance to the Combat Grief Cycle. Although the understanding of a soldier's indifference to death and killing came partly from a social construction formed in the civilian sphere in relation to the expectations surrounding martial values, its very presence in soldiers' accounts demonstrated that

[76] John Charles Barrie, *Memoirs of an Anzac: A First-Hand Account by an AIF Officer in the First World War* (Victoria and London: Scribe Publications, 2015), p. 134.

callousness towards death was necessary for the soldiers' emotional and physical survival. The construction of this state, both real and fallible, alongside society's expectations of how soldiers should behave, meant that where they did grieve it was compounded by the feeling that it went unacknowledged. This led to soldiers suffering 'disenfranchised grief' and necessitated the public admission of themselves as a group in mourning. As chapters three and four will demonstrate, no defence was strong enough to withstand the pain created by intense bereavements. This chapter has shown that hardening is not a straightforward term to use in relation to the soldier's experience and should instead be approached with trepidation as it denotes many complexities and ambiguities concerning the war experience. This is not least a result of the complicated web of individual experiences it is used to identify, as well as the fluidity of this phase of the Combat Grief Cycle. In order for soldiers to understand its utility they must suffer a bereavement or be forced to consider the reality of their mortality, two events which created a moment of rupture in the next phase of the cycle. It was not a fixed or achievable state for many and remained fallible until a façade was impossible to maintain.

Chapter Three

Individual and Shared Grief:

Bereavement as a Moment of Rupture

The rupture phase of the Combat Grief Cycle represented the moment a soldier's sense of hardening towards death, however fallible, gave way to grief and allowed disillusionment to set in. The previous chapter explored the complexities and nuances of soldiers' indifference, or perceived callousness, in relation to the dead and dying. Contact with death was one of the 'central traumas' for the men who survived the war and, as Michael Roper has argued, it was not simply about the recognition that the dead reminded soldiers of their own mortality. It was also the fear of a 'premature end' that soldiers struggled with.[1] Antoine Prost has suggested that men could be overwhelmed by a 'particular violent shock', with Pat Jalland acknowledging that soldiers were particularly vulnerable to the loss of a close friend.[2] Bereavements created by the deaths of friends provided one of the principal causes of the rupture moment. As Robert Lifton has argued, adults struggle to process their bereavements as they are able to understand what the future would have been like if the deceased had survived.[3] This meant that soldiers were able to conceptualise what their war experience would have been like if their friend had survived. Soldiers were unable to turn to their friends when support was needed most; during periods of intense grief. The break with hardening was not always caused by the loss of a personal friend and could be brought about by the death of an officer or an NCO.

This chapter and the next will consider the various interactions with death which broke through a soldier's hardening. This process, in relation to the loss of

[1] Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 248.
[2] Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society* (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1992), p. 22. Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 20.
[3] Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 189.

individuals often outside of offensive action, was not influenced by the cohort to which a soldier belonged and the timing of the break bore no relation to when a soldier had been deployed. The impact of a bereavement at the front could be immediate or delayed, with the initial shock and subsequent breakdown varying in intensity and longevity. After this, soldiers would become disillusioned with the ideas surrounding the notion of glorious sacrifice on the battlefield. Most men would continue to fight on in a state of mourning despite their inability to return to a state of indifference to death, and only a small handful would never recover.

This chapter explores the different kinds of bereavements soldiers experienced within the confines of their military communities set out in chapter one, as well as how soldiers used writing as an aid to processing and coming to terms with losses. The act of writing, both at the time and retrospectively, represented a space where soldiers came to realise what they had lost. Through recording the name of the dead or how their friends had died; men created sites of memory and memorials to the fallen. They became a place where soldiers could reconstruct their friends and their final moments, a way to come terms with what they had lost.[4] Rank influenced how ORs and officers responded to the death of close personal friends within the same rank, as well as how they came to terms with their bereavements. Although the patterns of language applied across all groups, with some differences relating to class and education, officers and ORs processed their bereavements in different ways. Officers had a more complex range of relationships with their men and their batman, with losses outside of their rank affected by the formalities of the military structure. ORs mourned for their officers through concepts of comradeship as bonds of close personal friendship did not exist between officers and their men.

Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter have argued that soldiers were still able to interpret the death of friends and comrades as a 'personal loss' within the vast number of dead at the front, as well as being able to determine losses as 'worthwhile sacrifice'.[5] This work argues that this was not possible in response to the loss of close

[4] For studies on the importance of writing for soldiers see: Vanda Wilcox. '"Weeping Tears of Blood": Exploring Italian Soldiers' Emotions in the First World War', *Modern Italy*, 17:2 (2012), p. 173. Lilie Chauliaraki, 'From War Memoirs to Milblogs: Language change in the witnessing of war', *Discourse and Society*, 25:5 (2014), p. 602. Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), pp. 43-4.
[5] Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter, 'Bereaved and Aggrieved: Combat Motivation and the Ideology of sacrifice in the First World War', *Historical Research*, 83:219 (2010), p. 159.

friends but was certainly present when men grieved for an officer. Rather than offering comfort to the bereaved, it created negative emotions as the deceased came to embody the best qualities of the battalion through their sacrifice on the field of battle. Therefore, the death of an officer represented more than just the loss of an individual but the destruction of unit's identity which had been invested in him. Soldiers had to navigate a number of losses during their time at the front, from close personal friends and comrades to the death of their beloved commanding officers of various rank. Although each led to different feelings of grief, personal and shared, they all had the power to permanently break through a soldier's hardening. Bereavements of this magnitude had to be mediated either through the creation of personal testimony or acts of shared mourning.

Private Soldiers' Grief for Friends

The loss of a friend was one of the pivotal rupture moments of the Combat Grief Cycle as sooner or later all soldiers would have to confront this reality of war. The death of a friend in battle can only be conceived through the idea of combat grief as it was a violent death dealt to a youthful and vibrant man. Stormont Gibbs, in his reflection on losing friends for the first time, highlights the shocking realisation that soldiers had to endure that not only were they themselves not impervious to harm but nor were their friends,

> The next shock of the war came to me – the next experience – the death of one's friends. It didn't seem possible. I jumped out of the trench and ran forward into no man's land "Come back sir, you can't do any good", from an old man in the trench behind. I came back. Wounded they might be but there they lie until they died, for no living man could go to their help – certainly not the only officer but two left in the battalion – just the colonel, Tack, Rush and I – all the rest had gone, even the doctor. I got back in the trench and cried until I couldn't see.[6]

He seemed to have no aversion to recording the fact that he had 'cried' for a substantial amount of time. Tears in relation to a bereavement seem, in this case, to be a natural response, especially for a man forced to learn the difficult lessons of war for the first

[6] Captain Stormont Gibbs, *From the Somme to the Armistice: The Memories of Captain Stormont Gibbs MC*, ed. by Richard Devonald-Lewis (Norwich: Gildon books 1992), p. 43.

time. The initial contact with death, as experience of loss grew, meant that it was no longer an abstract concept and as Holmes asserts it loosened the hold on the 'illusion of immortality'.[7] This was a particularly difficult lesson for young troops to learn not long after deployment to the front. Most young men believed themselves, and therefore their friends, invincible. This experience was also compounded by having to leave men to die, without comfort and without aid, as it would have been foolish to risk his own life. One of the hardest lessons for the soldier of modern war to learn, was that even when their friends were dying alone, they could not be helped.

The rupture of the Combat Grief Cycle was not the same for all men. For some it occurred as the result of the shock of one bereavement and for others it was the impact of one loss that the sufferer considered to be one too many. For some soldiers their hardening towards death at the front was undone over a period of time as they lost friends continually. Alfred McLelland Burrage recorded in his memoir,

> This was the last straw. I was still pretty badly rattled and, and I began to cry like a baby. A damned funny sight I must have looked. Oh, Dave, are you really gone? Shall we have no more meals and drinks together?... Whatever the change you have gone somewhere else, and here am I, a filthy caf, with tears running down my dirty cheeks.[8]

Burrage's memoir, *War is War*, was anti-war in nature and it is unsurprising that themes such as this appear in his writing. It is perhaps not necessary to question the validity of his experience as it was based on the events which took place during his time in the British Army. Burrage demonstrated, by publicly admitting his own violent emotional reaction to the loss of a friend, that these responses to bereavement were not out of the ordinary but common place and acceptable in the military. Sobbing and denial were key indicators of a deep and painful grief, their presence here showed that Burrage faced his own difficulties in coming to terms with the loss of a friend. The deceased was clearly a companion who was a central component to Burrage's ability to find enjoyment in the mundane daily existence of the front. Although Burrage's principal aim with this work was to encourage pacifism through revealing the horrors

[7] Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), p. 198.
[8] Ex-Private X, *War is War* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1930), p. 148.

of warfare, in part this also represented a cathartic exercise, as he attempted to process bereavements he suffered during his service.

The private soldiers' deep sense of grief was not restricted to those who had a long service and had an extended amount of time in which to emotionally unravel. Men who exclusively served in 1918 went through the same set of emotions. John William Drury recalled about the loss of his friend after his first time up the line in 1918,

> I asked about Tommy, was he really killed? "yes – all by the same shell – I'm sorry – he was your pal wasn't he"? I did not want to answer, being too upset at the time and I felt very down hearted, for Tommy in 8 months had grown dear and was more than just a pal. I knew how I should miss him. What was his was mine, and we shared everything – parcels, cigarettes, money, even letters – and troubles too![9]

Drury was overcome with grief and recorded feelings of denial over the loss of Tommy. By not answering a question concerning his connection with Tommy he demonstrated the need, in some respects, to supress his emotions. He stressed the strength of the bond he and Tommy had formed, even stronger than 'pals'. Drury demonstrated how significant the relationship could be between individual soldiers as they came completely to rely on each other. He went on to write, 'The next few days were unreal to me as if I could not bring myself to grasp the fact that I had now no service "chum".'[10] This showed the impact that the destruction of a bond, such as the one shared by Drury and Tommy, could have on the survivor if one man was killed. He was thrown into a deep sense of mourning for what he had lost, especially as he did not have the same kind of friendship with any other soldiers. It should not be underestimated how significant the loss of a close friend could be to individual morale. Drury could not just go out and find another 'service chum', as these special bonds between men were often formed from the very first days of training. One of the most difficult aspects for soldiers was to lose a close friend and not be with them in their final moments, as this meant that they could not go through the stages required to prepare for a bereavement.[11] This is usually an idea used to consider grief on the Home Front but the absence of a body, or seeing a body, could make it just as difficult for

[9] London, IWM, Documents. 20852, 'Private Papers of J. W. Drury'.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18,* p. 215.

soldiers to accept that a friend had been killed. As explorations of burial will go on to consider, the absence of a corpse for the performance of even rudimentary interment could have serious consequences for the acceptance of a bereavement. After the war, when men still remained unrecovered, or had been completely obliterated as in the case of Tommy, memoirs were a place where ex-servicemen could attempt to create a proxy-burial site for their fallen friends.

It should also be acknowledged that some soldiers who served during the war were more susceptible to a range of emotional responses than others, due to their personality traits. This led some men to construct a personal hierarchy of responses to loss which measured how deeply they were affected by their bereavements. Turner recorded in his memoir: 'In the past, deaths had saddened, sickened, or had merely left me unaffected; Milligan's death roused me to a pitch of fury. This mere kid, so full of life, so happy – blasted into eternity in the high noon of his existence. The bastards. The Utter Bastards!'[12] This particular response demonstrates a number of complexities in responses to death. Turner was in many ways an interesting character. Despite his relatively short war experience he came to see himself as an old hand quite quickly. He was not afraid to record the various emotional responses he had to witnessing death throughout his service. Moreover, he can also be identified as a conscript, suggesting that men who were compelled into service experienced the same range of emotions as volunteers. He showed that an individual soldier could be both affected by certain deaths and unaffected by others. This demonstrates that for some soldiers the hardening phase was fluid and contained no extreme responses to death. However, it was the death of a new recruit, because he was green, that effectively caused the transition from hardening to rupture in the Combat Grief Cycle. His moment of rupture is represented by anger and a desire to extract revenge on the enemy, a feeling no other bereavement had caused.

At times of shared loss there were always those who felt particular bereavements more keenly than others, and soldiers demonstrated a social and emotional awareness of those who suffered more. Well-liked soldiers were always more generally mourned than those who were not. Baldwin observed on the death of a member of his battalion, 'To the sorrow of every one of us, the gallant soul of Bill

[12] London, IWM, Documents. 4617, 'The Private Papers of A. J. Turner'.

Skerry took its flight to his Maker about ten o'clock that morning. A small shell ricocheting from a stunted willow tree simply tore him to pieces… Bill! one [*sic*] of our best beloved mates... The sorrow of his chum, Fitzpatrick, was overwhelming; nothing could comfort him for days.'[13] Baldwin intimates that he had, at the very least, been one of Bill's 'mates' and that he was, along with all those who knew him deeply saddened by his death. As an NCO he seemed to have developed close bonds with the men in his charge, if not friendships with some. Baldwin did not make his own 'sorrow' the focus of this extract, instead he drew attention to the grief of Skerry's 'chum' Fitzpatrick. As with loss in the civilian sphere there is a hierarchy of bereaved, with those who were closest to the deceased having their pain acknowledged above all others. The community which sustained the loss offers understanding and consolation to Fitzpatrick as he is the one most affected by Bill's death, whilst acknowledging and processing their own grief.

Previous work on the Somme has looked in great detail at how devastating comforting a dying man could be for those who survived. The example used to examine these ideas was Giles Eyre, and an incident during battle where a fellow soldier and himself comforted their close friend who was mortally wounded.[14] One of the most difficult aspects of death in war was watching a man die, whether he was a friend or a stranger, and knowing that nothing could be done to sustain him.[15] Not only this, soldiers would often have to offer words of comfort to men they knew could not be saved. This individual response to the loss of a friend was not unique to the Battle of the Somme. E. P. F. Lynch recorded a similar event to Eyre but instead it occurred at the Battle of Messines in 1917,

> Longun… walks up to me in a dazed sort of way. "Come here". His voice breaks. He's out of calmness for the first time since I've known him… there lying against the back of the trench is poor little Jacko dying. Big terrified eyes flickering above a strangely blue-tinged frightened face… His right thigh is a great, black, blood-edge hole of mangled flesh from which protrude pieces of reddish bone. His thin little girlish lips are twitching. I can't speak. I want to cheer

[13] Sergeant Harold Baldwin, *Holding the Line* (Chicago: A C McClurg & Co, 1918), pp. 162-3.
[14] Analysis of Giles Eyre's testimony has been published in Natasha Silk, 'Witnesses to Death: Soldiers on the Western Front', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Artistic and Cultural Responses to War Since 1914: The British Isles, the United States and Australasia*, ed. by Martin Kerby, Margret Baguley and Janet Macdonald (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 156. For Extracts from Giles Eyre see Appendix One.
[15] John Ellis, *Eye Deep in Hell* (London: Croomhelm, 1976), p. 114. Roper, *The Secret Battle*, pp. 263-4.

> him up, to make him believe he'll be alright, but I can't speak… Two frail little boyish hands paw towards me. I grab them and Longun's great hands close over ours and I feel Longun's hands trembling above mine as I hold Jacko's two. "You fellows been… been good… to me – ole man… ole…" And he shudders, his brave little shoulders droop. "Tell Daddy I found it, Mummy. Ole man, ole man, ole…". And we grab him as he falls and lower him down, dead… I wasn't able to speak to our little mate and can't speak now. I look at Longun and realise I've seen murder in a man's face. Furrows line his cheeks, and his eyes are all pupils and filled with tears. One more last look at the dead boy's face I cover it with his helmet and turn away. My jaws feel that they will lock and snap, they are tightening, so I rush back to my post, take a look over the top and hide my face in my arms there across the parapet as the tears blind me to all. I see Jacko as I've seen him the last few minutes, see a dark night in the snow of the Somme… God help you little pal![16]

Paul Connerton argues that those who have to comfort the dying become 'hesitant' and unsure of what they should say.[17] Eyre's account of comforting a dying friend differs from Lynch as he was able to offer words of reassurance to the wounded man. However, this was done in the sense that he was also trying to comfort himself at the same time, convincing himself that his friend would survive.[18] On the other hand, Lynch was so overcome with feelings of helplessness that he could only offer comfort through touch; in mute acceptance that nothing could be done to save his friend. The intrusion on the senses was an important aspect of comforting the dying but in the accounts of both Lynch and Eyre the reconstruction of the experience, particularly in the case of touch, was carefully managed.[19] It was recorded in a way that represented a kind and intimate communing between friends at the moment of death, rather than a gruesome and unwanted invasion of the personal sanctum. This allowed the dying man to become the primary focus of the memory and not the violence and horror of them being killed, with a secondary focal point the shared grief between the surviving friends.

As was the case for Rodwell's death in Eyre's account, Jacko's death took place during an advance and was recorded many years later in a memoir. Jacko was

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[16] E. P. F. Lynch, *The Experiences of an Infantryman in France, 1916-1918,* ed. by Will Davies (London: Transworld Publishers, 2006), p. 155.
[17] Paul Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 79.
[18] Silk, 'Witnesses to Death', p.156.
[19] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

killed by a dud shell and had suffered a violent and grievous injury but lived long enough for friends to say their goodbyes. Although it is true that adrenaline can cause the mortally wounded to live for longer than naturally possible, it is difficult to conclude (particularly in the case of Eyre where his friend had suffered severe facial injuries) that goodbyes which seemed to last minutes would have been feasible. It is more likely that their friends died in a matter of seconds before they could have been offered comfort and goodbyes exchanged. The memoir then became a place where these moments could be reimagined and redesigned by those who survived. In Lynch's case, it may have been that even in the years after the war, he still did not know what to say to his dying friend. It was a bereavement which had caused him and Longun deep and lasting grief.

Conversely, a separate element existed in which the survivor was able to speak for the dead and reconstruct his last moments as a memorial to the fallen. Lynch, through his account, was able to construct for his friend a 'Good Death', one where Jacko could be afforded his final words of gratitude to his friends, as well as the presence of his parents in his thoughts. The reliving and recording of the deaths of close friends, along with the intense emotional responses they caused, are a reflection of Lifton's concept of the 'death imprint'.[20] Jalland has argued that bearing witness to the violent death of a friend locked 'men into the encounter, impairing mourning and subsequent civilian life'.[21] Therefore, the recording of deaths in memoirs was an attempt to reconstruct the soldier who had died in a way which was easier for the bereaved to process. By recording in great detail the final moments of a friend's life, it provided a way to break through the 'death imprint'. Even if the account was not accurate, it allowed survivors to finally lay their friends to rest and process their own grief away from the violence which had impaired their mourning. It also discharged a sense of moral debt as the dead could not speak for themselves and was created by a sense of guilt, not at having survived but at having been unable to save their friends. The living settled this obligation by recreating the fallen in words and preserving the memory of the dead in perpetuity, ensuring they were not forgotten. Moreover, the soldier was remembered as a friend and an individual, not just another of the vast legion of war dead.

[20] Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, p. 170.
[21] Jalland, *Death in War and Peace*, p. 28.

Officers' Grief for Fellow Officers

The patterns present in private soldiers' accounts were reflected in those of officers. The testimony of officers dominated the published and unpublished accounts from the war and are often the most eloquent testimony left behind. Officers, as ORs did, formed close bonds of friendship with those of the same rank and came to rely on their fellow officers for support. However, due to the nature of their rank and position in command their responses to loss sometimes varied. Not only did they lose friends but they often positioned the deceased within the war effort, seeing their deaths as both a personal and a military blow.

As the above account by Lynch demonstrated, an overwhelming sense of bereavement made some men want to hide their emotions and grief. This was not a reaction confined to ORs but also occurred for officers. T. L. C. Heald recorded, 'The worst day of my life. Upset me frightfully. Luckily I managed to get into the woods by myself. It does seem hard that poor Basil should be taken.'[22] Geoffrey Gorer suggests that as long as there have been social structures, traditionally people would remove themselves from the community for a specified amount of time to process their bereavement.[23] The concealment of emotions, particularly amongst upper class men, was not an abnormal response to a loss, especially in the immediate aftermath. The fact that soldiers, on a number of occasions, removed themselves from the company of their comrades to deal with their initial reaction was a common manifestation of grief. The recording of these moments in personal papers suggests men were not ashamed of the reactions they had to deaths. Furthermore, Heald demonstrated, along with the accounts of Burrage and Lynch, that tears were the first response to a loss and therefore represented the initial process of grieving. This means that writing about a bereavement and reactions to it was the second phase of acknowledgment and mourning. This is particularly true for Heald who recorded the death of Basil in his diary, making the loss real and beginning the mourning process by creating a written

[22] T. L. C Heald in *Subalterns of the Foot: The World War One Diaries of Officers of the Cheshire Regiment*, ed. by Anne Wolff (Worcestershire: Square One Publications, 1992), p. 57.
[23] Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief, and Mourning: In Contemporary Britain* (London: Cresset Press, 1965), p 51.

memorial to his friend. Some officers, in comparison to privates, started this process during the war as due to their class they were more likely to keep a diary.[24]

Men often needed a moment or a period of quiet reflection away from combat to acknowledge their losses. In contrast to the most powerful accounts by private soldiers, Eyre and Lynch whose rupture moment came during battle. It seems that officers more than privates needed time away from danger to realise what they had lost. Once a soldier had been hit by the full force of an individual bereavement the effect could incapacitate them from continuing with their duties. David Cannadine suggests soldiers were initially unable to come to terms with their loss and any immediate feelings of numbness, or inability to accept a loss, would eventually be replaced by a more emotional response.[25] Second Lieutenant W. R. H. Brown recorded in his memoir, 'I now felt the effects of the shock I had received when Herbert Bunce was killed. I could not sleep at all and became quite ill. I was therefore sent to hospital at Gezaincourt, where I remained for a week or two.'[26] Grief manifested itself in a number of different ways at the front; some men broke down in tears and others recorded deaths with stoicism. For some men the shock of losing a close friend could be so great that their motivation to fight could be destroyed, creating a grief, in some cases, so powerful it psychically made men ill. Brown had been involved in heavy fighting on the Somme and had not only lost his close friend Herbert Bunce but had also lost a number of others.

Brown was not the only soldier who suffered feelings of sickness when grieving the loss of a friend. Captain C. Weld wrote, 'Feel absolutely worn out, tired and sick. Rowan's death has worried me a great deal. My first experience of losing a real pal.'[27] Chapter two explored how the first contact with death began the hardening process and led soldiers to realise what death in war really meant. As the first death a soldier experienced was not always that of a close friend, when soldiers did

[24] Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 48. Meyer argues that keeping a diary was predominantly a middle-class pursuit. Officers through the course of the war were often drawn from the middle and upper-classes of British society. The composition of the army in relation to class is explored by Gary 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, 2000).
[25] David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. by Joachim Whaley (London: Europa, 1981), p. 208.
[26] IWM, Documents. 4566, 2nd Lieutenant W. R. H. Brown.
[27] IWM, Documents. 16651, Captain C. Weld, 26 September 1915.

subsequently suffer a personal bereavement they would have to confront a new set of emotions. Although Weld's account is vague, he insinuated that the death of a close friend had made him sick with worry. Here he may have used 'worried' as an alternative to grief but it may not have been clear to him exactly what emotions he was feeling. Furthermore, he may have been making reference here to the realisation of his own mortality in the wake of losing a man he had a close connection to, thus making his own possible fate more real.

Although most officers reflected the same reactions to death as ORs, their grief was one of complex and compound emotions. Principally, and often the first overriding thought, was for their own bereavement but their loss was intensified by an understanding of how the death of an officer could affect the war effort and military efficiency. Fraser wrote, 'Have finished the reports on the battle and started on the recommendations. The outstanding feature was the really splendid work of the section commanders who have fully justified their training. But it's sad the good lads we have lost, and Minty and Crichton are difficult fellows to replace. One misses them at every turn.'[28] Death in war, particularly that of a good leader, could feel contradictory to those officers who had survived. If they felt that an officer(s), such as in Fraser's case, had performed as expected and had died leading their men well, then they forfeited their life in the cause of honour and duty. If they had died honourably on the battlefield it should have brought those who survived comfort. However, it was the element of friendship at the front which forced out ideas relating to glorious sacrifice which was supposed to bring comfort. Officers came to miss the companionship of fallen officers over the military prowess that they had possessed.

Therefore, the strength of the personal loss could completely outweigh any sense of military value. The moment of rupture in the Combat Grief Cycle, as explored for other years of the war and for ORs, could directly affect fighting motivation. Even for soldiers with a long war record, 1918 could present them with the moment their hardening ruptured, as this was always a relative experience. Sidney Rogerson, a Brigade Staff Officer by this time, after a long service as an infantry officer and a

[28] William Fraser, *In Good Company: The First World War Letters and Diaries of the Hon. William Fraser, Gordon Highlanders*, ed. by David Fraser (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1990), p. 183.

company commander, recorded in his memoirs of the Battle of the Aisne in 1918 when his friend Prance was killed and another, Monroe, wounded:

> The moral effect of this blow was out of all proportion to its practical significance. Among so many casualties these two seemed to mark a turning-point. Looking back on the afternoon through the reversed telescope of the years, it is not difficult to see why. Up to that time our little family at Brigade Headquarters had come through unscathed. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, an irreparable gap had been made. The sun seemed to go in.[29]

Through the passing of time Rogerson came to a profound realisation about this traumatic moment of his war experience. He demonstrates vividly the difference between the loss of a friend compared to a comrade. His sense of loss was disproportionate to the military significance of these two men to the war effort and it was solely the impact of these losses on his personal experience which affected him. His combat grief was manifested in an understanding that he would never be happy again; they were his 'little family' and could not be replaced. Rogerson demonstrated that not only was writing an important process for the mediation of grief, the compiling of a memoir could also represent a journey of discovery. It was a place where men could finally realise and comprehend what their losses had represented, bringing to an end a period of impaired mourning the war had created.

The way in which men lost their lives, sometimes recklessly and wastefully, gave rise to a confused response. Officers responded to a number of factors with different emotions when men were killed, such as their quality as a soldier, what they had done during the war and how they died. Captain Lionel Ferguson recorded in his diary in July 1918,

> On reaching B.H.Q. I was informed "D" Company had telephoned up that Easterbrook had been hit in the head and was being brought to the aid station, situated in the village. I went up at once and saw the poor chap, but he was past help and died during the day. It was very sad for he was a good fellow and a Parson in Civil Life, but he was foolish to have gone out as he did, there was no reason for doing so.[30]

[29] Sidney Rogerson, *The Last of the Ebb: The Battle of the Aisne, 1918* (London: Greenhill Books, 2007), p. 73.
[30] IWM, Documents. 7154, Captain L. I. L. Ferguson, 13 July 1918.

Easterbrook was shot in the head checking a building thought to be occupied by Germans. Ferguson was affected here by conflicting feelings; he was sad because Easterbrook was a good man and a friend, had been a parson in civilian life and therefore had played a significant role in society. However, he lost his life doing something 'foolish' on the frontline and therefore his good character appeared to transcend the way in which he was killed. This represents an understanding of a wasted life. Easterbrook had not died making a heroic sacrifice for the war effort, which he would have been deemed capable of doing as a 'good' man. A good officer, like Easterbrook, was supposed to die leading the charge and encouraging their men. Events such as this prevented officers from applying the notions of a glorious sacrifice to bereavement, which had retained a level of significance to them as a way of easing the pain of their loss. A violent and pointless death created anger for Ferguson which could only be directed at his friend, thus creating conflicting emotions that made grieving a difficult process.

Furthermore, it was the pull of the idea of glorious sacrifice amongst officers which created a more complex landscape of combat grief within their rank. In most cases it was very similar and friends grieved for each other. Conversely, there were a small handful of cases which demonstrated that death and the way in which men died, could have a peculiar impact on how the bereaved were affected. One example which deserves consideration was the death of Colonel Best-Dunkley. The officers with whom he served were so deeply affected by his loss that one, Floyd, in the aftermath of the war decided to pen a book, *At Ypres with Colonel Best-Dunkley,* concerning his experiences of Best-Dunkley as well as his death. His initial thoughts of Best-Dunkley were incredibly negative as were those of the other officers within the regiment, and on the eve of their introduction to Passchendaele, where Best-Dunkley was to lose his life, Floyd recalled a conversation,

> …we all discussed the probability of his falling, and always thought the odds were in favour of his falling. And to be perfectly frank… nobody regretted the probability! If we had really known what kind of a man he was, if we had been able to fathom beneath the forbidding externals, we might have felt very differently about it… We only saw in him a man who was unscrupulous as his prototype Napoleon in all matters which affected his own personal ambition, the petty tyrant of the parade ground, who could occasionally be

> very agreeable, but of whom all were afraid or suspicious, because no one knew when his mood would change.[31]

There is nothing in the initial pages of his account which suggest that Best-Dunkley was liked by anyone, not even his men. He was not a bad officer in reputation or skill however, as Floyd asserted, he was only concerned, or so it seemed, with his own achievements. Best-Dunkley was determined to participate in the action at Passchendaele only in order to win the British Army's highest decoration. Floyd's account attests to the fact that the officers in question here were not close friends with Best-Dunkley, and as with all tyrannical officers, did not much care as to whether he lived or died.

Best-Dunkley was mortally wounded leading a charge at Passchendaele and Floyd recorded in his account, 'The crowning triumph came when he was awarded the Victoria Cross; though, to the great sorrow all, he did not live to know he had won it'.[32] This demonstrated a complexity in relationships amongst not only officers, but soldiers in general, when it came to the death of a man who was not considered well-liked. The power of honour and gallantry, specifically in winning the Victoria Cross, could in an instant change the response of a group of men to the death an individual. Watson and Porter have stipulated that acts of individual bravery, particularly those which were seen as instrumental to the survival of the immediate military unit, were significant during a war of random and anonymous death.[33] Had Best-Dunkley died without receiving his decoration for gallantry in a doomed advance that he had led, he probably would not have been mourned by those with whom he served. Due to the sacrifice Best-Dunkley made and the honour he had won, Floyd was felt compelled to document the event and in doing so created an enduring memorial. As the book was not a memoir as such, but the 'story' of Best-Dunkley, Floyd's motivation perhaps lay in making amends for what he had thought about Best-Dunkley in life; an attempt perhaps to alter other people's negative perceptions of Best-Dunkley and reconstruct the man as a true war hero. This demonstrated, in extremis, the significance of military prowess to officers at the moment of death. The way Best-Dunkley died caused the realisation that although Best-Dunkley had not been the kindest of officers, his loss

[31] Thomas Hope Floyd, *At Ypres With Best-Dunkley* (London: John Lane, 1920), chapter xiv.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Watson and Porter, 'Bereaved and Aggrieved', p. 159.

was a blow to the effectiveness of his battalion due to his prowess as a warrior. These were the parameters in which he was mourned and not as a personal friend.

One Man's Combat Grief: Captain Herbert Leland

Although the above examples demonstrate that grief broke through the defences of hardening, many did not become irrevocably psychologically damaged by their losses and, despite their grief, were able to continue the fight. Writing was a process that helped them to mediate their pain, but for a small handful of men the act of recording their experiences was not enough to ensure their mental survival. One soldier who left an incredibly detailed account was Captain Herbert Leland. Throughout his war service he wrote letters to his wife to preserve his war experience. These exceptionally frank and honest letters tell the story of man who struggled to come to terms with multiple bereavements at the front and was ultimately invalided out of the war due to a mental breakdown. Leland had a record which stretched back to the Boer War and a history of neurosis in the field before 1914.[34] This does not necessarily undermine the validity of his account but does indicate that some soldiers, including officers, were more susceptible to breakdowns and shell shock following heavy losses. His first reaction to a loss was recorded in January 1917 after a few months out at the front: 'I very much regret to say that out of all these cheery fellows I sat down to dinner with the only one remains unscathed, but the objective was gained, although at a great cost.'[35] As with many soldiers the first death was borne with bravado and understanding as he found comfort in the concept of sacrifice for the cause; an idea new troops found easier to buy into. Although he felt 'regret' at the losses which were sustained, the feelings of sadness were equalised by the fact that they had gained the objective and he was reassured that the sacrifice had been worthwhile.

As the war went on and he sustained more losses, Leland began to realise that he had become hardened to death,

> Indeed I was sad, very, sad, one hearing of the poor "man's" death, but there is so much of it that round here just now, that one has grown into such a state, that nothing seems to affect us as it should.

[34] London, The National Archives, WO 374/41657, 'Captain Herbert John Collett Leland. The South Staffordshire Regiment'.
[35] London, IWM, Documents. 6280, 'Private Papers of Captain H. J. C. Leland DSO', 11 January 1917.

> We are always mourning someone or another. The Angel of Death has been very busy lately, and the fighting fiercer.[36]

It is unclear who the 'man' was as Leland's wife's letters do not survive alongside his. This letter demonstrated how the omnipresence of death prevented soldiers from experiencing any bereavement in the same way that they would have done in peace time. Breakdowns over the deaths of friends became acceptable in the army, as there were no hard and fast rules as to how a man should have reacted under the pressures of modern warfare. The only certainty was that traditional processes of mourning were not appropriate for death on the battlefield. Leland revealed that his unit was always in a state of mourning for one man or another. These feelings were relentless and therefore men could not help but become hardened to it, or at least pretended to be, as coping mechanism. Therefore, being in a state of mourning simply became the norm. Bereavement, no matter how impaired grief was, demanded mediation through acts of mourning, often shared and supported by a community. With mourning representing the usual feelings within a group, it suggests that soldiers at the front were at least attempting to process their bereavements together. It also allowed them to use the dead as motivation, to continue fighting by keeping their memory alive and allowing them to retain their place as important members of the community. Furthermore, processing bereavements that were not life changing formed a significant force for the preservation of hardening, as it represented an attempt to ensure psychological survival through the confrontation and processing of loss. It was also of spiritual importance to survivors, as those who had experienced a rupture moment required support during their time of grief from their community to maintain their morale.

Hardening for Leland swiftly became a façade which, in many cases, could not be maintained by all men for the duration of their service. By August 1917 and the Battle of Passchendaele, Leland's resolve was beginning to crack, 'Two of my best men have gone under. I am very worried about it, but I must carry on somehow. All I hope is that I do not crack up myself.'[37] As Cannadine comments there is a limit to how much death a man can witness before he becomes hardened to it,[38] and it would also seem that the reverse is true. There was only so much death a soldier could experience before it broke through his defences and caused, not necessarily shell

[36] Ibid., 8 May 1917.
[37] Ibid., 13 August 1917.
[38] Cannadine, 'War and Death', p. 203.

shock, but a state in which a man could not take any more violence or sustain any more losses. For some this came sooner than for others. This was the first time in his letters that Leland mentioned the loss of close friends within the casualties, lending credence to Jalland's theory that a man's veneer could not withstand the loss of particular friends.[39] Up to this point in his war service Leland had managed to navigate his bereavement without having his motivation to fight broken. Leland openly acknowledged to his wife what a devastating blow this has been to him, so much so he admitted that he did not know if he could carry on. He directly linked bereavement and the experience of losing comrades as a cause for breakdown. The loss of a friend could open the flood gates creating a crack in the façade which could not be repaired, that allowed months of repressed grief to be unleashed. Up to this moment Leland's letters to his wife had offered him an outlet in which he could admit and process the bereavement created by the death of soldiers who were not close friends. His continued penning of these letters indicated he was still attempting to use this medium to accept the reality of losses and deal with his emotions. As Jessica Meyer states, letters to home provided soldiers with an important emotional outlet.[40] Nonetheless, it was not that soldiers could not share their grief and draw support from their fellow comrades, but with friends killed survivors no longer had anyone they felt comfortable confiding in. Therefore, it is possible men looked to the Home Front instead to support them through their bereavements in the absence of close friends.

By October 1917, in the face of more losses, it became clear that Leland was trying to get a grip on himself and his mental state, 'There is very heavy fighting just now, and I am sorry to say, Turnball, of the Gordons, in temporary command of a battalion of the Manchesters, has been killed. I was only talking to him a few minutes ago. Several others have gone west, but we don't dwell upon this.'[41] Once again Leland demonstrated feelings of regret at a loss of a friend but no evidence of a breakdown. Rather than attempting to find consolation in the war he tried to mitigate these feelings by telling himself that he, and his fellow soldiers, did not dwell on losses and instead tried to forget them in order to carry on. Following this it is possible to chart Leland's descent into a mental breakdown as he began to write increasingly

[39] Jalland, *Death in War and Peace*, p. 16.
[40] Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 23.
[41] IWM, Documents. 6280, Captain H. J. C. Leland, 3 October 1917.

negative letters: 'Death and Glory I suppose they call it. All my friends gone, not a soul to go to for a chat. The Staffs, as far as I am concerned, consists of one man, the rest are reinforcements. They are a topping lot to me, but I did not know them.'[42] It is in this letter from October 1917 that the issues which caused the mental strain Leland experienced were the most evident. In the space of a few months he had lost nearly all of his friends which led him to feel desperately lonely. This was then compounded by the arrival of reinforcements which made Leland feel alienated within his own community. For Leland the Staffordshires were not the same as they once were, in fact they were not the same at all. Not only did he no longer have any friends in this group of men, he found no comradeship in the reinforcements. Alone with his grief, Leland in the months that followed was found mentally unfit and did not return to service.

In extremis, Leland demonstrated a rupture of hardening which was so fierce it could not be mediated. It seems that men could bear one or two losses as long as a core group of friends remained to offer support to one another or they were still able to identify comradeship from a shared military identity within a company or battalion. It seemed that if a soldier lost all of his close friends it was almost impossible to recover from their bereavements and men found themselves oversaturated with grief. Reinforcements could not comprehend this state as they were too green to know this true face of war, that bereavement could shatter a man's resolve. Furthermore, Leland demonstrated that writing as a way of processing bereavement did not always work and was highly dependent on the individual. As Leland had a history of neurosis caused by combat it is understandable that he did not mentally survive the Western Front. Perhaps the ultimate sacrifice was not to give one's own life but to sacrifice all of one's friends to the war machine and survive.

Moreover, Leland's account touches upon ideas of shell shock. It is important here to work within the confines of the definition of shell shock and not over stretch the term beyond its remit during the war. Dr Frank Steadman, recorded in a letter to his wife the severe psychological trauma of some of the men he treated during the Somme,

> Sometimes a man hesitates as he knows the other men can overhear what he says to me, so I bend over close, and he often whispers: "The dreams sir. I dare not go to sleep, because I dream of…" (and

[42] Ibid., 26 October 1917.

> I know he means his chums death). I have about 12 men in the ward now suffering like this; all have had their friends killed by their sides. These men can't sleep; if they go to sleep they wake up with a cry, and shriek out. If you are kind to them, they often cry quietly. It is a very sad story to see strong, brave men, brought down like this. It nearly breaks my heart to send them back, all too soon, to the firing line again.[43]

Steadman demonstrated that men who had suffered a bereavement could show signs of deep psychological damage that came through in their nightmares, a common symptom of shell shock. Steadman suggested that it was not a bereavement alone that bought about this reaction; a man had to bear witness to the death of a friend. This further suggests that the witnessing of violent death had an immediate and severe impact on some soldiers, with the effects of being locked into the 'death imprint' presenting themselves shortly after the event. This extract also shows that although men were reticent to acknowledge their grief, in some cases, they felt compelled to openly share their emotions with someone else when the burden became too much to bear alone. The men Steadman talked about were keen to hide their tears from other soldiers but not necessarily because they were embarrassed to cry. They were more than likely kept on wards where other men had suffered serious injuries and were probably embarrassed that they had been taken out of the line due to psychological illness.[44] Most soldiers would have suffered bereavement at the front in one form or another, but would not have required medical intervention as a result.

Moreover, symptoms of psychological trauma in relation to death were being exhibited by soldiers as early as 1914, as demonstrated in the diary of P. H. Jones,

> I notice, also that everyone is pretty nervy. If one wakes up in the night one can always hear several men muttering or even shouting in their sleep. Nightmares are very common and it is curious to note that everyone has the same dream of the dug-out falling in and being buried alive. At times this dream is so that a man wakes up yelling

[43] IWM, Documents. 18927, Major F. St. J. Steadman, 2 August 1916.

[44] Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldier of the First World War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). Leese explores the difficult relationship the British army had with shell shock, considering it a serious danger to the army's manpower. Furthermore, the treatments offered for shell shock highlighted the class difference between ORs and Officers. The rank and file were often viewed with suspicion and received more experimental treatments, such as electric shock therapy. Officers on the other hand, were often sent to convalesce at hospitals such as Craig Lockhart in Scotland where they received talking therapies. This area in relation to grief and the potential treatments grieving soldiers may have received deserves greater exploration.

> in a positive fever of anguish, and we all dread having the nightmare as badly as this.[45]

During the initial period of trench warfare a number of men had been buried alive and killed in Jones' platoon. Their trauma was not to do with bereavement as such but stemmed from the fear of their own mortality and being buried alive. Bourke has argued that fears of being buried alive were rife in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century and was an area of real anxiety throughout the population. For many who were approaching death it created a sense of terror and dread, more intense than an ordinary fear. She has also suggested that by 1914 these concerns had largely disappeared despite it being a reality for soldiers at the front.[46] However, Jones' testimony indicated that even though it may no longer have represented a fear for civilians, these anxieties saw a resurgence in the military as a result of trench warfare. Jones' account makes it clear that these men who feared this type of death and shouted out in their sleep were not derided. As much as grief could be shared, the fear of mortality was also understood due to its prevalence at the front and was clearly rooted in fears concerning the ways men could be killed.

Officers' Grief for Their Men

Officers occupied a unique position within the military structure. When it came to losing men at the front they often had to bear the responsibility for sending men into danger, with some men struggling under the weight of this burden. Roper has argued that after only a short time at the front an officer would have the death of his men on his conscience.[47] Marshall has observed of officers from subsequent wars that those in command would often blame themselves for the deaths of others. Moreover, he has suggested it was the moments when officers were left alone with their thoughts that the burden of this responsibility took its toll.[48] Officers' feelings of grief in relation to losses amongst their men were complex, as ORs did not represent close personal friends to men in command. However, losses within the rank and file were often accompanied by the death of officers as well. Therefore, multiple deaths within a

[45] IWM, Documents. 12253, P. H. Jones, 31 December 1914.
[46] Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005), pp. 34-7.
[47] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 136.
[48] S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), p. 118.

company or a battalion represented the destruction of military identity. This was then compounded by feelings of guilt as they had been the ones who ordered their men into battle.

The emotional responses of officers, particularly those of high rank, were often recorded by the men who witnessed it. During the spring of 1918 the British army, having been on the offensive for most of the war, found themselves defending en masse. Although many of the emotions experienced during defensive actions mirror those surrounding losses while on the offensive, it must be acknowledged that these emotions could be confused or heightened due to the detrimental effect retreating had on morale. On 23 March 1918 Jack Martin recorded in his diary:

> In the afternoon, just outside our huts, we saw a parade of what was left of a battalion of the Essex Regiment. All that had come back were the Colonel, one NCO and thirty men… the Colonel came forward and addressed the men. He was visibly affected and had difficulty in delivering his little speech, for emotion was half choking him and tears were rolling down his cheeks. He was tall and big, with a square jaw and a hard-cut face that had probably never felt a tear before. His words had a simple nobility and directness about them and I shall remember his speech as one of the most considerable that I have ever heard... I do not know who he was but I shall not forget him.[49]

This was written two days after the German Spring offensive had begun on 21 March. Due to his role as a sapper, Martin had not been in the action but was in a position where he could observe those who were and record their responses. His decision to document an officer's reaction in such detail, and the impact it had on his own emotions, demonstrated the acceptability of this reaction in such circumstances. This is also justified by the scale of the losses which had been inflicted. It was the overt and sustained intensity of the display which legitimised the colonel's response. Martin stated that it did not seem that the colonel was a man who usually, or had ever, cried. This conveyed to Martin the severity of the German Spring Offensive above other actions and the precarious situation the British Army found itself in, as well as showing to Martin how deeply 'affected' the colonel was. The shock and the violence of the

[49] Jack Martin, *Sapper Martin: The Secret War Diary of Jack Martin*, ed. by Richard van Emden (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 189.

German assault had a profound effect on the soldiers present, legitimising, in this instance, an outward display of grief from soldiers over losses.

In addition, officers had to bear the responsibility for the deaths of all men under their command and it was a weight they had to bear at all times of war and not just whilst at the front. Although they had command over soldiers in their unit, they could not always control their behaviour and often had to make difficult decisions when men had put themselves in danger. John Charles Barrie recorded in his memoir, 'Private Hunt risked his life to save his friend and both were mortally wounded... They did not have a hope. Hunt had thrown his life away to help a mate and now I knew neither could live… Now they were both lying mortally wounded and we could not get to them. The incident cast gloom over the party.'[50] When two stretcher bearers went out to save the men Barrie wrote, '"Don't be a bloody goat", I said grabbing him by the leg. I pulled him in. This was where I hated being in command. I would have given anything to help those fellows, but I knew it was certain death to anyone who tried it, and I could not allow other lives to be sacrificed for no good purpose. I hated doing it, but I had to.'[51] This incident demonstrated the lengths men were prepared to go to save each other. Friends would be prepared to sacrifice themselves in the hope they could rescue the stricken from being out in the open, with stretcher bearers prepared to risk their lives to carry out their duty. As an officer it was Barrie's place to stop this from happening, to assess the danger and make the order. As with all others present, he would have done anything to save the two men under his command but he was forced to give the order to leave them to die. However, he had to bear the responsibility for this decision even though he was sure he could not save them and that others would die trying.

Officers and their Batmen: A Unique Grief

The grief shared between officers and their batmen deserves separate consideration due to the unique position of their relationships. Often intimate and friendly, they still existed in a connection which was influenced by rank. It was a relationship, as Roper

[50] John Charles Barrie, *Memoirs of an Anzac: A First-Hand Account by an AIF Officer in the First World War* (Victoria and London: Scribe Publications, 2015), p. 133.
[51] Ibid., p. 134.

has suggested, that was forged by sharing the same dangers at the front,[52] in the same way ORs forged their closest relationship through the intensity of war. The loss of a batman was significant to an officer. As his servant, the batman came to know his needs and requirements well and it was often a relationship manifested in loyalty and trust. For the batman, his officer gave him purpose and if he had been treated fairly, there was no guarantee he would receive the same treatment if posted to someone else. Moreover, the bereaved man would then have to form a new relationship with a stranger, and as demonstrated throughout, this was not a situation any soldier relished regardless of rank.

Furthermore, the loss of a batman often occurred during offensives and was not the only bereavement an officer had to confront. Following the Retreat from Mons, some of the survivors were straight back into action at the Marne, where the losses that were inflicted by the war hit home for J. W. G. Hyndson:

> Unfortunately, I sustain seven casualties in my platoon, Drummer Richardson, my servant and runner, is killed a few yards in front of me, and six other men are wounded. Richardson's death is a great blow to me, as he has all along been untiring in his efforts to add to my comfort, and his high spirits have made him popular amongst the men of the company.[53]

This is the first time in Hyndson's account that he refers specifically to an individual he has lost. The bereavement felt by the survivor, whether that be an officer or a servant, was often strong and sometimes openly emotional. Here Hyndson feels the loss keenly because his servant had been good and attentive to his needs in the worst of circumstances. He was also a good man whose personality was of significance to the morale of the company, and therefore represented a loss to the military effort. Richardson was the only man mentioned by name in Hyndson's account suggesting the desire to remember this individual and the need to process this particular loss.

In the same way the grief of the closest friends of the deceased were elevated above the rest of the bereaved, a batman was offered the same recognition. Turner recorded in his memoir an incident when an officer was killed:

> a persistent machine gun nest in a wood was holding up an advance, ordering his batman to stay behind he started walking towards it. His

[52] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 144.
[53] J.G.W. Hyndson, *From Mons to the First Battle of Ypres* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1933), p. 41.

> batman, a young Midlander named Bailey, was devoted to him and shattered by the event. Deaths were common place, but his commanded sorrow… I regarded him with great respect and his example lived sadly in my memories for years.[54]

Through his language Turner conveyed how devastated Bailey was over the loss of his officer. Although Turner demonstrated that Bailey's feelings were more intense than his own initially, he still grieved for his officer for many years. The fact that this incident appeared in his memoir attests to this and his own need to process this loss. Moreover, Turner demonstrated that this batman's 'shattering' was acceptable as he himself shared sorrow over the officer's death. His experience does not mark him out as a conscript; his response to the loss of a beloved officer was the same as the men who had preceded him, suggesting military grief was present throughout all cohorts and not just prevalent amongst those who had entered into army life willingly. Extreme grief for an officer is also reflected by Sidney Rogerson, 'Sitting with the signallers was Prance's servant, a Scot, although serving in his officer's regiment, the South Wales Borderers. He, poor chap, was very, very maudlin. The shock of Prance's death and the effect of much good champagne on an empty stomach has been too much for him. We had to leave with his tears.'[55] Through a comparison with Turner's account, there are a number of differences which reflect the individuality of the soldiers' responses to death. Initially, Rogerson openly recorded the officer's servant's tears, making it clear that he was so overcome with his emotion that he could not be consoled. Rogerson then goes on to offer an excuse for this emotional response; the servant was drunk. However, due to the widespread feelings of grief that surrounded the loss of Prance, Rogerson did not render this response as unacceptable but instead it was pathetic, mirroring his own feelings about Prance's death. He felt sorry for Prance's batman because he himself could empathise with his grief in relation to this loss. It is clear from both accounts that the authors also suffered a deep and lasting bereavement over these deaths. Therefore, by including the intense emotions of others it offered support and validation for their own grief, with widespread mourning representing a fitting testament to the memory of the beloved fallen.

[54] IWM, Documents. 4617, A. J. Turner.
[55] Rogerson, *The Last of the Ebb*, p 77.

Communal and Shared Grief

Communal grief, or shared grief, was a prevalent idea in the writings of soldiers across all types of testimony. In some cases, it was presented to those who existed outside the martial sphere through condolence letters and in trench journals, but it also frequently appeared in personal testimony. Watson suggests losses at unit level were not quickly forgotten and Marshall has argued that the ranks collectively were never hardened towards the death of one of their own.[56] This kind of shared grief was almost exclusively reserved for men of rank and the occasional NCO; very rarely was it present for private soldiers and only when they had acted with particular heroism. The sense of shared and communal loss was present throughout the war and existed even in the early engagements of 1914. It was at the Marne that Hyndson first reported a widespread understanding of grief over the death of a commanding officer,

> Presently we are recalled, and reform to seek shelter in a small wood, where we remain for some time and take stock of our losses. Here the sad news is brought to us that our Colonel has been hit by a shell… and mortally wounded… We are all terribly depressed on hearing that the Colonel has died from his wounds early this morning. It is a fearful blow to the regiment, and he was greatly beloved by all ranks, and we feel his loss keenly.[57]

The language employed by Hyndson is concurrent with descriptions of other deaths of this nature throughout the war, whether the bereaved men were regular, territorial, volunteer or conscript. The Marne was a brutal battle with high casualties sustained, especially after Mons. It is significant to see this stage of the war in a similar vein to the Somme. One battle after the other, with the same men being recycled into the line over and over again. Although the passage in Hyndson's diary does not use overly emotive language, he still conveys the strong sense of grief that he and all men felt about their loss. Moreover, he also indicated the need for them to be able to stop to take stock of who they had lost and what these losses meant.

A few weeks later at the Battle of the Aisne, Hyndson recorded about the death of an officer called Allason, 'the men all loved him and are grief stricken beyond words at his unexpected death.'[58] The first months of the war were incredibly costly to the regiments which participated, with high attrition rates amongst officers. Even

[56] Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 67. Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, p. 118.
[57] Hyndson, *From Mons to the First Battle of Ypres*, p. 43.
[58] Ibid., p. 69.

though many were beloved by their men, some deaths had a greater effect on the soldiers than others. Allason was considered incredibly brave and had demonstrated extraordinary valour both at the Marne and on the Aisne, winning the admiration of the men. Allason's death was recorded with a deeper sense of emotion as he was a personal loss to his battalion and company, as well as Hyndson's friend, whereas the Colonel was a loss to the regiment as a man who possessed a higher rank and had responsibility for a larger group of men. Both were leaders nonetheless, but Allason as an officer, and not a higher-ranking commander, would have known the men with whom he served more personally. Hyndson demonstrated that emotional blows such as this were prevalent throughout the war and were as present for the regulars as they were for volunteers and conscripts. Moreover, Allason's death was 'unexpected'. It did not come in the set piece battles that the BEF were used to fighting and losing men in at the time, but was a result of a sudden bombardment.

This kind of long-term and communal grief which spanned beyond a man's immediate friends or comrades in his company could only be reserved for officers, as Will Bird demonstrated in his memoir,

> Then came the message that stunned everyone of us. Our Colonel had been killed. Lieutenant-Colonel Barlett McLennan, D.S.O., had been first and always a gentleman. He was admired and respected by every man in the battalion, and we tried our best whenever he gave an order. He had been out for a quiet afternoon to visit the line to which we were going, and a shell had come and suddenly struck him down … In my roamings I had talked with many members of the various units… and had never found a battalion in which love for the commanding officer was as spontaneous and unanimous as ours… His death more than shocked us. We feared we would not get another of the same kind.[59]

Good officers were more extensively mourned and remembered, not only because they were known more widely, but there was no guarantee he would be replaced by a man of the same calibre. However, this was not grief created from a sense of friendship but was rooted in a military relationship a good officer would have with his men. Bird suggested there was no other officer who was loved like their Lieutenant-Colonel, attesting to the power of the best and the brightest trope which existed in the military. Rank is significant when considering mourning in the martial sphere but only when it

[59] Will R. Bird, *Ghost's Have War Hands: A Memoir of The Great War 1916-1919* (Canada: CEF Books, 1997), p. 99.

existed alongside love and respect for the officers. An officer that was considered mean or incompetent would not be mourned and his demise would be met by indifference. COs, especially if they were good and well-respected, represented the ideal soldier and the embodiment of the regimental pride, honour and tradition. When he was killed on the battlefield these concepts perished with him and were lost to the regiment, providing a source of grief in relation to the ORs corporate identity. The death of an officer came to represent the glorious sacrifice soldiers aspired to achieve but would not be able to. Firstly, moving up the ranks was still difficult during the war for a private soldier making the position of dying as a CO out of reach. Secondly, attaining this glory meant accepting the death of the self, something which was incredibly difficult for soldiers to do. Therefore, the ideal of glorious sacrifice could not offer comfort to private soldiers in relation to the death of an officer, as the lofty ideals of honour and valour had died with him and they could not be recreated by the survivors.

When it came to the loss of a beloved officer men openly shared their emotions, deeply damaging the morale within the battalion. This could last for an extended period if the officer had lost his life in difficult circumstances. Barrie recorded one such incident, 'The affair cast gloom over the battalion for days. I never knew men take anything to heart so much as the death of Captain Hardy. Men cried that night. Their defeat and the loss of so many comrades was bad enough… His name will never be forgotten by those who served with him.'[60] Barrie conveys a complex array of emotions that were felt amongst the men who were in his unit. 'The affair' not only referred to Captain Hardy's death but also the fact that men had been scouring no man's land for his body with no success. As this work has explored the absence of a body was distressing for those who were bereaved, significant in this case as he was a beloved officer and his men would have wanted him to be laid to rest properly. This extract from Barrie also suggests there was a hierarchy of losses. A soldiers' individual bereavement for his fallen comrades could be compounded or potentially even usurped by the loss of an officer. This was directly related to the communal symbolism an officer provided in relation to regimental pride. The death of an officer was a bereavement that all soldiers could sink their identity into and find comfort from the

[60] Barrie, *Memoirs of an Anzac*, p. 145.

comrades around them, particularly if they had lost their close friends who would have traditionally offered them support.

There seems to be a complex reason as to why a hierarchy of bereavement existed and it was not necessarily reliant upon how well-liked an officer or individual soldier was. Instead, it was sometimes the context in which the death occurred which often affected the soldiers. I. L. Read commented in his memoirs on the death of an NCO,

> …we lost one of our best N.C.O.s in the company – Corporal Durrant… I recall how depressed at this everyone was, from White downwards… By that time sudden death among us, indeed, a commonplace; but, maybe because – luckily – we had escaped casualties for a few days previously, and because, too, of the hilarity engendered by the escapade of Lewis, the corporal's untimely end affected us with an additional emphasis.[61]

The individual and collective response to a loss was predicated on a number of conditions, not least when and in what circumstances the death occurred. Read himself was confused as to why, at a time when men had become used to witnessing death and had become hardened to the sudden nature of it, were affected so deeply. Therefore, he demonstrated that there was fluidity in the nature of hardening. It seemed that at moments like this, when men had spent a few days in the line without losses or constant exposure to death, hardening could wane and the loss of an individual, in this case an NCO, could affect men when it usually would not have done. Furthermore, the humorous 'escapade' of a soldier had lightened the mood. These two aspects combined meant that the loss of Corporal Durrant was in stark contrast to the previous days, once again hammering home the realities of war for this individual community. The loss of an NCO would have been particularly devastating for a section, due to the size of the group it affected and the closeness of the relationship they would have had with their Corporal.

By 1918, battalions would have sustained a number of high-profile losses, particularly when it came to officers. Denis Winter argued that the dead were often quickly forgotten and were rarely mentioned in conversation.[62] Although soldiers stopped recalling or mentioning the fallen in their letters and diaries, that did not mean

[61] I. L. 'Dick' Read, *Of Those We Loved: A Great War Narrative Remembered and Illustrated* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2013), chapter 22.
[62] Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 56.

the dead had been forgotten. On some occasions, grief over certain soldiers once again permeated through the ranks at poignant moments in the war. The longevity with which soldiers were remembered, particularly officers, was a complex phenomenon which was influenced by how well-liked the man had been and the composition of his military community. The absence of the repeated mentioning of the dead in diaries and memoirs is not evidence to suggest the fallen had been forgotten. It was through the act of physically recording a death, even just once, that meant the dead had been immortalised and would not be forgotten. However, a small handful of beloved officers were remembered consistently throughout the war. F. C. Hitchcock who served with the Prince of Wales' Leinster Regiment, recorded in his diary on 6 November 1918, 'It was the anniversary of Colonel Murphy's Death; the men had not forgotten him; all day long on the march, and later in billets, I heard them talking about him.'[63] This demonstrated that as a community the men had not forgotten about Colonel Murphy a year after his death, remembering and marking the day he had fallen. This was not just a cursory mention of the day of his passing but his memory dominated the conversation amongst these men a year on. Evidently, Colonel Murphy was a well-loved officer. Men would not continue to remember just anyone they had lost, and when there was a strong sense of bereavement the grieving process could last over a period of time. This was reserved for losses that caused a deep sense of bereavement for a battalion as a whole and required shared mourning in order to mediate grief. For those who grieved for friends privately, the site of memory created in memoirs demonstrated the desire not to forget the fallen.

Colonel Murphy was not the only man who lived on in the memory of his battalion. H. R. Williams recorded about the death of Captain Fanning,

> His death was an irreparable loss to the company, and a grievous loss to the battalion; in fact, the A.I.F. was the poorer by the passing of a man… Soldiers on active service have short memories of those who have crossed the Great Divide, but Captain Fanning was never forgotten… Right up to the beginning of 1918 when we got our last reinforcements from Australia the boys would gather round the braziers at night in the billets, and would entertain the new comers

[63] Captain F.C. Hitchcock M.C., '*Stand To': A Diary of the Trenches 1915-1918* (Uckfield: The Naval and Military Press, 2009), p. 306.

> with stories of Captain Fanning and what 'A' Company was like when he commanded it.[64]

Williams demonstrated that some battalions in the Dominion Armies reflected the same codes of mourning as their British counterparts. As with individual grief, not all battalions followed the same practices and rituals as others. Those they choose to participate in collectively were a reflection of the individual identity of their community. Some battalions, or even companies, platoons and sections, had a better relationship with their dead than other military units, making the process of mediation after the rupture moment easier to cope with during the war. These men found comfort in the sharing of their grief with each other and keeping Fanning's memory alive. Through this act, they were able to retain the potency of Fanning's military prowess as a part of their unit identity, meaning that the ideals of the battalion had not died with him. There were some men, who by the strength of their character and the impact they had on their men whilst alive, could not be forgotten and their legacy was incorporated into the identity of their unit.

Shared grief, as well as apparent from soldiers' personal testimony, is evident from soldiers' publications. Trench journals were used by some units to create a sense of shared loss and construct themselves as communities in mourning. For the battalions and units who produced journals, not only were they designed to offer entertainment and news, they were also a means with which the fallen could be recorded and commemorated. Although this was done to varying degrees depending upon the unit however, some journals remaining solely satirical. For certain publications, which had a wide readership both at the front and at home, reporting on losses at the front concerned publicising the mourning which occurred in soldiers' communities. For these journals, as well as publications which were only produced for soldiers, part of the focus was on making grief and mourning an acceptable and acknowledged response in the ranks. Journals which chose to use it as a means to report the fallen included an obituary section; details of officers who had been killed in action or at the very least a roll of honour. In some cases, if a particularly well-

[64] H. R. Williams, *An Anzac on the Western Front: The Personal Reflections of an Australian Infantryman from 1916 to 1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2012), p. 67.

known officer, or even OR, had been killed there was often an article written in dedication to his memory.[65]

The patterns of language used to report the deaths of well-liked or known men follows similar construction to that which appear in soldiers' personal testimonies. *2/1st Northants Yeomanry Magazine* reported in September 1915 that 'the regiment would be deeply grieved' by the news of Corporal Harry Strangers' death;[66] *The Green Tiger* commented in 1918 on the loss of Lieutenant C. F. Atter that those who knew him felt 'his loss deeply'.[67] Although trench journals deployed the same language as other types of testimony, it was also a place in which soldiers were offered comfort and the concept of glorious death on the battlefield endured. *The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette* recorded about Lieutenant T. H. Moore that, 'he gave up his life in endeavouring to rescue Lance-Corporal Rodway, and thus made the supreme sacrifice. His men loved him, and his tradition will not die.'[68] In addition to constructing heroic and glorious deaths, trench journals were also a place where the memory of a soldier could be preserved. In this case, soldiers reading *The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette* were being encouraged to keep the memory of Moore alive. Furthermore, as this may have been read by his family at home, these types of comments were designed to reassure Moore's family that his death was not in vain. Conversely, it may not have been aimed at the family of Moore but instead was included to comfort his friends at the front and encourage them to remember him through their actions by following his example. Trench journals therefore, focused their efforts on convincing men that carrying on was a means to justify losses, suggesting that personal sacrifices forced men to continue fighting and endure the hardships of war. This is perhaps evidence of a survivor mission instead of survivor guilt.[69] Although soldiers built the dead into their communities organically, trench journals represent this process in an official capacity, with focus less on preserving the memory of the fallen but mobilising it in relation to morale and esprit de corps.

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[65] Some analysis into the Somme and the editorials of Trench Journals has already been done in Silk, 'Witnesses to Death', p. 152.
[66] 'Roll of Honour', *2/1st Northants Yeomanry Magazine*, 1 September 1915, p. 7.
[67] 'Obituary', *The Green Tiger*, 1 April 1918, p. 119.
[68] 'R. I. P. Lieutenant T. H. Moore', *Fifth Glo'ster Gazette: A Chronicle, Serious and Humorous, of the Battalion while serving with the British Expeditionary Force*, 1 October 1915, p. 8.
[69] Watson and Porter, 'Bereaved and Aggrieved', p. 161.

Trench journals offered men a place where they could share their grief together. Rather than being constructed personally within private writing, the mourning and type of grief was dictated by the officers or NCOs who were in charge of editing and putting together the journal. Therefore, these passages do not necessarily indicate what the private soldier felt but are more an observation from officers of the feeling within the battalion. One example of this can be found in *The Incinerator* from June 1916, on the death of Lieutenant J. Walker, 'What a gap his death has left. At all times and on all occasions he was ready with a joke. He was the life and soul of his Company mess, and beloved by his brother officers… 2nd Lieut. J. L. Walker – our first officer to be killed – but the last to be forgotten.'[70] This extract is the perfect indication that trench journals, and their applicability across a battalion or regiment, should be handled with care. This obituary from *The Incinerator* is an example of shared grief among officers, suggesting other officers were the principal audience for this particular journal, as it does not speak about the battalion in a broader sense. Nevertheless, it demonstrated a willingness amongst officers to create open and public communities of mourning of their own, thus making grieving acceptable throughout the military unit for all ranks. Trench journals offered an opportunity to have the best officers of a battalion written into the unit's history in their own words, albeit the words of officers.

On the other hand, for some publications it was an opportunity for officers to bridge the gap between themselves and the ORs. *The Highland Light Infantry Chronicle* reported on the death of Captain A. Steven's,

> It is hard to write an appreciation and thereby do justice to one who held such a position of respect and love as poor Stevens did among all ranks of the Regiment… Deeply regretted by all comrades, he leaves behind him as fine a record as any solider of the Regiment for others to follow. Gallant soldier, true comrade, and a man of sterling qualities of whom it may truly said - "He had no enemies."[71]

The Highland Light Infantry Chronicle alongside *The Outpost*, also published by the H.L.I., were trench journals which devoted numerous pages, articles and editorials to demonstrating their regiment, and its battalions, as a community in mourning. *The Highland Light Infantry Chronicle* demonstrated that regimental identity was still

[70] S. H. M., 'The Passing of a Man', *The Incinerator*, 1 June 1916, p. 34.
[71] R. W. H. R., 'Death of Captain A. Stevens', *Highland Light Infantry Chronicle*, 1 July 1917, p. 76.

significant in 1917 to the H.L.I. and that it had not fractured, at least officially, to a battalion focus. It also showed that there was a strong sense of regimental community still present in their ranks as a regular battalion. However, this was probably also true for many of the territorial and volunteer battalions, in particular 'the pals', after the shared experience of battle. This publication shows the sense of shared experience and loss was not limited to the private papers of the men who served in the H.L.I. but was constructed publicly through a journal. In this case, it was an opportunity to not only inform soldiers of the death of one of their beloved officers, but it also served as a moment where all ranks could share their grief and find comfort in their communal mourning.

Within the ranks of the volunteer army, including Dominion expeditionary forces, communities in mourning tended to organise around the identity of their battalion rather than their regiment. *The Brazier* recorded about Captain B. H. Rust in August 1916, 'no better tribute to this brave young Canadian officer can be written than to say he was beloved by all ranks of the 13th Batt. He was the ideal type of citizen soldier and through dint of conscientious work won his commission and promotion on the field of honour.'[72] The division between old and new armies was rooted within the differing identities between these two groups, which are exemplified through their publications. Rather than focusing on the broader military identity of the officer, this obituary laid greater weight on the loss of those who he had led and had known him personally. Furthermore, the author of the obituary chose to draw attention to the officer's civilian identity as a 'citizen soldier' rather than focusing fully on his military identity. The point here perhaps being, in the same way as the other extracts above, to encourage other soldiers to follow in the officer's footsteps. Moreover, all trench journals which reported on the deaths of their soldiers reflected the idea that it was always the best and the brightest who were killed.

Connecting with the Home Front

Although the principal aim of this work is to bring to the forefront of our understanding the soldier's experience of death, the picture would not be complete without

[72] B. H. R., 'To Their Mothers and Wives', *The Brazier: Printed at the Front by the 16th Battalion, the Canadian Scottish*, 22 August 1916, p. 5.

considering grief on the Home Front. Grief over the same losses caused some tension after the war with difficulties arising over who owned the dead, and therefore, the grief.[73] This is one of the key reasons as to why soldiers mourning has been marginalised and sits on the periphery of historical study. Conversely, during the war shared grief offered a moment where men connected with those at home and found solace in shared mourning over those who had been lost. The principal means of achieving this was by sending condolence letters to the family of the deceased. However, part of the reason for writing letters of condolence, especially those written by the friends of the dead concerned, as Meyer has argued, an element of laying claim to a connection with the dead.[74] The act of writing letters also formed part of the soldiers' codes of mourning. Letters were an acceptable outlet for soldiers' grief and formed an aspect of the mediation process. Laying claim to the dead was perhaps, in part, about ownership of grief but given the heavy emphasis soldiers placed on the grief of the family, both in the letters and in their private papers, it seems to be more consistent with the idea that soldiers were laying claim to grief to create a sense of shared loss and establish a connection with the Home Front. Moreover, a large number of trench journals carried references to the plight of grieving families at home, often elevating it above the mourning of the military group.

One of the most important aspects of these condolence letters was for soldiers to construct themselves as communities in mourning. This was done through creating a connection with the deceased soldier and using the language which appears throughout soldiers' testimony. For example, an unknown soldier wrote to the family of a Captain Archibald Gilmour,

> As he was a friend of mine I have taken the liberty of writing to you.. [*sic*] We were wounded at Loos together and for sometime at the 9th Batt. at Richmond, so I knew him better than anyone left in the amalgamated Batt. It was a great shock to me to hear that he has been killed the night before last… I think the hardest part of the war is seeing ones friends go one after the other… he will be a great loss to the Batt. and as a friend we shall all miss him very much indeed. Please let me know if I can do anything about the grave as I shall be only too glad if we have not left this part.[75]

[73] Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994).
[74] Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 75.
[75] London, IWM, Documents. 16973, 'Private Papers of Captain A. K. Gilmour'.

This unknown soldier uses many of the devices which are common in the condolence letters written during the war. He demonstrates the closeness of the bond he shared with Gilmour by recounting how long they had known each other, using the experiences they had shared together before indicating the deepness of his own grief. He then goes on to build a picture of a community in mourning, beginning by discussing the constant losses they were sustaining amongst friends, followed by the collective grief which would be felt through the military unit at the loss of Gilmour. However, and most significantly, he ends the letter by emphasising the grief of Gilmour's mother, asking her if she has any requests regarding her son's final resting place. Rather than laying claim to the grief over the loss of a friend, the soldier here is attempting to create a sense of shared grief and build a symbiotic relationship, in which he can help the family at home by vicariously carrying out acts which will help them mourn their loss. For others the sense of shared loss in the military community was one of the most important aspects of letters of condolence. Hector Burns wrote to Mrs McGregor on the death of Private Peter McGregor, 'He was universally beloved in the battalion and a very wide circle of officers and men are mourning his loss as one which is personal to themselves.'[76] This demonstrates that this type of deep emotion felt on the loss of a friend or comrade was not just reserved for officers, but indicates that the loss of a beloved private soldier could create a shared sense of mourning amongst all ranks in the frontline. Furthermore, this was a grief which needed to be conveyed to a soldiers' loved ones at home, not just to demonstrate to the Home Front that soldiers too were a community in mourning, but to offer comfort in a sense of widespread shared grief between front and home.

On rare occasions friends wrote letters together to convey their sense of shared loss and to support one another. Many soldiers' letters and private papers attest to the fact that writing letters to the bereaved was one of the most difficult tasks of the war as they battled their own grief.[77] Two privates, only known by their first names Tom and Jim, wrote to Mrs Boorer, Herbert Boorer's wife, 'We got the news and needless to say how sorry we are for you and the laddie for it is not us fellows that get the brunt of this war but the folks we leave at home, for we do not say much but we know how you feel as you have our sympathy and feeling but there are times out here when we

[76] London, IWM, Documents. 21092, 'Private Papers of P. McGregor', 14 September 1916.
[77] Roper, *The Secret Battle,* pp. 210-212.

would rather be gone as to put up with the conditions.'[78] Again, these two soldiers demonstrated an understanding concerning the plight of those at home, seeing them as the true victims of war rather than themselves. They also created the sense that they could understand what had been lost because they felt the same grief and could empathise. These two men also acknowledged the distance which had been created between those at the front and those at home, and is the idea that some men hoped for death as a release from the war. Moreover, these words were not written to wound those at home but to instead offer comfort from the soldier's perspective.

These condolence letters written for people outside of the martial sphere, conveyed the concept that soldiers themselves were in mourning, a way to counteract the isolation they felt physically from being at the front and psychologically through their experience of war. Men also expressed their shared loss and understanding of the pain of those on the Home Front through other types of letters or recorded their thoughts in their diaries. Part of their role was to protect those at home from the realities of war but they needed to do this whilst having to process their own grief. Tennant wrote in a letter to his wife after Neuve Chapelle in 1915, 'Poor Alan died on his way [to the aid post] – to my great sorrow. I have had the sad task of going through his small effects and of writing to his mother: his letters from home bore eloquent testimony to the greatness of the gap there which his loss will cause.'[79] Tennant demonstrated that the idea of using grief to connect to the Home Front was not one that only applied to the volunteer army but had existed from the early stages of the war. Tennant acknowledged his own grief for the loss of Alan to his wife, but also demonstrated an acute awareness of what Alan's loss would mean to his family at home. He did not prioritise his own grief but elevates the grief of Alan's loved ones above his own. Furthermore, he had to undertake tasks most young men would not have normally done, which was sorting out his friend's effects to forward on to his family. It almost seems that Tennant needed to prioritise the grief of Alan's family over his own in order to complete the task. As other letters testify to, a soldiers' grief could also prevent him from undertaking writing condolence letters as the act itself was a painful reminder of what they had lost.[80]

[78] London, IWM, Documents. 12113, 'Private Papers of H. G. Boorer'.
[79] IWM, Documents. 8046, 2nd Lieutenant C. G. Tennant, 21 March 1915.
[80] An example of this can be found from Major G. Christie-Miller, Oxford to Mr. Crouch in Lionel William Crouch, *Duty and Service: Letters from the Front* (London: W. Crouch, 1917), p. 135.

Acknowledgement of the grief and loss felt on the Home Front was not just restricted to condolence letters. In many of the obituaries present in trench journals sympathy was often extended to the families of the deceased. An article written in *Chevrons* after the Armistice highlighted why soldiers felt a connection to the Home Front,

> A highly-coloured picture postcard came to view – simply a picture of a Union Jack and a pathetic little verse printed across it. But it was not exactly the pathos contained in the verse which made those war-hardened warriors swallow hard as they lowered their heads and turned away... One or two faces showed signs where a mud-stained cuff had been drawn across their eyes. And for what reason? At the bottom of the card were two wavy and badly smudged baby names, written by little hands, apparently guided by a stronger hand which had signed "Mummy."... Perhaps those tight-lipped figures could picture the joy and laughter of that home would become unutterable anguish. Even now, a return message was on its way, but, alas, how very different from the expected one... Hearts which had hoped would be broken, anxiety would cease; but instead the dreaded blow would have fallen – how dread only those who have experienced know...Men had died before, and the remainder had viewed it with the philosophy born of exposure to danger and hardened familiarity.[81]

This shared sense of emotion between front and home was grounded in a mutual understanding of what loss in war meant.[82] Soldiers understood how significant a bereavement could be to the family of the dead. On the eve of demobilisation this was perhaps a pertinent reminder to soldiers to remember not only what they had lost but also that those at home were mourning too. The reporting of soldiers' emotions suggests that they were not embarrassed to publicly acknowledge tears at times of sadness, although in this case the emotion did not concern their own loss but were shed for the family of the deceased man. This was perhaps not to do with the elevation of Home Front grief over that of the soldiers but a reminder of what life had been like at home for those men. Moreover, some of these men would have had a wife and children of their own and incidents such as this brought to the fore fears of what would happen to those left behind if he had been killed.

[81] Nemesis, 'Our Sacred Trust', *Chevrons*, 1 December 1919, p. 6.
[82] Previous historical scholarship has highlighted the gulf in the experience and understanding between home front. See Malcolm Brown for an example of this. Malcolm Brown, *Tommy Goes to War* (Stroud: History Press, 1978), p. 46.

Soldiers demonstrated through their private papers that they understood the suffering at home. Although the civilian experience of death was different, soldiers did not show contempt for those who could not know what it was truly like. H. L. Adams recorded,

> The tragedies of war were not confined to the battlefield and although the soldiers in the war zones were compelled to witness scenes at times which were heart rendering, yet there were dear ones in the home land whose minds were always in tension owing to the awful tragedies that might befall their dear ones whose face will never be seen again on earth. The next day was very sad for us all, one of our sergeants were killed and when this news reached his mother, she died immediately from the shock.[83]

Adams demonstrated what might be considered a complex and contradictory understanding of a soldier's position as one of privilege when it came to death. Men at the front did not have to worry about or imagine the fate which may have befallen them or their friends, they knew what death in war looked like. Their knowledge of losses was more immediate and concrete; they often witnessed the death of friends or knew those who did. This was something that could not be offered to those at home whose loved ones died, and soldiers were aware that it was their duty to protect civilians from the horrors of war. Soldiers at the front were well acquainted with the terrors of the faceless and unknown dead, and therefore could understand the anxieties experienced by those at home. They were able to share in the sacred moments of death, to look upon those who were dying or had died and commit their faces to memory one last time.

As has been explored and demonstrated successfully by a number of historians, soldiers, when constructing their letters of condolence, followed a set formula which allowed them to hide an agonising death from the relatives of the deceased.[84] This work postulates that this reconstruction of the dead also served a purpose for the soldiers who wrote the letters. It became a way to recreate their dead friends separate from the horror and the violence of their death. Through rewriting and reworking the way their friends had died in the memory of their families, for a short time at least, allowed the soldier to reimagine and see his friend as he was, not a broken and mutilated mess of a man who died in agony. For example, Lewis Morgan wrote to Mrs

[83] IWM, Documents. 4300, H. L. Adams.
[84] Brown, *Tommy Goes to War*, p. 160.

Bolton about the death of her son, 'He may have lived for about five minutes after being hit. But though conscious he did not appear to be in any pain. He died peacefully'.[85] The language used here by Morgan was not uncommon; he was able to provide detail about how Bolton had died without describing what he had died from or the nature of the injury. By way of a caveat here, it is possible that Bolton died exactly as Morgan described, but as in most cases only the letter survives and there is no accompanying diary or memoir from the soldier who wrote the letter. Therefore, it is impossible to know the true nature of this death. Ultimately, Morgan gave very little away in regards to detail other than that Bolton had lived for several minutes after being wounded. Given the nature of the violence perpetrated on the Western Front it is unlikely he passed away 'peacefully' and Morgan chose not to relive his friend's final moments. This not only spared Bolton's family from the truth but also himself the pain of recalling the event in full.

Soldiers understood the importance of preserving ideas of heroic death in order to provide comfort for civilians.[86] This appealed also to soldiers, as the idea of a beautiful death in war could still be preserved for them in the memory of others who did not know the truth. For example, Andrew Dickinson wrote to Mrs McGregor of Private McGregor's death, 'Your husband died quite instantaneously, while on duty, as the result of a shell bursting in his trench. I may say that the injuries were mostly internal and caused no disfigurement of the features.'[87] However, a letter from a Chaplain indicated to Mrs McGregor that it had in fact taken ten minutes for McGregor to die.[88] This may be a simple case of different interpretations of what qualified as an 'instantaneous' death. Dickinson is very clear in the fact that McGregor's face had not been damaged by the shell blast and that the injuries which had killed him were mostly internal. Again, there is not definitive evidence to suggest otherwise and he may well have died from the concussion of the blast, but these deaths were instant and occurred at the moment of impact. Therefore, it is likely that McGregor had sustained significant injuries to his body. Through his letter Dickinson was able to construct for Mrs McGregor, as well as for himself, the image of McGregor dying almost as a whole

[85] London, IWM, Documents. 19228, 'Private Papers of J. C. Bolton MM', 11 July 1917.
[86] Lyn Macdonald, *The Somme*, p. 270. Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes: On War, Memory and Representations* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 122.
[87] IWM, Documents. 21092, P. McGregor, 15 September 1916.
[88] Ibid.

unmutilated man, quickly and with very little pain. This offered comfort to the Home Front as well as himself.

Overall, soldiers existed in communities where individual and collective grief created a complex set of reactions, some private and others shared. All of these soldiers demonstrated that the martial sphere created a space in which they could mourn for their fallen friends, officers and NCOs. Deep individual grief was reserved for close friends regardless of the rank the survivor held. The act of writing, in a diary or memoir, provided, not only a site of memory in which the dead could be remembered in perpetuity, but also a place of catharsis and conciliation. The violent deaths of friends soldiers witnessed locked them into the 'death imprint' which impaired their mourning during and after the war. Survivors were ultimately compelled by the passing of time to confront these losses and process their grief. Therefore, soldiers' testimony, in every form, revealed a deep pain that the author was seeking to accept and move on from. Where bereavement was communal, when officers and NCOs were killed, men mourned for the lost identity of their regiment that commanders embodied through their actions and glorious sacrifice. However, it was this honour and pride which was laid to waste on the battlefield and survivors believed it could not be recovered or recreated. It was these feelings that created a painful and shared grief within companies and battalions for which there was little comfort, other than the support of each other. This chapter has demonstrated that individual and communal responses were applicable throughout the war and were not dictated by the cohort to which the individual belonged. The next chapter will go on to consider ideas of combat grief as a shared experience during offensives and in relation to mass death. It was in these moments of heavy loss that the cohort to which a soldier belonged mattered the most, creating a relative war experience for the men who served during the First World War.

Chapter Four

Death in Battle: Grief,

Disillusionment and Mass Losses

Mass death during offensive action was experienced by all cohorts of the British Army. Although the approach to battle changed throughout the war at a tactical and operational level, the effects of losses on individuals and communities who survived combat were consistent. These responses only deviated from the norm when soldiers were on retreat or participating in the war of movement; an experience unique to the men who fought in 1914 and 1918. The previous chapters considered that the Combat Grief Cycle represented a uniting experience for soldiers regardless of when they were deployed to the front. This chapter will explore the relative nature of the war for soldier communities based on which cohort they belonged to. This key concept relates to the understanding that there could not have been one battle that created widespread disillusionment within the ranks of the army.

The Somme is considered the watershed moment in which the understanding of combat changed, for both soldier and civilian.[1] It is understood to be the moment when the belief in glorious sacrifice and beautiful death on the battlefield disintegrated and were replaced with notions of disenchantment. This chapter will argue that this could not be relevant for the soldiers who did not see service in Picardy in the summer of 1916. Disillusionment was a state that was only caused by direct contact with a traumatic event. Some soldiers by 1916 had already experienced this moment at other battles where they had suffered significant casualties. It is more accurate to see the Somme as one in a series of watershed moments, with this offensive representing the key collective rupture event for the volunteer cohort. This had already happened in

[1] Jay Winter, 'Representations of War on the Western Front, 1914-18: Some Reflections in Cultural Ambivalence', in *Power, Violence and Mass Death in Pre-Modern and Modern Times*, ed. by Joseph Canning, Hartmut Lehmann and Jay Winter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 210. Brown, *Tommy Goes to War*, p. 131.

1914 for the regular army culminating at the First Battle of Ypres and for the territorials in 1915 at the Battle of Loos. From 1917 onwards the cohort system is more difficult to establish with a mixture of volunteers and conscripts being deployed to the front together. For those who arrived at the front in 1917, regardless of the nature of their enlistment, Passchendaele served as a moment of collective trauma. In 1918 the German Spring Offensive or the Hundred Days Offensive provided this experience depending on when a man was deployed. Alongside these cohort events, smaller groups of men experienced the same sense of watershed at more marginal or peripheral engagements. Although the Somme was not the only moment of widespread disillusionment, soldiers' testimony and frontline memorials demonstrate that the offensive held a special position within the collective memory of the British Army, most likely due to the number of casualties suffered.

This chapter explores a number of engagements which created a rupture moment for individual cohorts and led to widespread communal grief. It also examines smaller engagements and specific battles within offensives which had the same effect. These disparities occurred due to the positions different groups held in the line during an offensive, in addition to whether their units were there or not. Therefore, in some cases units became outsiders to the cohort experience and then subject to their own watershed moment. This collective rupture was a result of participating in a battle so traumatic that it altered a soldier's outlook on war and was recorded as a soldier's worst experience of battle. As with individual bereavements, writing became paramount to a soldier's ability to accept and process mass death. Combat caused soldiers to sink their identity deeper into their military unit, relying on comrades to pull them towards the German line.[2] This complete surrender of agency to an intangible group of men, many of whom a soldier did not know personally, extended his bonds wider than his small group of friends. This created a strong sense of allegiance within the army as a broader entity, laying the foundations for a sense of bereavement if these men were to be killed in large numbers. It was this reliance on strangers, forged in battle, that meant men could mourn for soldiers they did not know.

[2] Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 57.

Responses to Mass Death at the Front

Mass death was the loss of a considerable number of comrades during offensive or defensive action. The men in question did not have to be close friends but simply had to share a military identity with those who survived. Battle was a difficult event in the service of any soldier, as many struggled to process and overcome what they had witnessed on the field of engagement. Richard Holmes has asserted that watching others being killed or dying was 'a powerful contribution to the strain of battle'.[3] The overwhelming degree of combat grief soldiers experienced as a result of mass losses ultimately altered a soldier's outlook on war. Going into battle caused considerable strain on the individual. Soldiers were forced to confront their own fears about being maimed or killed, as well as the anxiety of losing friends. For each individual, certain battles would retain significance over others, particularly because no soldier was ever present during all the actions of the war. For some it was their first engagement which proved the most devastating and for others, it was a culmination of witnessing mass violence over a long period which led to disillusionment.

Extreme responses of grief and disillusionment are perhaps expected for the volunteer and conscript army. When historians have considered that men could not be fully stripped of the civilian identity it is usually these groups which are inferred. However, concepts of close friends and military community existed in the army from the very start of the war, with the earliest recording of bereavement being from Mons in the original BEF. 1914 was a different experience of combat in comparison to the four years which followed. The early months were a war of movement, punctuated by retreat and the beginning of the stalemate. The only period which compared to these initial stages was 1918, as a year of both retreat and considerable advance. Retreating could complicate feelings in relation to losses, as it caused chaos in the ranks leading to uncertainty around those who had died. Lieutenant Colonel Dudley Turnbull commented about the Retreat from Mons,

> We hear 17 officers and 500 men all of our regiment are prisoners. I hope so, I am sure for if they are all really killed, I could never live in the regiment again with all my very best friends out of it. We who are spared wait here at head quarters hoping and praying that we

[3] Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), p. 203.

> may be up to strength soon so that we may get some of our own back and that of our missing brother officers and men.[4]

This particular situation led to an element of denial which made grief difficult to process. Turnbull did not see his comrades killed or wounded and could therefore continue to believe they were still alive. As previously noted, the absence of a body significantly impaired a soldier's ability to acknowledge a death. For Turnbull, this led to hope that they could be recovered alive in the next advance. Turnbull's account also revealed that it was better to discover comrades had been taken prisoner rather than killed; it was the finality of death he feared. To discover that these men were dead would completely shatter his morale and his resolve to fight. However, he kept faith they could be recovered and the regiment restored to its original composition, and with the frontline fluctuating constantly this was a real possibility. Turnbull offers evidence to suggest that as early as 1914, the idea of a holistic military identity and the concept that soldiers would fight just because they were ordered to did not exist. In these initial engagements of the war, soldiers also found their strength and motivation in the men they fought beside. Turnbull also set these losses within his regiment. This was a trait unique to soldiers of the original BEF, which would remain present within some regular regiments as the war went on. Future soldiers were more likely to mourn within smaller groups such as their battalions, companies or platoons.

By September 1914, the men of the regular army felt the true weight of their losses as the desperate fighting continued. Second Lieutenant Neville Woodroffe recorded in a letter to his mother, 'This is a terrible war… there has been more fighting and more loss life… it is awful what the Brigade of Guards has lost and [in] one big regiment… everyone… feels it all the more.'[5] Not only does Woodroffe reveal to the Home Front how terrible war had become, he also alluded to the bonds which were held amongst soldiers of the regular regiments in 1914. Woodroffe served with the Irish Guard and demonstrated there was a strong feeling of community in the whole regiment. He acknowledged every man felt their heavy losses keenly and not just the losses of those around them or of their immediate friends. It was the scale of the loss of life that made this war unbearable. Regular regiments as a whole, and not just battalions, were communities in mourning from the very first engagement they

[4] London, IWM, Documents. 18455, 'Private Papers of Lieutenant Colonel D. R. Turnbull DSO'.
[5] London, IWM, Documents. 3260, 'Private Papers of 2nd Lieutenant N. L. Woodroffe', 30 September 1914.

participated in. It is likely that this was not an applicable outlook for later cohorts due to the brigade system employed by the British Army meaning that regiments did not serve together.

The presence of a broader communal loss in soldiers' letters, in the case of Turnbull and Woodroffe, demonstrated that soldiers understood and identified with a wider military community. Hyndson's diary, explored in chapter three, showed that regular soldiers mourned in a complex and varied way. Some losses were significant for the battalion or even company, whereas others were mourned by the regiment. Hyndson recorded after the First Battle of Ypres, 'During twenty-three days of continuous fighting we have lost thirty officers and 1,000 other ranks killed, wounded and missing, an appalling figure. Including as it does all the trained officers and men in the regiment whom we shall never be able to replace.'[6] All three of these accounts show that regiment wide mourning was predicated on there being a substantial number of deaths in the unit. For Hyndson this also concerned the belief that soldiers of the regular army and special reserves could not now be replaced by reinforcements. As already suggested, in battle soldiers had to rely on a wider group of combatants beyond their close communities in order to survive. Therefore, at the end of 1914 soldiers had lost many of the key components, officers and privates, which had constituted the fighting force they had come to rely on since their deployment.

These notions were also reflected more broadly in trench journals produced during the fighting. *The Highland Light Infantry Chronicle* reported in October 1914,

> That the Regiment has been bearing its full part in the gallant struggle on French soil, and has been upholding the best traditions of the past, is nobly attested by the long list of officers and men who have laid down their lives for their country and in the cause of right and liberty. To all the relations of both officers and men who have fallen we offer the deepest sympathy.[7]

The journal did not report losses in the same sombre tone as soldiers' individual accounts. Instead, *The Highland Light Infantry Chronicle* framed the deaths of the early days as the upholding of the glorious history of the regiment. The Highland Light Infantry produced journals for the duration of the war. They continued to record losses as important to the whole regiment and not just the individual battalions, due to the

[6] J.G.W. Hyndson, *From Mons to the First Battle of Ypres* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1933), p. 111.
[7] 'Editor's Notes', *Highland Light Infantry Chronicle,* 1 October 1914, p. 129.

long history and traditions these units had. This was not possible for the Kitchener's Army as these battalions had to forge their history in the First World War. The deployment of battalions from the same regiment to different areas, as well as the re-forging of military identity once an individual arrived at front, prevented soldiers from continuing to identify with their regiment in the later years of the war. This meant that the regular army held a unique position of being able to relate to a more holistic military identity. Furthermore, the positioning of the original BEF as the 'Old Contemptibles' during the war also gave men the ability to see their losses within an exclusive group which extended throughout the whole army. H. Mattison closed his memoir, 'With… stunning tributes to the "Old Contemptibles".'[8] This illustrated that veterans after the war continued to remember the fallen of the opening months as a collective.

The beginning of 1915 heralded a new phase of the war with stalemate having fully set in and poison gas being used for the first time at the Second Battle of Ypres. The Territorial Army was deployed to the front throughout this year to reinforce the army and expand the war effort. The Battle of Loos came to represent this cohort's watershed moment, as this was the engagement where territorial soldiers en masse, witnessed the carnage of war together and suffered heavy losses. Stephen Graham observed, 'After Loos the bombers had their great show… boys of the bombing party were all killed or wounded… Never did anyone see so many dead at one time in the whole war as in the foreground of this terrible redoubt. The shadows of the crowds of the dead invaded men's consciousness, and left in not a few a lasting sadness and melancholy which even victory could not cure.'[9] This is an assessment of the events that happened at Loos from someone who was not present but followed the happenings of the war as a journalist. The way he recorded his regiment's experience at Loos indicated that it had been passed down from the men who were present at this action through word of mouth. This suggests that something akin to oral tradition was present within the regiments of the British Army, as a way to indoctrinate new recruits into an identity that existed at the front and could not be bestowed upon them in training. This sharing of memories functioned as an outlet for mediating grief after suffering heavy losses. This is also reinforced by the examples given in the previous chapter of

[8] London, IWM, Documents. 16067, 'Private Papers of H. Mattison'.
[9] Graham, *A Private in the Guards* (London: MacMillan, 1919), pp. 165-6.

battalions keeping the memory of their officers alive by recounting tales of them to reinforcements. The Somme is the offensive which has become synonymous with the image of mass death in present day cultural memory. It is difficult to envisage a moment in the war more horrifying than 1 July 1916. However, not all battalions and men were present on that day. There were other moments of such concentrated violence, that even if they were present at the Somme, it eclipsed all other scenes they witnessed. Mass death, whenever it occurred, could cause long lasting emotional damage to the men who witnessed it. These losses also became part of the unit's history to be passed on to new recruits. Furthermore, Graham suggests that victory in such a costly action could not bring men comfort in their losses, as the illusion of the glorious sacrifice in war began to unravel well before the summer of 1916. Therefore, Loos became the watershed moment for men deployed to the front following the end of 1914. It also lived in the memory of those who survived as the worst engagement of the war.

Graham offers second hand evidence whereas William Fraser, who was present at Loos, supports this concept in a letter he wrote home to his father: 'I'm rather fed up with seeing fellows blown to bits and I don't mind when the war ends. It's heart breaking all the good fellows of the 1st and 4th G.H. [Gordon Highlanders] killed. Splendid men, but they never had a chance. No men could do more than they did.'[10] The breaking point for these types of feelings was not in fact provided by the Somme but were reflected throughout the war. Fraser had been at the front since 1914 and by this time had experienced over a year of active service. An individual's breaking point was relative based on war experience and a soldier's own personal ability to endure, with some men being able to survive the brutality of war longer. Here Fraser references, as many men do, the damage shells did to the human body. Sights so violent and terrifying he does not want to witness it anymore. Fraser wanted to see the end of the war at any price, this seems to be a case of win or lose. They were 'splendid' men, as on the Somme, and they never had a chance of winning but did their best. They were, as they always were, the best and brightest there was to offer.

In October, Fraser wrote in another letter to his father: 'The men of some of these new divisions were simply sent forward like sheep to the slaughter: part of the

[10] William Fraser, *In Good Company: The First World War Letters and Diaries of the Hon. William Fraser, Gordon Highlanders*, ed. by David Fraser (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1990), p. 67.

show was simply criminal… You know, one really does begin to have doubts about the outcome of the war, the way we sacrifice men for nothing is so terrible.'[11] This gives an indication that soldiers'/officers' opinions of engagements with the enemy did not change over the course of the war. The Somme has an infamous place in history due to the large-scale nature of the offensive. However, that did not mean that the early actions which took place, and their relatively high casualty rates, did not dent morale and cause disillusionment with the war to creep into men's thinking. The needless sacrifice that was being made led Fraser to question whether the British army could, or perhaps even should, win the war. Furthermore, Fraser's language 'sheep to slaughter', evokes the ideas created by the first day of the Somme of men slowly walking towards their deaths and being able to do little about it. The war being fought in 1914 and 1915 was not dissimilar from what was to follow, therefore, as a more general assessment, soldiers' attitudes towards death remained constant. Graham and Fraser demonstrated the relative nature of the war experience, not just for the individual, but also the cohort to which they belonged. This was entirely dependent on the time at which they were deployed to the front and numerous soldiers had already been deeply affected by mass death before they reached the Somme.

Combat grief is identifiable due to manifestations of grief that are reserved for witnessing violent and unexpected death, with reactions governed by the volume and nature of violence only seen in war. Anger, although considered one of the five stages of grief for a bereavement suffered in normal conditions, is an emotional response to loss that is prevalent in soldiers' testimony, and can be used to identify the presence of grief when other emotional responses such as tears were not recorded. Douie wrote about a bereavement suffered at La Boisselle in 1917,

> Dawn came at last. The ruins of the village and the surrounding trench lines became distinct, and it was day. On the German wire there were dark specks, among them the dead subaltern and my faithful orderly. Behind me lay a city of the dead, beside me the ravished graves of the dead, before me men, my friends, who yesterday had been so full of life and now lay silent and unheeding in death. Anger and bitterness were in my heart against those who had wrought this destruction, an anger which could find no expression in words.[12]

[11] Ibid, pp. 67-8.
[12] Charles Douie, *The Weary Road: The Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry* (London: The Naval and Military Press, 1929), p. 129.

Douie created an image of a man surrounded by the dead. This was a common scene which appears in the personal testimony of men who survived offensive actions. Substantial losses on the battlefield could leave survivors feeling isolated and alone. The sight of numerous dead left soldiers feeling overwhelmed and unable to fully process their grief as they were affected, not only by the loss of close friends, but the decimation of their fighting force. Douie suggested that the emotions these experiences gave rise to were almost impossible to put into words. The inability to describe the intensity of the experience is evidence for how traumatic the war was for the men who fought. The fact that these ideas are present across testimony from soldiers does not demonstrate a silence, instead it was an acknowledgement from the men themselves of how deeply affected they had been by losing those who formed their military community. The very nature of wishing to put these feelings and experiences into words, no matter how unsuccessful it might have been, is evidence of the notion that men used writing to share the horrors of war. Even many years after the war, memoirs presented a space where veterans could record the feelings of anger they harboured over the deaths they had witnessed in the war. This demonstrated the long-lasting impact that the mass deaths within the military community had on soldiers.

Heavy losses affected individuals in different ways; some men failed to cope or process mass death within their regiments and battalions. This reaction to a large number of losses did not necessarily come as the result of one stint in an offensive but could build up over a prolonged involvement in one campaign, with bereavements and subsequent grief being added to before it could be mediated. Edward Campion Vaughan is an example of an officer who struggled to deal with the high numbers of losses during the course of Passchendaele. His published diary is a rare opportunity to examine how prolonged exposure to mass death could cause a man to experience the rupture moment in the Combat Grief Cycle.

> I was alone – quite alone in the world. There was no other life. Why couldn't I get up and walk back in the bright sunshine to Berles? To Berles where we had been so happy, or to Peronne?... I collapsed in my mud chair and burst into tears. I was going out in a few hours, back to the old happy life – but not the same. Raddy had gone and I would never see him again, Hammond was gone and Jimmy I knew was finished. I was the company commander now, but of what company?... It seemed the ruin and decay of the life I had revelled

> and with my face against the wet mud I lay choking and gurgling, and longed for the hateful to go and take the memories of similar bright days now lost for ever.[13]

The emotional impact of multiple bereavements and the subsequent grief was too much for some men to handle, and crying or sobbing was the only way to process the extent of their losses. Although at the time Vaughan was alone with his emotions, he had no one to share them with anyway. His open recording of his feelings demonstrated that he was not ashamed of his emotional reaction to a situation where he felt he was alone and in command of a tattered company. This desolation was compounded by the knowledge that there was no way back to a life where he had previously been happy. Even if he could replace the fellow officers he had lost with new ones, the times of carefree living had gone and could not be brought back due to Vaughan's overwhelming sense of grief. In addition, Vaughan demonstrated that crying represented the first reaction to bereavements which created deep pain, with writing providing the necessary second step for processing loss. Writing in a diary in such detail about losses suggests Vaughan was attempting to mediate his grief in order to continue fighting.

The final entry in Vaughan's diary demonstrated how destructive mass death could be to a soldier's emotional threshold,

> About 9 a.m. I dragged myself wearily out to take muster parade on which my worst fears were realised. Standing near the cookers were four small groups of bedraggled, unshaven men from whom the quartermaster sergeants were gathering information concerning any of their pals they had seen killed or wounded. It was a terrible list. Poor old Pepper had gone – hit in the back by a chunk of shell; twice buried as he lay dying in a hole, his dead body blown up and lost after Willis had carried it back to Vanheule Farm. Ewing hit by machine gun bullets had lain beside him for a while and taken messages for his girl at home. Chalk, our little treasure, had been seen to fall riddled with bullets; then he too had been hit by a shell. Sergeant Wheeldon, DCM and bar, MM and bar, was killed and Foster. Also Corporals Harrison, Oldham, Mucklow and the imperturbable McKay. My black sheep Dawson and Taylor – had died together, and out of our happy little band of 90 men, only 15 remained… So this was the end of "D" Company. Feeling sick and lonely I returned to my tent to write out my casualty report; but

[13] Edwin Campion Vaughan, *Some Desperate Glory: The World War Diary of a British Officer, 1917* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 209.

> instead I sat on the floor and drank whisky after whisky as I gazed into a black empty future.[14]

Vaughan survived the rest of the war and returned home, with his diary eventually published by his family but he never wrote another entry. His final comments openly displayed grief and sadness at what had been lost.[15] This was accompanied by a deep dejection and the final realisation that he had no one left to share the war with. He had rallied after the previous bereavements only to be confronted by more loss and the final destruction of the group with which he had come to the war. It is unclear as to why he stopped keeping his diary. It is possible that he ceased to keep a diary as all the men he had enjoyed spending time with had been killed and there was no point in remembering the rest of the war. The pain caused by these losses perhaps overwhelmed Vaughan for the rest of his life, so much so he could still not add anymore to his account after the war was over. This also suggests that writing no longer served Vaughan as a way to help him process his grief. For him the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle was total and left him stuck in the disillusionment phase for the rest of the war. This demonstrates how difficult extreme violence and mass death could be for individuals to cope with over an extended period of time.

Although it is possible to follow a brief experience of the war in detail, due to attrition rates it is virtually impossible to identify accounts which covered the war in its entirety. This is further complicated as those who survived the duration of the conflict often spent time away from the Western Front, either injured, on training courses, deployed on other fronts or promoted out of the firing line. Fraser is an example of one officer, who despite various breaks from fighting, was present at both the beginning and the end of the war. As demonstrated already, Fraser felt deeply for the soldiers he lost in 1915. He also presents evidence to suggest that disillusionment was fluid at the front and some individuals could experience mass death on a number of occasions and psychologically survive. This shows the complexities and nuances

[14] Ibid., p. 232.

[15] Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldier of the First World War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002, p. 30. Fiona Reid, *Medicine in First World War Europe: Soldiers, Medics, Pacifists* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). Leese has argued that soldiers turned to alcohol as a way of dealing with their distress. This is an act in relation to bereavement which deserves greater exploration. Reid explored the use of alcohol and drugs as methods soldiers used to deal more generally with the traumas of war. These ideas would benefit from being applied specifically to processing grief and dealing with ones' own mortality after combat. Furthermore, this also presents an opportunity to interrogate class differences within the trenches, due to the varying availability of alcohol for ORs in comparison to officers.

which existed in the Combat Grief Cycle, suggesting that the initial moment of rupture could be recovered from, perhaps as a result of time away from the line. This meant that men could experience deep pain over bereavements on more than one occasion, especially in the context of mass death. These ideas were exemplified by Fraser in April 1918,

> The news is bad this evening – Bailleul has gone, and they are fighting in Meteren – Wytschaete and Messines have gone and the Boche is into St. Eloi. That has widened out his salient so much that it is no longer a salient. And I am afraid he will get Ypres, which we have defended with so much blood and misery, and it looks like we might have to withdraw from the Passchendaele Ridge which it cost us so many lives to win. But I still know nothing about it after all – except that most of our divisions are tired and untrained and lacking in good officers – that is what depresses one far more than the loss of ground.[16]

A concept which clearly comes through Fraser's diary is the difficulty in seeing land that had been hard fought over and many lives sacrificed for being lost to the enemy. His deepest fear was that they did not have the men to stop the German advance and defend the land the British army still held. Although the sentiments may be the same as the preceding years of the war, the British were no longer sacrificing men to win ground in a big push; they were losing men whilst giving up land to the Germans. Not only this, but a sacrifice had already been made to win and hold those areas of the battlefield. Therefore, to some soldiers, all previous sacrifices had been in vain. For those who had seen much of the war it did not seem that the army had learnt its lessons from previous slaughters of the untrained. The continued sacrificing of soldiers perceived as unfit for combat unsettled Fraser the most in 1918. This suggests that feelings of disillusionment were fluid and could be compounded or intensified through the continued exposure to mass death. Depending on the nature of the event, further losses served to deepen disillusionment in relation to death on the battlefield, especially in spring 1918 when the British Army was on the retreat.

The tide turned in the summer of 1918 and the British began to advance great distances. Carter recorded about his experience at the Battle of Bapaume in August,

> The Germans must have retreated to a good distance by now... We found that the sergeant major had been killed, as well as all our officers… We noticed we were hungry and began to tuck into what

[16] William Fraser, *In Good Company*, pp. 247-8.

> rations we possessed, but had little heart even for that, as we discovered old so-and-so had had it, that so-and-so had the most ghastly wound from a supposed explosive bullet, and that so-and-so had got the full benefit of a "taty masher". etc. etc..[17]

As chapter two argued the Combat Grief Cycle was a complicated process for soldiers who served in 1918. Many men, as the end of the war neared, were able to overcome losses as the possibility of their survival became increasingly tangible. In the case of Carter, little survives in regards to his war service or how long he had been at the front for. August 1918 was too distant from the end of the war, and the Allies situation still too precarious for soldiers to feel any comfort in these ideas. Carter and his Comrades had been surrounded, with the deaths they sustained an indicator of how perilous their own situation had been and that they were lucky to be alive. Victory could not change the reality of warfare and lives were still lost in the pursuit of it. Survivors were still overcome with a deep sense of bereavement and revulsion at the violence of the day's events. Furthermore, Carter finishes his account of Bapaume with '[the officer] led the way from the scene of what I remember as the most moving and ghastly experience during my service in France and Belgium.'[18] Carter shows the relative nature of the soldier's experience beyond the cultural memory of the war. Not only was his worst and most horrific experience of war in a peripheral battle, it came at the moment the British Army were beginning to gain the upper hand.

When considering 1918 it is important to acknowledge that soldiers were still focused solely on their part of the line and the actions they were involved in. German breakthroughs or British gains did little to influence the way men responded to the deaths of their comrades. It is important to consider that huge and painful losses did not have to come from an attack or counterattack. Wilfred Heavens recorded one such event in his diary in August 1918, after the platoon to which he was stretcher-bearer suffered a large number of casualties due to shelling, whilst digging a communication trench,

> In the early morning the remnants of the company arrived back at Mont-des-Chets a saddened and dejected lot. Many a bosom pal was missing and many a silent tear was shed that day. Some of the chaps

[17] IWM, Documents. 11606, A. S. Carter.
[18] Ibid.

> were inconsolable in their grief. Nearly every dug-out had an empty place and spare kit, and it seemed a different company altogether.[19]

Heavens was a seasoned soldier who had been at the front since 1915. Never one to record his own feelings throughout, as evidenced by this extract, he did not deride others for their emotions nor did he seem to consider them to be out of the ordinary. Heavens had been through both the Somme and Passchendaele and this was the first entry of this kind to appear in his diary. The level of devastation wrought on this unit was huge with all men losing friends. Heavens openly recorded their tears, silent or otherwise, with some inconsolable demonstrating how incapacitating bereavements could be. They had not died in battle but had been vulnerable whilst carrying out a mundane military task with little significance. Deaths were always significant at the front for the friends of the deceased. Those who were loved would always be mourned regardless of the time or the place they were killed. It did not matter how and why these men had died; with friends and comrades gone the company would not be able to recover to its former self.

It was often the scene after combat which caused a profound breaking of the emotions, as demonstrated in Graham's account of Loos. Although this work has attempted to give equal weight to all major battles, the first day of the Somme was still a moment that created a significant rupture of the Combat Grief Cycle for the men who served there. Captain Lionel Ferguson recorded, 'At last we arrived and we entered a large hall filled with wounded. I saw Captain Deoul getting a dressing put on and other friends lying dead or dying; the sight was so cruel that my nerve went and I fell down on the floor and started sobbing. I had had no sleep and little food for 60 hours, also weak from loss of blood, so had some excuse.'[20] Futility is a word that is often used indiscriminately in conjunction with the First World War. However, in relation to the writings and remembrances of the soldiers who survived combat, it was perhaps the most accurate description of how soldiers felt. Although it is clear from Ferguson's account that he was suffering from what would now be termed battle fatigue, the sight of his friends dead and dying was too much for him to process in the immediate aftermath of battle, especially when he had himself been injured. This scene instilled in Ferguson an overwhelming sense of futility as there was nothing he could

[19] IWM, Documents. 17484, W. Heavens, 19 August 1918.
[20] IWM, Documents. 7154, Captain L. I. L. Ferguson, 5 July 1916.

do for them. Therefore, sobbing was the only emotional response he was capable of at this time. This lends further credence to the notions that tears were the first reaction to intense feelings of bereavement. Ferguson felt the need to excuse this behaviour in the days which followed as it clearly did not sit comfortably with him. The act of recording these feelings suggests that he was trying, not only to make sense of the scene he had witnessed, but also his own emotions where bereavements were concerned.

In addition to recording episodes of sobbing, soldiers employed language to convey how deeply they were affected by mass death. Heartbreak or being heartbroken by the sight of their decimated military communities was one phrase that soldiers used to show their deep sense of grief. This was a recurrent theme throughout the war but was particularly present in testimony in relation to the Somme. G. McDonald wrote on 15 July 1916, 'to look at the battalion now is enough to break one's heart. Nearly all my pals are dead or wounded… We don't know yet how many we have lost.'[21] In the immediate aftermath of an engagement it was not clear to those who survived how many had been lost. The only indication they had concerning losses was what they had seen, could be told by others and the number of men who lined up for roll call. Not only were the numbers obviously small to McDonald, he was already aware that almost all of his friends had been killed or were wounded. The notion of soldiers being heartbroken after losing a large number of friends or comrades indicates the strength of the bereavement they felt.

Although grief was often the overriding emotion after battle, once the dust had settled these feelings could be compounded by defeat. John Charles Barrie recorded of watching men march back from the front after a failed attack on the Hindenburg Line,

> We watched them go by in silence, and every man's heart went out to them in sympathy. They trudged past with their heads down, stunned by their appalling losses, grieving for their mates who had so needlessly been sacrificed. I had seen units come out of a fight before with pretty thin ranks, but still retaining a glow of pride in a job well done, but I had never seen anything like this before… all feeling that the job they had done was not only hopeless from the start, but absolutely useless, and their mates had gone for nothing.[22]

[21] London, IWM, Documents. 15085, G. McDonald, 15 July 1916.
[22] John Charles Barrie, *Memoirs of an Anzac: A First-Hand Account by an AIF Officer in the First World War* (Victoria and London: Scribe Publications, 2015), p. 232.

The British Army as a wider community, Barrie served in the A.I.F., demonstrated a widespread understanding for the suffering of survivors who were coming back from battle. They knew and understood the emotions their fellow soldiers were going through, and grieving for mates 'gone west' was considered part of the military experience. These men who trudged back behind the line were not derided for their emotional and down-hearted responses. Morale was clearly shattered but other soldiers who watched on found sympathy for them, knowing that their turn to go up the line was more than likely yet come. In this case, as with others on the extreme of the spectrum, it hit those who looked on hard as they knew that these men suffered more because they saw their sacrifice as being in vain. Soldiers needed to be able to believe they had lost their comrades for the good of the war effort, that some minor victory had been won in order to maintain morale and mediate their grief. It was when men decided that death in war was futile that bereavements became harder to bear and their position within the Combat Grief Cycle became compromised.

Following combat all military units went through the same process of rebuilding. As the first chapter addressed, bolstering depleted ranks caused an array of complex emotions, principally centred around the idea that new troops changed the fabric of a battalion and old hands struggled to accept green replacements. The empty places within the ranks immediately after battle presented a stark image to those who had survived, demonstrating to them visually what they had lost. Griffiths wrote in his memoir after fighting at Mametz Wood on the Somme,

> Men were marching abreast who has never before stood together in the same file. There are the gaps in a battalion on the march, though many have fallen, but the closing up that follows losses tells its own tale. The faces of many silent and hard eyed men showed that they were but half-aware of their new neighbours, newcomers who jostled the ghost of old companions, usurpers who were themselves struggling against the same griefs and longings, marching forward with minds that look backwards into time and space.[23]

Griffiths suggested that the effects of reorganisation began before new recruits even arrived. He demonstrated in reality how fractured a battalion was after combat and how fragile ideas of comradeship were. Comrades could not offer comfort to each other after the loss of close personal friends. Griffiths reflected the argument of David

[23] Griffiths, *Up the Line to Mametz* (London: Faber and Faber,1931), pp. 233-4.

French, that after heavy losses soldiers came to regard their battalions 'as a diminishing group of comrades', or in this case, friends.[24] The fighting at Mametz Woods was particularly fierce with high casualties and men such as Griffiths were traumatised by the violence they witnessed. Following combat, the closing of ranks, even by those with shared experience and identity, felt like a betrayal of the dead. This 'replacement' of the fallen came too soon after battle, especially as survivors had not yet had the chance to rest and demobilise the mind in order to acknowledge their bereavements. Through the lens of time Griffiths was attempting to make sense of and understand these feelings. He wrote as an observer, still attempting to process his own grief many years after the end of the war. It is clear from Griffiths' account that these men had collectively experienced a rupture moment in the Combat Grief Cycle. On the march away from the line men could not comprehend what had just happened to them, with this perhaps representing for Griffiths a transition between the two phases; hardening and disillusionment. Although this should have been a moment of shared mourning, men became lost in their own pain only aware that those who had fallen were not there to offer them comfort. Then their bereavement was heightened by the fear that the dead were already being replaced and forgotten.

Once drafts arrived and were admitted into battalions, men who survived numerous battles developed a complex relationship with reinforcements, as Drinkwater discussed in his diary,

> Huge drafts arrived today, making the battalion up to strength again. It's a very worrying business, this getting to know a fellow, going up the line and afterwards finding out no one knows what has happened to him. His place is filled by the next draft up and so continues; officers and men alike. The infantry are beginning to be known as "gun fodder". I think it is a very apt description.[25]

As Richard Schweitzer has argued one of the 'grimmer realities' of war was having to rebuild a battalion after heavy losses.[26] Some soldiers took an instant dislike to the idea of new troops after they had lost friends. For some soldiers, such as Drinkwater, it was a longer process before they decided they were not going to integrate with the

[24] David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army and the British People c. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 284.
[25] Harry Drinkwater, *Harry's War: The Great War Diary of Harry Drinkwater*, ed. by Jon Cooksey and David Griffiths (St. Ives: Edbury Press, 2013), p. 149.
[26] Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt Among British and American Great War Soldiers* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), p. 135.

new draft. This concerned learning the difficult lesson, especially for men who survived a long period of the war, that they were making friends and forming new bonds only to suffer grief and loss again. Therefore, many soldiers decided after their first or second round of losses that it was easier, and imperative to their emotional survival, to keep to oneself. This meant some men only found comfort in acquaintances with whom they had joined up and had some understanding of shared experience with, but had never been and would never be a close personal friend. In addition to the struggles concerning unit identity outlined in chapter one, this cycle led to deep disillusionment concerning the value which was placed on men's lives.

Trench Journals: Mediating Battle Losses

Trench journals became a means with which soldiers as a community could navigate their heavy losses. As the previous chapter explored soldiers' publications were a space where communal grief was expressed and made acceptable. Trench journals were also a place where esprit de corps could be maintained and this was significant after heavy losses during battle. For those battalions and regiments who placed great stock on the impact of their journals on the ranks, editorials became a way of boosting morale, helping soldiers to find value in their losses. They also reinforced motivations to return to the battlefield and encouraged survivors to seek revenge.

Therefore, trench journals were a place of communal mourning, comfort and healing. This was the focus of a number of journals during the war years, particularly after heavy fighting. *The Oak Tree*, in December 1915, began its first edition with,

> In these moving times our first words must be to express sorrow and regret, mingled with pride, for the comrades we have lost. There cannot be a member of the Regiment who does not number a personal friend amongst those who have gone. But, thank heaven, there are many to take their place, and many serving, and thanks to cheeriness, grit, and pluck all have displayed and are displaying, we feel prouder than ever.[27]

These were patterns and sentiments which were fairly common for trench journals which chose a more solemn tone and took the opportunity to confront losses. *The Oak Tree* did this for the regiment as a whole and constructed a community of mourning,

[27] 'Editorial', The Oak Tree: The Magazine of the Cheshire Regiment, 1 December 1915, p. 1.

making grief acceptable. The acceptability of these feelings was grounded in the acknowledgement of the difficult times the men had been through, accompanied with the understanding that every survivor had lost a close friend. It was also used as an opportunity to encourage soldiers to move on and hope for better times by accepting new recruits willingly into their units. This is an idea which stood in contradiction to the general feeling amongst officers and soldiers alike that it was the best who had been killed and they could never be replaced. Although many trench journals subscribed to the same ideal, as part of their remit was to improve morale, they were forced to place a more positive spin on their situation to influence the attitudes of survivors.

Dominion battalions and regiments were some of the most prolific trench journal publishers in the British Army. There are many examples of journals from Australian, Canadian and New Zealand regiments, with all reflecting similar sentiments concerning death and the empire. The *Chronicle of the N.Z.E.F.* wrote in October 1916:

> Individually and collectively we are sadder and wiser. We have learnt many lessons deep and tragic, and, to retain our Empire's strength, little more remains but to remember and practice those lessons.… From near and far they have come to pay their toll on the fields of France... The price may be heavy, and many homesteads will never see their blithe, bronzed boys again. But it is little to pay, after all, to keep British still for those who come after the many miles of free, beloved country overseas. Britain may forget these hard learnt lessons – likely not – but yonder, over the seas, they never shall.[28]

It was perhaps more important to Dominion units to maintain a publication due to their distance from home. Their journals were an important part of retaining their national identities separate from the British Army. Although national identity was significant to soldiers of the dominions it was always firmly constructed under a Britannic umbrella. During 1916 ideas of national determination were still in their infancy and soldiers continued to fight and die for the Empire. It was towards the end of the war that these ideas held their most appeal. Therefore, their reasons for fighting were less clear than for the ordinary Tommy. Following heavy losses, journals became an important place to remind men of the Dominions why they were fighting and renew

[28] 'Editorial', *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F.: Records of Matters Concerning Troops and Gazette of Patriotic Effort*, 16 October 1916, p. 75.

commitment to supporting the Empire, particularly as these countries began to focus more on their emancipation on the world stage as an independent power. It was important to acknowledge the pain and anguish that soldiers had been through since their arrival in France. It was also important to encourage soldiers to learn lessons from their losses to ensure that deaths would not be in vain. Deaths were reported in this way to aid soldiers in their mourning and encourage them to fight in the memory of the fallen.

Trench journals not only encouraged soldiers to fight in the name of the dead, but also to sacrifice themselves in the pursuit of victory. *The Outpost*, reported in March 1917,

> We have passed through the Valley of the Shadow … The noblest and the best of our comrades went into the valley with us. They are there yet … Their smiles of comradeship, of endurance, of patient suffering cannot be effaced by Death itself. To us who are left to continue the way, their names are engraved on the tablets of our memory … And this is our message to men – Though our hands are empty, our dead lie behind us. Their number is the measure of our prowess. In remembrance of them we find our strength, the courage for the coming conflict. They call on us to come to them. When we answer their call we shall do so with our hands full, for in our grasp shall be full and final victory.[29]

As already noted, officers who edited trench journals were acutely aware of morale within their units going into the new campaign season. For the duration of the Somme *The Outpost* ran numerous editorials dedicated to the memory of the fallen and creating as a sense of communal mourning.[30] In March 1917, with offensive action again on the horizon, the publication continued to exercise the demons of the Somme, building the memory of the fallen firmly into the identity of the 17th Service Battalion, Highland Light Infantry. This editorial also cemented the battalion as a community in mourning as they continued to actively grieve for their dead as motivation to return to the field. It also encouraged men not to fear sacrifice as they would die, as those before them had, in the pursuit of victory and would live in the memory of the survivors. This

[29] 'Editorial', *The Outpost*, 1 March 1917, p. 172.
[30] Some of these editorials have been considered in Natasha Silk, 'Witnesses to Death: Soldiers on the Western Front', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Artistic and Cultural Responses to War Since 1914: The British Isles, the United States and Australasia*, ed. by Martin Kerby, Margret Baguley and Janet Macdonald (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 152.

demonstrates that the mediation of losses in battle continued collectively for many months after the offensive had ended.

Combat Grief and Acts of Revenge

As already acknowledged anger and revenge were prominent emotions in the testimony of soldiers. Revenge was a common response to combat grief, as Watson has argued, because death in war could not be assuaged through 'traditional' acts of mourning such as laying flowers.[31] Joanne Bourke has argued that men were more likely to be compelled to act out of revenge when it was their own lives under threat,[32] although this was more likely to have been an instinctive act driven by an innate desire of self-preservation. Revenge was more often recorded as impotent feelings of rage in response to a bereavement, hoping to get the Germans back next time in a more collective style of retribution dealt out by the battalion. For some soldiers the only way they could process their violent loss was through the use of violence themselves. As this work has demonstrated already killing the enemy was a complex and often difficult act for many men who served in the army.[33] For those who did find the motivation to take a life, it often took the death of a friend or the mass death of comrades to persuade them to kill. Therefore, they would kill the enemy not for the war effort but in revenge for those who had been lost.[34] Revenge was most potent as a form of mourning, as it offered a way to mediate the bereavement felt when a friend(s) had been killed violently.

Feelings of revenge were often created in response to the loss of a well-liked individual and did not have to occur during combat. These deaths did not result in the immediate carrying out of retribution but were held onto to use when a soldier went over the top. Charlie May commented in his diary in April 1916,

> Gretsy… a good man and one whom we liked well… His poor body was full of gaping holes. It was very, very sad… so be it we can get our price from the Hun. Confound the man. He fights with iron and steel against poor, brave bodies. It is what a German would do. But

[31] Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 69.
[32] Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, (London: Granata, 1999), p. 227.
[33] Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society* (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1992), p. 10.
[34] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 227.

> one day we'll get him with bayonet. The issue must come at last to man to man. And when it does I have no doubt as to the issue. We'll take our price then for Gretsy and all the other hundred thousand Gretsys slain as he was standing still at his post.[35]

It is clear from May's account that Gretsy was mourned widely by the men he served beside. He was not a man killed in a great offensive, such as the Somme, but was merely manning his post when he was hit by a shell. Unlike other accounts, the death of this popular soldier was not seen as random and the Germans as a collective were to blame. It was these kinds of incidents which would give men the courage to go over the top and kill when the time came. This supports the understanding that in violent death there was always someone to blame and retribution must be enacted on them.[36] This is a reflection of the notion that if someone had been killed, it was intentional and had been carried out by someone, even if they were intangible. May's rage was compounded by the way in which the German's were killing his friends and comrades. He suggested that the way the British fought was more honourable, as they would rather settle the war in hand-to-hand fighting instead of hiding behind shells. He saw the Germans' way of fighting as cowardly because they would not leave their trenches. This dishonourable conduct carried out by the Germans' robbed soldiers like Gretsy of the opportunity to die gloriously in combat. Men could be reluctant to kill until they had justification to and for many the death of a friend could provide the motivation.

Acts of revenge were not just thought about by soldiers in the abstract. In a number of accounts men did not wait for the opportunity to carry out their vengeance but instead were compelled to take action immediately, often at great personal risk to themselves. Geoffrey Brooke recorded in his diary about the Battle of the Marne in 1914,

> Dickie (Dixon) and Granny (Onslaw) were both exceptional men and all ranks were devoted to them. When the adjutant… heard they had been killed he got permission (or possibly he did not) to go out with a rifle to kill at least two Germans in revenge for the loss of his friends – and he succeeded. One certainly admired the Germans as soldiers – they were both brave and efficient; but there are times when, after seeing your best pals killed, a feeling of bitter animosity

[35] Charlie May, *To Fight Alongside Friends: The First World War Diary of Charlie May*, ed. by Gerry Harrison (London: William Collins, 2014), p. 118.
[36]Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), pp. 169-7. Edward K. Rynearson, *Retelling Violent Death* (Philadelphia: Brumer-Routeldge, 2001), p. 21.

> comes over even when the most stolid individual and he is determined somehow to exact retribution for the losses sustained.[37]

This account from Brooke demonstrated that acts of revenge had their foundations in the very early engagements of the war, and even the regular army were motivated to kill due to the loss of friends. Brooke recorded a certain affection for the prowess of the German soldier, and although he does not say it directly, suggested at least himself and those around him were not simply prepared to kill their fellow man indiscriminately. Instead, death had to be dealt in an eye for an eye exchange. From the British soldier's point of view motivation to kill must always be brought on by a German act first; they were always the aggressor as they had been in starting the war. More generally perhaps in order to protect the British soldier, killings which were recorded must always have had reason behind them which justified the act.

As alluded to by May, revenge was not always related to death in its simplest form but could also be tied to the way men were killed. Therefore, the revenge had to be exacted in the same vein. Horace Reginald Stanley recorded in 1915,

> I get some wire cutters and cut the end off a clip of bullets and throw the pieces well into no man's land for I know full well the penalty if I get caught by own officers or Germans. I aim at the spot where the flames are licking the breast work and blaze away and am rewarded by seeing the breast work vanish as if some fiend were at work with an invisible spade. Demonically I repeat the process until exhausted and then I begin to have pangs of remorse. I have seen the terrible wounds caused by those things, but it wasn't human to try and burn us alive. My honour is deserting me and I haven't seen much glory.[38]

In this case Stanley was moved to the extreme and committed a serious war crime in order to exact his revenge by making 'dum-dum' bullets. This was not simply a case of death on the battlefield but concerned the way men were killed and the rules of war. As Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker have argued, soldiers often carried out acts of revenge as a protest against the 'impersonal violence' of the front.[39] This demonstrates not a fear of mortality but a fear of certain kinds of death. Being burned alive, in Stanley's opinion, was not the right way for men to be killed as it was inhumane and

[37] Major-General Geoffrey Brooke, *The Brootherhood of Arms* (London: William Gloves and Son, 1914), p. 39.
[38] Horace Reginald Stanley, *Grandad's War: The First World War Diary of Horace Reginald Stanley*, ed. by Juliet Broody and Heather Broody (Cromer: Poppyland Publishing, 2007), p. 40.
[39] Leonard V. Smith, Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 91.

was not the way war should have been fought. The Germans' actions were sub-human and rather than responding simply with feelings of revenge he acted upon them. Stanley retaliated by committing a war crime himself. It seems that Stanley felt that this act was justified as he did not consider it anymore barbaric than using fire to kill. At the time he had no thoughts of reprisals, this came after he had his revenge. Stanley's actions were about responding to the enemy in kind. If the Germans were going to maim and violently kill his comrades then they themselves should suffer horrific wounds, not in line with the codes of war.

Revenge and feelings of revenge were not just harboured and carried out by individuals. Collective acts of revenge carried out by companies on the spur of the moment were not uncommon. A. J. Turner recorded in his memoir,

> "C" Company's fury hit white heat when a young German audaciously appeared with his hands held above his head and started to walk towards them. A brief second of astonished outrage was broken by a roar from Lewis and rifles, the impact lifted him backwards. He must have been dead before he fell. His binoculars and telescopic sight confirmed his despicable trade. Boys spat on him as they passed.[40]

Building upon Stanley's account, this again concerned the ways in which men were killed and the types of killing which British soldiers found unacceptable. The understanding of fair and chivalrous warfare was not necessarily governed by the international codes of war set out by world leaders. As Stanley and Turner both demonstrated men shunned the so-called rules of warfare to enact the revenge which they saw as just, such as shooting a surrendering enemy soldier. These men had just witnessed their comrades picked off by this sniper and it was perhaps the perceived cowardice of his surrender which whipped a whole company of men into a fury. Significantly here, even though they had killed the surrendering sniper, their desire for revenge reached such a peak of rage they treated his remains with contempt. This demonstrates Tim Cook's suggestion that soldiers were 'as much executioners as they were victims' is an over simplification.[41] Overcome with grief and drunk on battle soldiers often acted out of instinct when the enemy surrendered.

[40] IWM, Documents. 4617, A. J. Turner.
[41] Tim Cook, 'The Politics of Surrender: Canadian Soldiers and the Killing of prisoners in the Great War', *The Journal of Military History*, 7:3 (2006), p. 665.

As demonstrated above witnessing death in battle could have numerous and contradictory effects on men. For the most part this work focuses on how bereavements during battle were either ignored, as men did not have the mental space to process them, or were a source of grief in the aftermath of fighting. It was only in a rare circumstance that a bereavement could break through the mobilisation of the mind and body. Bereavements at the height of offensive action could also motivate men to overcome their fears for their own safety and fight harder. Ferguson commented in his diary, 'Stewart in charge of no. 1 platoon was killed outright, the best officer in the battalion. I saw him a few moments later, quite dead, his lighted pipe still between his teeth… From this point we were just mown down. My blood was up now, my fear had gone and I wanted to kill and rush on.'[42] For Ferguson it seemed a combination of a personal bereavement and witnessing the indiscriminate killing of the unknown masses caused him to seek revenge on the enemy rather than fearing for his own life. As already shown, once Ferguson was demobilised from battle due to his wounds, he began to feel grief and sadness for the men killed. Revenge was a response to combat grief which could only be endured as long as men were at the front and mobilised for fighting.

Revenge alone was not always enough to encourage men to carry out the final act of taking another life. Second Lieutenant R. A. G. Taylor wrote in his diary, 'I pride myself I was the first man into the trench and when I got there I saw the Huns running in all directions… I knelt down and shot… the running Huns, thereby getting my own back for Cookson, Sterling, Wallace, & Johnson-Brown. They dropped one after the other. I simply couldn't have done it if I was[n't] nearly half mad with excitement.'[43] Taylor demonstrated an inherent reticence to kill his fellow man; the death of his friends alone was not enough and he could only carry out violence due to the adrenaline and excitement of battle. Revenge was not necessarily a complicated motivating factor for killing the enemy; what mattered here was that soldiers could be killed by artillery, machine gun fire or rifle fire, but the cost was almost always meted out on the enemy infantry. As long as a price, normally more than the number lost, was exacted it did not matter which men died. Conversely, as Taylor demonstrates,

[42] IWM, Documents. 7154, Captain L. I. L. Ferguson, 5 July 1916.
[43] London, IWM, 'Private Papers of 2nd Lieutenant R. A. G. Taylor', 15 and 16 June 1915.

revenge could rarely be carried out in cold blood; it almost exclusively had to occur in the heat of battle when a man was primed to attack in the first place.

Revenge was also a prevalent theme in many trench journals. It was not always reserved for moments immediately after battle but was used as a communal motivating factor for regiments and battalions. *The Oak Tree* reported in August 1916:

> The month – August – and the name – Mons – to most of us now seem inseparable. Two years ago! The "Contemptible little Army" – our one Battalion then fighting – bearing the full force of the Huns' attack... God grant that our splendid New Army Battalions and Territorials will revenge those losses and continue, as they are doing, to punish the swollen headed brutes who, two years ago, in their inflated pride and great strength, swept over poor Belgium and plunged Europe into this present nightmare of death, wounds, and mourning.[44]

The Oak Tree demonstrated that the regulars were respected publicly throughout the army and the concept of revenging the losses from the early part of the war endured at least into 1916. Not only this, but the British Army continued to utilise German atrocities from 1914 as a way to motivate soldiers.[45] This showed that mourning and grief for losses within military communities lasted throughout the war, even if the individual men had long been forgotten. These feelings could still be used to encourage men to take lives and foster hatred for the enemy. This was particularly important in 1916 as many of Kitchener's volunteers were still green and untried units would be put into combat for the first time. Therefore, motivation and morale had to be provided for men who had not yet suffered their own losses. Appearing during the Battle of the Somme, these ideas of revenge took on greater significance after the opening days of the offensive. Actual losses could not yet be reported as a result of censorship and journals perhaps had to look at previous battles to motivate soldiers to continue. As already noted, great respect existed for the Old Contemptibles and their memory could be used to encourage revenge and the emulation of their heroism.

[44] 'Editorial', *The Oak Tree: The Magazine of the Cheshire Regiment*, 1 August 1916, p. 129.
[45] Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). See Kramer for an exploration of how German atrocities from 1914, such as the destruction of Louvain, encouraged belligerent nations to adopt 'extreme' war policies.

Cohorts: A Disparate War Experience

The idea of a disparate war experience amongst cohorts was a concept that was not lost on some soldiers who served during the war, even if it was only acknowledged retrospectively. Sir Tom Bridges wrote about the Somme in his memoir,

> So ended the Battle of the Somme, the passing of the New Army as Mons had been the grave of the old. Three times had my Division been renewed and fresh faces met one on every side, but they lacked the cheerful eager look of the volunteer. We never had the same gallant adventures in the ranks again. They were splendid soldiers. They got few honours, little glory and often just six feet of France to lie in. But in their cheerful philosophy these worthy successors of the men of Agincourt asked no more.[46]

Soldiers who entered the war at different moments and fought in different battles, did not share the same understanding of the First World War as each other. Each cohort participated in an offensive of such devastation to their ranks that their military group no longer existed for survivors in the same way as it had done before. This watershed moment became immensely significant for those who survived, shaping their perception of their military communities in the aftermath of an offensive. For Bridges, this moment was the Somme but he was able to identify the same process for the original BEF. Bridges indicated here that the Retreat from Mons for the regulars who fought there, came to hold immense cultural significance when it came to ideas of death in the British Army. It resonated as a moment of deep loss and served as a comparison for other battles of the war. This is further evidence for the Somme representing only one in a series of watershed moments, which destroyed a cohort along with its ideals.

Bridges offers a detailed explanation of how the watershed moment affected men who had survived. Confrontations with mass death and grief changed the outlook of the men who served within a cohort across the board, with battle creating a mass break from hardening. It came either as a response to heavy losses or in combination with personal losses. This was not just the case for the Somme but for all principal campaigns. These offensives provided a focal point where individuals came to see the army as the wider community to which they belonged. This only became possible

[46] Lieut-Gen Sir Tom Bridges, *Alarms and Excursions Reminiscences of a Soldier* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1938), p. 163.

when a large number of battalions served together in the line, leading to feelings of extensive mourning and disillusionment. As Bridges alluded to, these feelings were not unique to the volunteers who served at the Somme but were thoughts and feelings shared by almost all soldiers who experienced the war.

For the retreat in the spring of 1918, as with offensives actions, it is difficult to construct a homogenous experience for an army which contained a variety of men with a plethora of different experiences. It is virtually impossible to consolidate the experience of green troops with those of the men who had been through the Somme and/or Passchendaele, as well as the reaction of young men who had continued to volunteer with those who had been forced into service. J. Nettleton wrote about the retreat in 1918, 'This retreat had its sticky moments but on the whole it was not nearly so alarming or dangerous as the battles of the last half of 1917'.[47] Although an offensive or defensive action could be the worst moment of a man's war it could also bring into stark relief previous experiences, and Nettleton is an example of this. The ghastly nature of other offensives could help men process or put into perspective the disastrous situations they found themselves in. The response also depended upon where a man was in the line when an action was occurring, making generalised comparisons problematic. Although these factors fed into the moment when a soldier's sense of hardening to death was ruptured, the moment when it occurred could be retrospectively pinpointed. Feelings of disillusionment could fluctuate but the break with hardening in the Combat Grief Cycle could only happen once. Nettleton demonstrated that the moment of rupture was not always apparent to soldiers during the war. An individual's worst experience of combat was sometimes only revealed when a soldier reconstructed their memories after the war and were able to compare battles. Therefore, in relation to mass death the memoir was a place of revelation alongside the processing of the horrors of war.

This comparison between battles, in part, led to the disenfranchisement of grief for the 1918 soldier. Alongside his devalued worth as a conscript, he was forced to fight the retreating Germans over the same ground as the offensives that had indelibly marked the memory of the Home Front and the army. Therefore, their losses could never be comparable as Turner commented, 'we had lost a great many of our

[47] IWM, Documents. 12332, Lieutenant J. Nettleton.

companions, though I suppose, our losses would be regarded as "Light" when compared to the carnage of 1915 and 1916 over similar ground.'[48] The losses over this period were deemed as 'light' not by the men who fought there previously but by those who would compare their exploits to those which had occurred earlier on in the war. In fact, Turner probably feared that their losses would fade into obscurity as the ground was associated with the early years of the conflict. Although in reality the number of casualties were incomparable in 1918 to those which had happened previously, the weight of losses did not concern the numbers but the connection of survivors to the ones who had perished. Turner felt that his mourning would be disenfranchised as he believed the dead of his cohort would not gain the same recognition as those who went before.

This was a feeling which was not unique to Turner, and not always directly related to the land over which men fought. Instead it concerned gaining recognition that other battles were more costly, or just as destructive for individuals, as those offensives which were already famous before the Armistice. W. Hall commented in his account of the Second Battle of the Aisne, written in May 1918,

> The people at home know very little of this battle compared with their knowledge of the Somme and Ypres battles for the reason that few British units took part, there being only four Divisions when the action commenced, forming part of the French Army. Yet, it was probably a greater disaster to British arms than any previous battle in the Great War.[49]

A trend which comes out of the First World War soldiers' accounts, both public and private, was the tendency for some soldiers only to write about one battle or event from their war experience. Although this thesis would like to establish a homogenous understanding for this practice, there are a number of reasons for why a soldier might only have written about one engagement. For Hall, only writing about the Battle of the Aisne concerned putting on record that this battle would be little known. He believed it needed to be brought out of the shadow of the Somme and Passchendaele and be recognised for the trauma it represented for those who survived. Hall did not reflect the same disenfranchised grief as Turner because he was present at both the Somme and Passchendaele. Nevertheless, he did bring into stark relief the relative nature of

[48] IWM, Documents. 4617, A. J. Turner.
[49] London, IWM, Documents 4845, 'Private Papers of W. Hall'.

war experience. Hall had participated in watershed events that had ruptured the hardening of numerous men but it was the Second Battle of the Aisne that broke him. Hall's account testified to how significant a peripheral engagement could be for an individual. It could eclipse the battle which united his military community, most likely because he had not felt a personal bereavement in a prior action and could not share the communal grief which emanated from a cohort's watershed moment.

For soldiers who had a long war service, the unrelenting nature of losses deeply affected them in the later months of 1918. As the British continued to push the Germans back Frank Percy Crozier wrote in his memoir, 'And then comes tragedy once more. The war is not yet over; it is October, and there is to be more tragedy still and even after.'[50] Crozier became a controversial character in the post-war era; an officer with a long and distinguished military career who became a pacifist. In his other book, *The Men that I Killed,* he covers in detail his own actions during the war, such as firing on troops to keep them fighting and carrying out a death sentence. He considers through a number of these incidents the horror of war and the revulsion at his own actions.[51] The above quote, taken from his memoir *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land,* demonstrated the unrelenting nature of the war he had been involved in since the outbreak in 1914; there had always been tragedy and there would continue to be as long as the war lasted. Crozier demonstrated throughout his interwar publications the detrimental effect sustained industrial warfare could have on soldiers of higher rank. A veteran of the Boer War, his time on the Western Front witnessing destruction and horror, as well as sending men to their deaths, undid any ideas of the glory of war Crozier had brought with him in 1914. Over four years of war Crozier's resolve was broken down by the death and destruction he not only witnessed, but had a hand in creating. For many men, victory in 1918 could not make the sacrifice and tragedy of war worthwhile, as the offensive action of the last hundred days only offered more of the same emotional trauma.

Trench journals also helped to build a sense of disparate experience if they had published over an extended period of time. *The Outpost,* over numerous editions in 1916 covered the devastation that the Battle of the Somme had caused to the ranks of

[50] Brigadier-General F.P. Crozier, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land* (London and Toronto: 1930), p. 226.
[51] Brigadier-General F. P. Crozier, *The Men I Killed* (London: Michael Joseph, 1937).

the 17th Service Battalion, Highland Light Infantry. Not only did the journal continue to publish articles about the Somme into 1917, on the anniversary of the beginning of the battle the publication continued to elevate the event above other calamities that had befallen the British Army before the Somme and since. *The Outpost* published these comments in an article titled 'miserable days' in July 1917,

> Paradoxically enough, it is our most miserable days that we cherish most. We would not forget them if we could; we recall then, revisualise, and revivify them more frequently than we do our happy days … And in the wider and deeper issues, when gallant comrades fell, and we mourned the loss of bold and generous heart, I may have been more sad than miserable… Yet in the singling out my experiences in France, it is under the last category that I must enter the most unhappy day I have lived through … Added to bodily weariness was the burden of jaded spirits, disappointment and profound grief… The First of July last year will live in the memory of every man who survived the horrible ordeal that day. It was the first engagement our battalion had joined… the cost was great. The picture of the battlefield under the red glare of the sunset is unforgettably printed on my mind. Nowhere in Dante will you find the description equal to that lurid sight torn and battered humanity, friend and foe together… I can never efface from my memory the recollection of that night… the sense of loss weighed heavily on us.[52]

By July of that year, the Highland Light Infantry had already suffered through more engagements. Collectively these men continued, not only to focus upon the Battle of the Somme, but its opening day, as the focal point for the battalions continued mourning. During the war, fixating upon the worst moment of battle may have been a tactic employed by the officers editing journals to bolster the morale of soldiers before entering the battlefield once again. For old hands it served as a reminder, not only for their fallen, but also for their own survival. They had faced the worst the war had to offer and had lived to fight another day, an attempt to remove the fear from the next time they went over the top. For new recruits, it reminded them of the battle honours of the battalion they now belonged to and the glory they had to uphold. It also demonstrated to them that men could survive the true horrors of the battlefield. *The Outpost* indicates the danger of concluding that all battalions of the same regular regiment focused on 1914 as their watershed moment. The 17th Service Battalion was

[52] Mac, 'Miserable Days', *The Outpost*, 1 July 1917, p. 87.

part of the new army and formed of volunteers.[53] This meant that their first contact with offensive action came at the Somme. These men could not identify with the experiences of the regular battalions who had served earlier in the war and therefore formed their own identity rooted in the experience of the individual battalion.

Disillusionment

As this and the previous chapter have demonstrated, men grieved for and were affected by a variety of different losses which occurred in numerous circumstances, culminating in the rupture moment of the combat grief cycle. For some soldiers this was a short process and for others it took many months, or even years, to reach breaking-point. Although the effects of this moment could still be termed combat grief, the majority of soldiers' accounts become punctuated by the same sentiment: disillusionment. This term is not being used in the traditional ways it has been employed during and since the war, to signify dissatisfaction and repulsion towards war in general, usually signalled by a turn towards pacifism. Instead it is being used to indicate a change in attitude towards death in war and an acceptance of the perceived futility of loss on the battlefield. It manifested itself in a number of ways. Some came not to care what happened to them or became bitter about the way men continued to die. Furthermore, soldiers came to focus upon the common trope that only the best and brightest were killed in war. An important caveat is that this sense of disillusionment was not a constant but spasmodic state, much in the same way that grief surfaces due to particular sights and circumstances. Some soldiers did feel consistently despondent, as already highlighted, but others suffered these feelings episodically as they were reminded intermittently of what had been lost.

The principal trope, which was culturally significant for reflecting feelings of disillusionment, both during and after the war, is the idea that the best and brightest were killed on the battlefields of the Western Front. It is an idea which existed amongst soldiers almost for the entire duration of the war and was closely linked with feelings of disillusionment. Morgan Crofton wrote in his diary in 1915, 'The best officers, NCOs and men of every regiment are invariably killed or seriously wounded in this

[53] John W. Arthur, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry (Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Battalion): Record of War Service 1914-1918* (Glasgow: David J. Clark, 1920).

trench warfare, and they cannot be replaced. One more show like that of May 13th last, and reinforcements of both officers and men will have to be scraped together from the winds.'[54] As many of the other accounts in this thesis attest to, it was always the bravest and the most courageous who were killed, none of whom could be replaced. It was not simply the idea that the most promising were being lost from society or the military, it also symbolised the deep disillusionment amongst survivors. It was never the most disliked or cowardly who were killed. Each cohort which came out to the front believed the men with whom they served were the best Britain and the Dominion nations had to offer, and they were necessary for the improvement of society following the conclusion of the war. More importantly, the army itself could never be the same again after they were lost. These were the men who would have ensured victory for the allies. This is also another aspect to the idea that officers who died represented the death of a battalion's corporate identity, as they embodied the best qualities of the unit. As a soldier's purpose was to sacrifice himself on the battlefield, to not do so represented a failure. To become the best the army had to offer a man had to be willing to die. As many were not, they would never achieve the greatness by carrying out the ultimate selfless act in the name of the nation.

In the post-war era, for civilians and soldiers alike, the Somme retained and even gained in cultural significance as the moment that the war turned into disillusionment and fully away from the traditional understanding of the chivalric death on the battlefields. In the preface to his literary account, David Jones wrote,

> This writing has to do with some things I saw, felt, and was part of. The period covered begins early in December 1915 and ends early in July 1916. The first date corresponds to my going to France. The latter roughly marks a change in the character of our lives in the Infantry on the Western Front. From then the onward things hardened into a more relentless, mechanical affair, took on a more sinister aspect. The wholesale slaughter of the later years, the conscripted levies filling the gaps in every file of four, knocked the bottom out of the intimate, continuing, domestic life of small contingents of men… The period of the individual rifle-man, of the 'old sweat' of the Boer campaign, the 'Bairnsfather' war, seemed to terminate with the Somme battle.[55]

[54] Sir Morgan Crofton, *Ypres Diary 1914-1915: The Memoirs of Sir Morgan Crofton* (Stroud: History Press, 2004), p. 271.
[55] Jones, *In Parenthesis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p. ix.

As already acknowledged, the Somme has been considered the moment that war descended into pointless and futile effort, with this work seeking to broader this understanding to other battles. Jones indicated that this period for him was a turning point because the small communities of men, the 'trench households' that had become integral to a soldiers' survival and enjoyment of the war, ceased to exist in reality and as a concept. The fact that the Somme is considered a watershed moment is not a fallacy, the death of huge numbers of Britain's youth – of men who willingly signed up to lay down their lives for king and country – unsurprisingly cut deep emotionally at home and in the army, throwing communities at the front and at home into deep mourning. For the British Army, the ideas which Jones conveyed, are applicable to numerous other battles which occurred both before and after the Somme. Men had their small communities and their ideals shattered at every stage of the war never to be the same again.

Battle has traditionally been considered a transformative experience. It usually centred upon the notion of a boy becoming a man or a green soldier becoming a well-trained veteran. Combat has been historically understood as a liminal experience with a positive outcome, even though the men involved would never be the same again. However, this is a misreading of battle for most men and is particularly inaccurate for the men who served in the First World War. The transition between the two states was a destructive experience for an individual's identity, particularly because his community was usually ripped from him violently and suddenly. Battle, and its accompanying death tolls, was often the event which created a widespread sense of disillusionment within the ranks. Will Bird wrote in his memoir,

> By now the entire company did not muster more than the strength of a platoon. We sat around after being roused for late breakfast, unshaved, not speaking, no one so much as asking about mail… We had little drill, but rested and slept and had good food until finally we were more like human beings. But men who endured Passchendaele would never be the same again, was more or less a stranger to himself.[56]

The rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle centres on the concept that soldiers, at some point in their war experience, realised that they have suffered a loss so severe that they themselves, or their outlook on life during and after the war, would never be

[56] Will R. Bird, *Ghost's Have War Hands: A Memoir of The Great War 1916-1919* (Canada: CEF Books, 1997), p. 68.

the same. Furthermore, once forced to re-enter their civilian life they would not be able to leave the war or the dead behind. After Passchendaele, Bird and the other men who survived cared for nothing, not even word from home which often sustained soldiers in their darker moments. For Bird the rupture of the Combat Grief Cycle was Passchendaele but for other men, as this work has demonstrated, it could have been any other engagement that caused them to suffer this level of dejection and despondency. There was almost always a moment where a soldier's outlook on war and life afterwards changed irrevocably, and during combat, it was often shared communally with those who remained.

Romanticism concerning the initial months of conflict and the original BEF gained prominence during and after the war. It is difficult in many soldiers' accounts to distinguish disillusionment directly related to death from the more general disenchantment concerning the overall war experience; that being tiredness, hunger and mud. As Second Lieutenant Charles Tennant demonstrated there was a moment when soldiers realised the true face of war, 'At its present state this war is unquestionably a dirty, disgusting, murderous business: along our front it is simply a war of killing.'[57] As has been already established, morale concerning glorious sacrifice in war could only survive if soldiers believed that they were not victims of and did not perpetrate murder. Tennant does not ascribe killing to one side or the other, but all men are simply being murdered in the name of a 'dirty' war with no morals, glory or sacrifice. Written in a letter to a friend in January 1915, Tennant provides evidence that the regular army were not immune from feelings of disillusionment and the process of this widespread sentiment had been set in motion at the very beginning of the war.

As each cohort of men experienced a similar pattern of life and death at the front, they also had moments which marked them out as different. One engagement which is often overlooked, even in testimony of all kinds from the men who fought there was the First Battle of Ypres. Stephen Graham recorded after the war, 'The first battle of Ypres was a frantic ordeal. The glory of the battalion lies in the terror of these days and nights in which was destroyed and in the ever-memorable losses in officers and men, a new type of glory in the British Army, one which has been born of suffering

[57] IWM, Documents. 8046, 2nd Lieutenant C. G. Tennant, January 1915.

and losses rather than one born of joy in causing losses to the enemy.'[58] Although Graham was not there, as a journalist he picked up the history of the battalion and the significant elements of it which resonated within the Guards whilst he served with them. Graham suggested one particular reason which seems to indicate why there was so little written about First Ypres; the hectic and devastating nature of the fighting on the salient at this time as the British Army desperately attempted to halt the German advance on the town. This left few alive to recount the tale at the time, with these numbers dwindling as the war went on. Graham also suggests that this was and should have been seen as the moment which changed the nature of the war. As Graham's work, *A Private in the Guards,* alluded to throughout admittance to the community of the army was based on a sense of shared suffering and mourning rather than delight at the success of killing the enemy.

The idea that the best society had to offer was sacrificed at the front had its foundations in the early months of the war. As already demonstrated by Graham, First Ypres was one of the most brutal engagements of the conflict. Hyndson highlighted the conditions at First Ypres still further in a diary entry from the 14th November 1914,

> The first Battle of Ypres thus comes to an end in so far as it concerns the 1st Battalion of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. During twenty-three days of continuous fighting we have lost thirty officers and 1,000 other ranks killed, wounded and missing, an appalling figure. Including as it does all the trained officers and men in the regiment whom we shall never be able to replace.[59]

The small amount of testimony from this battle highlights how disastrous this early engagement was for the British Army, with the scale of the losses being considered monumental at this early stage of the war. For the men who fought and survived this early battle in Flanders it represented a watershed moment for the regular army. This was the first moment that soldiers believed that the men who had been killed in large numbers could not be replaced. The First Battle of Ypres must be considered as one part of a larger story for the original BEF. It was a crescendo of the opening battles of the war, including the Retreat from Mons, the Marne and the Aisne. Ypres was the breaking point for the regular as it represented the culmination of disillusionment from the early months which had begun in August 1914. It was the climax of intense

[58] Graham, *A Private in the Guards*, p. 152.
[59] Hyndson, *From Mons to First Ypres*, p. 111.

violence which had taken place over a series of engagements, punctuated by retreat and desperation. The successful defence of the town and the end of the battle marked the first moment in which the BEF were able to stop and take stock of their losses. Completely exhausted and despondent these soldiers struggled to come terms with the consequences of industrial warfare.

Disillusionment created by death in war can be identified not just in the words of soldiers but also in their actions. Heavy losses changed the fabric of a soldier's war experience, as they had relied upon the fallen for companionship and comfort. Without their original companions present to share the war with men withdrew from the company of others. Vaughan recorded in his diary, 'We sadly missed Radcliffe and Ewing and as we did not seek the company of other officers we became very lonely.'[60] Once men had lost most of their original support network they found it difficult to make new bonds and find comfort with the drafts which replaced the men who had been killed. This was a phenomenon that occurred for both officers and ORs. Mourning the men they had lost, particularly in Vaughan's case, meant that they did not want to spend time with officers who were not their friends, or who did not know those who had been lost. Instead soldiers kept to themselves, often experiencing the rest of their war lonely and with little joy.

This research for the most part has considered that men feared their deaths and were deeply affected by concerns generated by the reality of their own mortality. As alluded to already, men were able to find comfort in the idea that death could bring relief to the wounded. In some cases, particularly after battle when soldiers were at their most fatigued, these ideas went one step further and those who survived came to envy the dead. This meant that soldiers believed it would have been better died in combat rather than survive to fight in another offensive. Crozier referred to the dead in his memoir as 'the vast legion of happy warriors',[61] an idea which permeates through many personal testimonies. The dead were often thought of as being at peace and happy as for them the war was over. This was also an idea soldiers could use to comfort themselves in the face of heavy losses. This point was illustrated by *The Outpost* in two of its editorials from 1916. The first from August commented, 'Ours is the loss and theirs the victory… for them the conflict is ended and the issue is

[60] Vaughan, *Some Desperate Glory,* p. 214.
[61] Crozier, *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land,* p. 102.

clear';[62] with the editor writing in December, 'We sometimes envy their escape, however final, from the imprisonment of life in death, for such it is to those of us in the line who are left to carry on.'[63] Both these extracts demonstrated that mass death could create conflicting emotions amongst survivors, with the envy of the dead stemming directly from the war weariness felt by living. Furthermore, the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the war was clearly taking its toll on soldiers by 1916 but for the dead, these anxieties and fears had been resolved. This was a key indicator for disillusionment amongst men. Some soldiers wished for death or longed to be with their comrades. However, it still had little to do with glorious sacrifice on the battlefield but was instead a reflection of a desire for the war to be over by any means necessary.

This conflicting set of emotions was identified by Crosse. He observed at a military funeral, 'As one looked on the weary band of tired and muddy comrades who had come to fulfil this last duty to their friend, one felt in a way one seldom does at an ordinary funeral, that there was a sense in which they really were to be envied, since for them the long-drawn agony of war was at an end.'[64] Crosse suggested here that at the funerals he performed at the front the dead were envied by the living. A stark juxtaposition with the fear of mortality which has been demonstrated as prevalent amongst other soldiers' accounts. Wishing to be dead and fear of mortality were not mutually exclusive, it was possible to both fear death and wish the war to be over, even if death was the only possible release. As both J. Glenn Gray and Dave Grossman argued from their own experience of death in war, it was seen as relief because for the dead their misery and fear was at an end.[65] This was perhaps also bound up in the feeling that even when the war came to an end a soldier's suffering would not. They would not be able to forget what they had experienced. Another observation which illustrates this concept was the state of the living attending the service. These soldiers had just been through an offensive, they were tired and dirty, and in this state, death was preferable to continuing on through another attack. Therefore, a soldier's state of

[62] 'Editorial. 1916', *The Outpost,* 1 August 1916, p. 144.
[63] 'Editorial', *The Outpost,* 1 December 1916, p. 44.
[64] IWM, Documents. 4772, Canon E. C. Crosse.
[65] J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), p. 104. Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), p. 92.

mind was fluid and, as with all emotions and responses to death, was influenced by the point of service a man was at.

Mass death created a complex array of responses amongst soldiers and operated as a significant rupture moment within the Combat Grief Cycle. As with the deaths of individuals, the confrontation with heavy losses during battle demanded mediation but ultimately created intense feelings of disillusionment with death in war. This was due to the fact that losses as a result of combat often included at least one or more of the survivor's close friends. Grief was then compounded and reinforced by the arrival of drafts and the rebuilding of the battalion in order to participate in the fighting once again. In addition to grief, the exploration of offensives has revealed the relative war experience of the soldier in relation to his deployment to the front and the group to which he belonged. This has allowed for the realigning of the Battle of the Somme, not as the key moment where the war ceased to be glorious and honourable but one of a number of watershed offensives which occurred. Although a man could assimilate the losses of his battalion, or the army as whole, into his military identity once at the line he could not be disillusioned by an event he had not participated in. Even more marginal engagements, if they had been particularly devastating, could usurp the group experience for an individual and lessen the impact of the large offensives which punctuated the war. Overall, the result was still the same as mass death cemented military units as groups in mourning. As well as individual losses, these group rupture moments needed to be mediated and this was often done through writing both during and after the war. The next chapter will explore how burial came to offer men comfort during the fighting and, that its absence, impaired grief and necessitated alternative practices such as erecting memorials and writing about the dead.

Chapter Five

Mediating Losses at the Front:

Funerals, Burial and Commemoration

This thesis has demonstrated death and grief were a prominent part of a soldier's life on the frontline, if not at times all consuming. Funerals, burials, visiting graves and commemorative practices became dominant acts for soldiers attempting to mediate bereavement. Rather than considering the logistical and official records of burial, this thesis is more concerned with soldiers' personal interactions with disposal of the dead and how it impacted on their ability to process death and grief at the front.[1] Funerals and burials could not always be carried out in appropriate ways that would allow soldiers come to terms with their losses, as they would have done in civilian life. Where only rudimentary burial took place, it often had the opposite effect and compounded a soldier's sense of loss and disillusionment as they struggled to maintain an understanding of glorious sacrifice. Alternatively, for some at least, the act of interring a deceased friend with limited ritual could abate the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle, as it allowed the bereaved to accept and process their loss. Death at the front usually impaired mourning which had to be eventually dealt with through the act of writing rather than the traditional channels of grieving.

This chapter will demonstrate how active mourning at the front allowed soldiers to attempt to assuage their bereavement together and created spaces where they could share their grief. This was mostly done through funerals, burials and rudimentary memorials at the front. Soldiers had an understanding of the importance of burial beyond the practicalities and necessities of the act. They became compelled to inter friends whenever possible, motivated by the notion that it was the right and proper course action after a bereavement. The accounts of soldiers considered in

[1] A detailed study on logistics and interaction with burial for the C.E.F. and Canada has been carried out by Jeremy P. Garrett, 'Tribute to the Fallen: The Evolution of Canadian Battlefield Burials during the First World War (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2018).

chapters three and four, rarely included evidence of funerals having taken place and only on some occasions was burial of some form recorded. The inability to use appropriate rituals after a violent death had occurred compounded the effect of the 'death imprint' in impairing grief. Although this requires greater and more detailed study, it was likely that the inability to carry out burials and funerals necessitated writing as a mourning ritual by creating a site of memory as an alternative to a marked grave. Soldiers had attempted to replace traditional rituals but their absence ultimately delayed, or even prevented them coming to terms with their bereavements in the aftermath of the conflict.

The study of funerals, memorials and commemoration has often been reserved for the Home Front in understanding of grief and mourning resulting from the First World War.[2] These rituals and their intended comfort for the bereaved were also significant for the soldiers who grieved at the front. Funerals on the frontline were drawn from civilian life in essence. Although the way they were conducted at the front was heavily shaped by the experience of the war. Due to the violence of death and consistent threat to a survivor's mortality funeral rites needed to be adapted for the war zone.[3] William Hay has argued that as long as people have formed communities, rituals have been significant in helping humans make sense of 'the mysteries surrounding death… and navigated [them] through the uncertain terrain that accompanies death.'[4] These ceremonies in relation to death also bring stability to the chaos the loss of an individual creates for a community.[5] During the war, the random and arbitrary nature of death meant that even basic burial rites became more important to soldiers as the need to find stability within chaos became a necessity. Michael Sledge has suggested funerals allowed soldiers to connect to civilian life by participating in the normal rituals which surrounded a bereavement.[6] Soldiers never truly lost their connection to the civilian sphere and, in death, it became a link that

[2] Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994). Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See Gregory and Winter for an exploration of post-war commemorative practices and civilian grief on the Home Front.
[3] Ross Wilson, 'The Burial of the Dead: the British Army on the Western Front, 1914-1918', *War and Society*, 31:1 (2010), p. 29.
[4] William G. Hay, *Do Funerals Matter? The Purpose and Practice of Death Rituals* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.
[5] Ibid., p. 10.
[6] Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 17.

could offer them a comfort the military could not. However, this relationship to civilian life created a tension between the dead man's peacetime and wartime identity. Whilst the living drew comfort from practices borrowed from their civilian lives, when burials and funerals were possible, soldiers used the rituals of interment to incorporate the dead into the identity of the battalion. The grave markers used by soldiers often included military insignia alongside a man's regimental number, ensuring an individual maintained his military identity even in death. Even though military funeral rites were designed to discharge the dead from all of their military duties, as with those who survived the war, they could never shed their wartime identity and return to being a civilian. A man who died a soldier's death and was buried by his military community would remain a soldier in perpetuity, with this state being cemented by the work of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) in the aftermath of the war.

Beyond the emotional needs of soldiers, burial had an important practical necessity at the front for a number of obvious reasons. Eric Crosse wrote in his memoir,

> Quite apart from the religious significance of a Christian burial… burials on active service had a great practical importance. In the first place if one had buried a man's body one knew for certain that he was dead. The compiling of really accurate casualty list was from every point of view a most important matter, and after an action, a padre could do work of immense importance in identifying and burying the dead, and reporting what he had done to his Battalion H.Q. Secondly nothing is more depressing to the living than to see the unburied dead around them.[7]

Once a soldier had been buried he was officially dead and chaplains became significant in helping the army keep an accurate list of the deceased.[8] Beyond the cold, official nature of being certain who had been killed, it also confirmed to the friends of the fallen that they were truly dead. As Crosse discussed, if a chaplain laid a man to rest then he could be certain a man had been killed rather than relying on eyewitness testimony, even if the grave was to go missing in subsequent fighting. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly as explored in the opening chapters, the sight of dead bodies was detrimental to morale. Living constantly amongst the dead was a permanent and terrifying reminder for soldiers about the fragility of both theirs and their friends'

[7] IWM, Documents. 4772, Canon E. C. Crosse.
[8] Edward Madigan, *Faith Under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 103.

mortality. This also allowed for an accurate roll of honour to be produced as another site of memory soldiers could use to accept the reality of their bereavement.

The primary concern for soldiers was not with the burial of the dead in general, but the act of interring their friends with decency and respect. The significance of funeral rites for fighting men coalesced around notions of proper and decent burial. Proper burial concerned being able to carry out an actual funeral with a grave which could be permanently marked. The funerals needed to involve a chaplain, burial service, military funeral rites and a final resting place that would remain undisturbed. A decent burial pertained to the concept that on the battlefield a man's friends or comrades would do all they could to inter him with respect, although they could not guarantee he would remain so. The attachment of soldiers to carrying out burials, even if it meant risking their lives, most likely stemmed from a desire to combat the ever-increasing unknown dead and missing. Burial also held an important position in the Combat Grief Cycle as an opportunity to mediate the rupture moment and return to the relative psychological safety of the hardening phase. Particularly at moments of mass death, individual burials and funerals were impossible as the dead were interred in communal graves even if they might have been individually marked. These interments were often carried out by soldiers who did not have a direct connection to the dead as they were from different battalions or regiments. This meant that those who did share a bond with the dead were robbed of the rituals they needed to assimilate the bereavement into their lives. Survivors, whose bereavement had already been compounded by the violence in which it had occurred, were then offered no help in navigating the death imprint through the ordinary means from which they could have derived comfort.

The work of the IWGC has been well documented by Philip Longworth in the *Unending Vigil.* In this work, he highlighted the role of IWGC as the architect of the cemeteries on the Western Front, as well as their organisation of the burial and commemoration of the war dead.[9] It is not the work of the IWGC which is of interest to this thesis but the ad hoc burials carried out by soldiers themselves at the front. The IWGC began life as the Graves Registration Commission in March 1915, with the original remit being the recording and marking of the graves dug by soldiers

[9] Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2010).

themselves.[10] As the war proceeded there was increasing pressure on chaplains to ensure the dead were interred in designated cemeteries and not just where they fell.[11] Despite the best efforts of the Grave Registration Unit, Army Command and the Chaplaincy to organise burials efficiently, soldiers still had to bury men where they fell if circumstances demanded it. This was not always possible and, in many cases, soldiers had to leave friends in the open without any chance of burial. Furthermore, losses particularly after offensives, were too large to be dealt with by the Graves Registration Unit alone and were carried out by the battalions and regiments themselves or burial parties. For the soldier, the work of the IWGC and the Graves Registration Unit did not cause conflict with the soldiers' desire to honour their friends but instead offered them hope that one day their friends and, if the time came, they themselves would be buried and remembered properly. Despite the concerted efforts from a number of groups, including soldiers, the unknown dead continued to litter the battlefield causing distress to the living.

In an attempt to identify the dead and prevent men becoming missing, the Army introduced the identity disc.[12] Comprised of two discs, one would remain with the body and the other would be given to H.Q. to maintain an accurate list of the dead.[13] As the memorials to the missing attest, despite the best intentions, the army and soldiers at the front could not prevent their friends becoming part of the legion of the missing. Herbert Browne wrote in a letter to his brother Gill in 1915, 'if [a] man has lost his identity disc or he is buried in a hurry with it on him, there is very often no other official record and nothing will be known until we finish the war and exchange prisoners.'[14] Browne demonstrated that identity discs were not a reliable way to keep an accurate record of the dead. He suggested that some soldiers were not exactly careful with them and it was not unusual for them to be lost, perhaps if they had even been worn at all. It is likely that some soldiers did not want to carry them as they would serve as a constant reminder of the fragility of their mortality. Those who did wear

[10] Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 208.
[11] IWM, Documents. 4772, Canon E. C. Crosse.
[12] Sarah Ashbridge, 'Military Identification: Identity Discs and the Identification of the British War Dead, 1914-18', *The British Journal for Military History,* 6:1 (2020), pp. 21-41. Sarah Ashbridge is completing her PhD in the study of identity discs within the British Army during the First World War. Part of her project considers the type of identification soldiers wore.
[13] Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), p. 231.
[14] London, IWM, Documents. 20766, 'Private Papers of H. Browne', 4 January 1915.

them, perhaps only did so for the benefit of their loved ones, for fear that they would be left without proof he had really died. Moreover, as Browne also discusses, some men were buried too hastily for those carrying out the interring to remove the disc. In cases of mass burial, especially on the Somme, soldiers had large numbers of putrefying corpses to bury, making identity discs impossible to remove. This is where the concepts of proper and decent burial became important; in order for a soldier to feel that his friend would receive a proper burial, it relied on the ability for his grave to be identified and marked in perpetuity with the name of the deceased on the headstone. In many cases this was not possible and men at the front were fully aware of this due to the facts outlined by Browne.

Behind the Lines Funerals and Frontline Burials

Throughout history mourners have helped lay their dead to rest and to be involved in the process was a natural human response to experiencing a bereavement.[15] Richard Holmes has argued the act of burial alone, whether it could be accompanied by any funeral rites or not, allowed men to mourn their comrades and restore some semblance of order to the randomness of death at the front.[16] Even the simplest of burials was a significant moment in helping soldiers come to terms with the reality that their friend had been killed and, in ideal circumstances, a chaplain should have been present to administer burial rites.[17] Chaplains prepared to serve in the frontline could have conceivably spent the majority of time carrying out burials.[18] Therefore, it is unsurprising that soldiers became, in many ways, obsessed with burying and honouring the dead. Periods of static warfare, when men were in the trenches and neither advanced or retreated, made the disposal of the dead with reverence and decency difficult. Due to the danger of the frontline the deceased could only be buried at night and men often had to share their trench during daylight hours with the dead. In most cases, it was almost impossible to administer proper burial rites and responsibility for disposing of a corpse was often left with the friends or comrades of the dead.[19] If men were moving out of the line the night a man was killed responsibility

[15] Hay, *Do Funerals Matter?*, p. 66.
[16] Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), p. 201.
[17] Ibid., p. 202.
[18] Madigan, *Faith Under Fire*, p. 102.
[19] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 207.

for burial was often left with the incoming battalion. The proper or decent burial of the dead became deeply important to some soldiers with men often killed or wounded in the pursuit of recovering their fallen.[20] The type of burial a man was prepared to accept varied amongst the soldiers at the front. Some were satisfied with carrying out the interment of their friends themselves. Therefore, burial at the front occurred in a number of different ways, with the living making the most of the comfort they could derive from any of the rituals they were able to carry out.

The issue of religion, its prevalence and observance at the front amongst the rank and file, has been contentious in the historiography of the First World War. With formal religious observance on the wane in the general population before the outbreak of war, this general trend seemed to be reflected on the frontline.[21] However, when it came to burials and funerals on the battlefield it still retained its significance. As the only officers of the British Army who were able to administer religious funeral rites, chaplains became highly valued.[22] The presence of a chaplain could mean the difference between a man receiving a decent or proper burial, with the religious funeral rites still prominent in the civilian sphere retained their potency. Crosse's memoir reflected on the difficulties chaplains faced when interacting with soldiers following the death of a friend or comrade. Crosse commented on the form for conducting military funerals, 'The service used at burials differed considerably from the prayer book version. In fact, it would be true to say that no part of the prayer book seemed more inadequate than the official form. The form of the original was, in general retained, but it was not uncommon to find almost every sentence replaced by others which seemed more appropriate.'[23] Funerals, or at the least the simplest burials with some rites, were designed to help the living come to terms with the loss of a loved one. Throughout history the disposal of the body has usually involved more ritual than necessary, all for the benefit of the living.[24] Thomas Laqueur has argued that to dispose of the dead without due care and attention represents 'an attack on the order and meaning we look to the dead to maintain for us'.[25] As Crosse demonstrated this

[20] Madigan, *Faith Under Fire,* p. 103.
[21] Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 1.
[22] Madigan, *Faith Under Fire,* p. 102.
[23] IWM, Documents. 4772, Canon E. C. Crosse.
[24] Ian Crichton, *The Art of Dying* (London: Peter Owen, 1976), p. 86.
[25] Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 4.

became more complicated at the front where rites were difficult to administer and the living required more comfort than they would have needed at a civilian funeral. Therefore, services usually began with a sentence or two to comfort survivors.[26] As Crosse alluded to, the rituals that were usually used in peacetime were not suitable at the front and had to be adapted, particularly immediately after battle. Services, in their altered form, needed to offer comfort to a group of soldiers who were not only grieving for the man being laid to rest, but were also in mourning for the others who had been killed. Speaking to men who were tired, war weary and confronted with the fragility of their own mortality, chaplains needed to not only offer closure for losses but also speak to soldiers' fears that their turn may have been next.

Military funerals not only lent heavily on Christian tradition, they also had their own rites with a long history and their own symbolism. Beyond all other military traditions, the Last Post was the stalwart of funerals held on the Western Front and was the act which soldiers found the most poignant.[27] The sound of the Last Post had a powerful impact on the men who served at the front, even if they were not present at the service. Hart recorded, 'The sounding of "The Last Post" at a comrade's graveside on active service is the saddest thing I know of.'[28] Hugh Quigely wrote in his diary, 'There is a sadness in the air: below me a bugle blows a plaintive "Last Post" in a graveyard beyond the hospitals, some fine fellow has gone, after suffering.'[29] The notes of the Last Post became a sound that signalled the finality of a loss. Sounded at the side of the grave it signalled the final 'Stand Down' of a soldier's career. Traditionally used to signal the end of the day and start of a soldier's rest, it took on a deeper sense of meaning when used in the rites of death. It signalled the final discharge of a soldier from his duties, demobilising him in death.[30] As the sound of the bugle became associated with death and loss at the front, soldiers were moved whenever they heard it. The Last Post, along with the rest on arms reversed and the rifle volley over the soldier's grave, became important symbols to men in the military community.

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[26] Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt Among British and American Great War Soldiers* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), p. 67.
[27] Ralph Vaughan Williams. 3rd Symphony (2nd Movement). 1922.
[28] Brigadier General Herbert Hart, *The Devil's Own War: The First World War Diary of Brigadier General Herbert Hart,* ed. by John Crawford (Auckland: Exisle Publishing, 2008), p. 191.
[29] Hugh Quigley, *Passchendaele and the Somme: A Diary of 1917* (Eastbourne: Anthony Rowe Ltd, 1928), p. 18.
[30] Australian War Memorial [online]. The Last Post. [cited 27 May 2020] Available from: <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/customs-and-ceremony/last-post>

Death and burial were seen by some soldiers as a purifying event. Although a soldier could not return to his pre-war civilian identity, death allowed officers to shed the negative effects battle had on their personalities. As Stephen Graham suggests in *The Challenge of the Dead*, an officer who was innocent and pure when he first began his service, who disliked gambling, swearing and drinking, came to rely on all things he had despised during his time at the front until his death,

> We carried him to his grave… Poor hero… he marched through the valley of the shadow of death, tormented as Pilgrim was by hobgoblins and satyrs. But when he died he shed his war body, and shed his lurid phraseology, and became once more, no doubt, the Kingsley-Carlylean hero that he was, with some sort of knowledge of human sorrow which those who live in peace do not… They shook off something evil when they died, but in passing through it they must somehow have understood more. Sorrow dimmed the eyes of even the hardest swearer of the army. And the dead now constrain us to a new human tenderness, they empower us to more delicately and to understand more deeply – to love more. Pity for us if we do not now live differently because of the dead.[31]

Graham demonstrated that the dead were envied by the living; through their deaths they were purified, their sins and unclean living were forgotten. By sacrificing themselves they became the true and pure heroes of war. This was not the case for those who survived. Instead, they were forced to learn the lessons from the dead and ensure they had not died in vain. It was not through winning the war that their sacrifices would be justified but through those who survived living better lives; only then could the dead be truly honoured. Graham also indicated that it did not matter how hardened a man of the army became, he still felt the sorrow of his losses. It was through bereavement that he softened and his hardened outer layer could be penetrated by grief. The funeral was a moment that an officer became permanently tied to his identity as a soldier but only to the best aspects of how he had lived and died. As demonstrated in chapter three, when an officer was killed on the battlefield he was considered to have embodied the best of a battalion's or regiment's identity, and this was confirmed at the moment of burial. Therefore, rather than allowing a man to be discharged back into civilian life, death as a soldier allowed for the forgetting of an unheroic life and the creation of a glorious death in war. As the death of an individual was of such importance to the soldiers left behind, it was not in their interests to allow

[31] Stephen Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead* (London and New York: Cassell, 1921), pp. 104-5.

the dead to shed their military identity when their memory was significant to the motivations of the living.

Funerals were an important moment for the communities of men who were grieving. Regardless of a soldier's religious inclinations they were a place where a soldier could pay his final respects to the dead.[32] Funerals themselves did not form a rupture moment in the Combat Grief Cycle, due to their purpose being the meditation of a bereavement as an act of mourning. It was often a moment of shared and open emotion, where tears from all men became acceptable. R. A. G. Taylor recorded about the funeral of comrades, 'Day quiet. The funeral of Wallace and Sterling took place in the morning. It was very pathetic. I own, I cried.'[33] Taylor's diary in general was short and to the point, but through this short extract he conveyed the feelings of anguish a funeral could create. The idea of the image of military funerals as pathetic is one which appears often in soldiers' testimony; it is one that cultivates a sense of deep sadness and wastefulness. There is no doubt that funerals were deeply moving. Investigations of emotions in previous chapters have demonstrated soldiers were not afraid to cry but on some occasions when they did, they tried to hide it from their peers or found it difficult to accept their own responses. Conversely, a funeral was a place where soldiers seemed more comfortable with their tears, a space where crying was a natural response and expected to be present. Moreover, funerals occurred in safer areas allowing for the sense of demobilisation that was necessary for soldiers to be able confront their grief. Crying in this situation would not have endangered the individuals or the men around them. Therefore, funerals offered soldiers a time and place where their bereavements could be acknowledged and shared with their comrades.

The same language patterns which were established for conveying a bereavement are present in soldiers' accounts of funerals. Tears and crying are rarely mentioned by name but soldiers reflected the coded language used to demonstrate deep pain which had been caused by bereavements. C. R. Smith wrote about the funeral of his friend who had been killed trying to save another in no man's land,

> In the evening he was buried quietly, we were very much affected as he was liked in the Company and the officers paid their last respects to our dead hero, the colonel being present, and was deeply

[32] Madigan, *Faith Under Fire*, p. 102.
[33] IWM, Documents. 15078, 2nd Lieutenant R. A. G. Taylor, 24 April 1915.

> moved as he was laid in a grave with others at the bottom of the trenches a wooden cross being placed over him.[34]

This short extract reveals the deep emotions that were stirred by military funerals. As other accounts have explored, these shared responses were reserved for the well-liked and those who were memorialised as heroes through their deeds. This soldier's act of self-sacrifice and the ability to hold a funeral for him behind the lines, created an atmosphere in which soldiers of all ranks could openly share their grief and mourn together for the loss of a good solder. The recording of tears and crying at this funeral were not enough to convey the sense of loss which was felt by all in attendance. Where tears were noted as being present, it was likely that the funeral represented the moment when soldiers realised and accepted their bereavement, with crying indicative of the initial and spontaneous reaction to feelings of grief.

Funerals were not just held for the dead at the front. There are a number of recorded incidences where soldiers buried or held funerals for humorous purposes, for example destroyed parcels or spoilt food. Although these mock funerals may have seemed comedic, they were sometimes done for more serious reasons. As Frank Dunham recorded in his memoirs, 'A fitting end to the old Battalion, a mock funeral was arranged and carried out; a grave was dug in the midst of our camp, and wooden cross was erected bearing the information, ornamented with an old tin hat.'[35] It has been established that soldiers struggled when their battalions were disbanded during the war. The account from Dunham demonstrated how difficult it was for men to cope with the process of leaving these groups behind. This pseudo-funeral symbolised the understanding that their identity and community had died, and this process needed to be mediated through an act of mourning usually reserved for the dead. Furthermore, these men erected a memorial to the memory of their military unit, an act designed not only to memorialise their military community but also to remember the group with which they had once served. This act demonstrated burial had taken on a significant role in the soldier's psyche allowing him to work through distressing times of loss.

Funerals covered a complex array of experiences at the front. Simple burials carried out by friends were perhaps the most common way privates and officers were

[34] IWM, Documents. 8486, C. R. Smith.
[35] Frank Dunham, *The Long Carry: The Journal of Stretcher Bearer Frank Dunham*, ed. by R. H. Haigh and P. W. Turner (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970), p. 122.

buried. For some men, the act of burying a friend without ritual could bring enough comfort to mediate the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle. Men could still find the necessary comfort either without a chaplain to perform a service or a large group of mourners. Robert Cude recorded,

> At once and with a stretcher [we] go in search of Teddy. By good luck we find him and bear him back to Bedford House where midday we bury him properly in the grounds… when we bury him in the grounds no parson was present. Do not see them up here, so no service was read as it would only have been a mockery. Nevertheless, it was done by all of us with the greatest possible reverence.[36]

This group of men offered their friend a decent burial fairly close to the frontline by laying him to rest at Bedford House, an established military cemetery by the time this entry was written in 1917. Cude was also able to remove all of Teddy's personal effects to send to his family and bury him in an individual grave. The 'reverence' with which these men carried out the burial seemed to offer an adequate replacement for traditional rites, with Cude able to gain closure from having carried out the interment of a friend himself. For Cude notions of 'properly' pertained to the place where his friend was buried, not just the amount of ritual used to lay him to rest. As the burial was carried out in the presence of other friends, these men were able to share their grief together, an important aspect of mediating bereavement.

Burials were not always a communal affair, particularly if they were rushed. This was made more difficult if a chaplain could not be present and men were forced to seize any opportunity they had to bury the dead. Charles Carrington recorded one such incident in his memoir written under the pseudonym Charles Edmonds, 'Before we left we buried our dead men in a shell hole in front of the trench. We made a rough wooden cross to mark the graves, but no one seemed inclined to say a prayer. I was much too shy to suggest it, being the only officer, while the burial was carried out by the friends of the dead men.'[37] Carrington demonstrated the difficulties some new officers faced when they interacted with their men after deaths in their unit. After all, as a new officer he had not had a chance to establish a bond with his men, who were

[36] IWM, Documents. 129, Robert Cude, 20 July 1917.
[37] Charles Edmonds, *A Subaltern's War: Being a Memoir of the Great War from the Point of View of a Romantic Young Man, with Candid Accounts of Two Particular Battles, Written Shortly After they Occurred, and an Essay on Militarism* (London: Peter Davies, 1929), p. 105.

now grieving for a friend Carrington did not know. This, therefore, was a place where rank broke down and decisions concerning the rites which should be administered to the fallen were made by the friends of the dead man and not the officer in charge. It did not seem appropriate to Carrington he should say anything that might be construed as an order. Not only was Carrington new to the unit he was also outnumbered as the only officer present. This suggested that in some settings rank was not important and it was better to leave the men to deal with their dead friends or comrades as they wished to.

Some soldiers were not prepared to wait for the cover of night or a safe moment to bury the dead. Instead, they would simply dispose of bodies through the quickest means available. Wilfred Heavens recorded about the death of a sentry in February 1917, 'When we arrived he was dead; a whizz-bang had caught him in the face, blowing half of it away. Being daytime, we were unable to bury him, so we pitched his body over the top into a shell hole in no-man's land.'[38] Most accounts which discussed men being killed during the day usually described either, how the soldier was placed delicately out of the way at the bottom of the trench, or put over the parapet to await burial at night. Therefore, it was not out of the ordinary that this man was thrown over the side of the trench into a shell hole as his final resting place. There is perhaps one explanation; the violence of the injury sustained. The mutilation of this soldier's face would have been a particularly gruesome demise and an image that would have been damaging to the morale of the men around them. Additionally, a shell hole was often considered to be an appropriate place for the hasty disposal of a body. Heavens had been at the front since late 1915 and a stretcher-bearer for some considerable time. He did not write his account with any great emotion. Heavens' actions were perhaps those of a man who remained hardened to the death which occurred all around him. Knowing for certain that the man was dead and nothing could be done for him, and clearly not grieved by the death as he shared no close connection to the soldier, the morale of the living was perhaps more important than a decent burial for the deceased.

[38] IWM, Documents. 17485, W. Heavens, 7 February 1917.

The bodies of men killed by shell fire were often too damaged to recover and take up the line for a proper burial, especially as sometimes all that was left of a body could be shovelled into a sandbag. As Heavens account from November 1916 attests,

> At daybreak we came out and examined the wrecked dug-out. Close by we found the limbs of the other two men; they had been blown in half and the heads and shoulders were lying some thirty yards away. The other men had died during the night, so we buried the three in the wrecked dug-out, filled it in and put a wooden cross on the top with their names.[39]

When a soldier's body parts were scattered over a distance and came to rest with those of another, it was often impossible to discern which parts belonged to each individual. As these men were found at dawn, the surviving soldiers would have spent the day with the mutilated corpses of their comrades, themselves having survived the bombardment. A gruesome task for those who were not caught up in the blast and a reminder of the damage shell fire did to the body, the hasty burial of remains such as this was important for morale. On the battlefield men could be buried together as if whole, returning to them the individuality they had lost in death.

Using a dugout as a grave was not usual, especially if soldiers were killed in one and could not be recovered. A. C. Arnold recorded in his diary in October 1917, 'Six men were buried in a dugout and could not be extricated. So the place was covered and fenced off as a grave.'[40] Although it was likely that all the men had been killed in the explosion and subsequent collapse of the dugout, Arnold and the other men present would normally have attempted to extricate the interred men in the hope they were still alive. As the attempt to rescue the soldiers, or at least recover the bodies was futile, they were forced to use the ruined dugout as the grave site for these men. Throughout the war the act which seemed to become the most generally significant to soldiers, in addition to burial, was the marking of graves. Therefore, as it was unlikely that these men would ever be recovered the place was marked for all of them as their eternal resting place. As with many of the accounts here, these bodies were laid to rest in the structures of war; a shell hole, a used trench or a destroyed dug-out. These pre-existing grave sites created by the destruction of war offered soldiers a quicker and easier way to bury their dead. Efficiency, especially if soldiers had no particularly

[39] Ibid., 17 November 1917.
[40] IWM, Documents. 15023, A. C. Arnold, 19 October 1915.

strong connection to the deceased, often took precedence over decent or proper burial rites. Moreover, both Arnold and Heavens were able to mark the graves of the men who had been killed, perhaps removing the necessity to find an alternative site. Furthermore, when it was impossible to inter men properly, comrades had to settle for the best they could do.

Many of the men who served on the frontline were not comfortable with the concept of hasty burial, particularly when they felt a strong connection with the dead as a friend or comrade. One of the more difficult aspects soldiers struggled with was the idea that once buried the dead would not always stay that way. Lynch wrote in his memoir,

> A shallow grave marked by a rifle stuck up in the mud is all that can be done. It gives some satisfaction to do that, although we are all aware that the men so buried will be thrown up and reburied by shell fire time after time until the fighting shifts on from here. Some day they may have real graves. What a lot to look forward to! It's as well their people can't fully realise what finding a soldier's grave really means.[41]

As well as burying men in the structures of war, graves were often marked with weapons. A rifle was frequently used as a temporary grave marker until the Graves Registration Unit or the battalion itself could place a cross and name over the grave. In Lynch's case, not only was the grave itself temporary but so was the marker. These types of burial cemented the dead firmly as a soldier, unlike funeral rites which created at least some connection to peacetime. Lynch offered a window into the isolation and separation of the martial sphere from the Home Front. As the consideration of condolence letters demonstrated, soldiers often protected civilians from the realities of the war, with one of the more difficult being that the dead did not always remain buried. Soldiers were all too aware that just because the dead were placed in a marked grave, it did not mean that he would not eventually become one of legion of the lost and unknown fallen.[42] E. P. F. Lynch suggested that soldiers still found comfort in this small act of reverence as it offered them the opportunity to realise that their friend or comrade was really dead. However, it did not allow for contradictions in relation to the soldier's identity after the death, as his body was not subject to any of the rituals

[41] E. P. F. Lynch, *The Experiences of an Infantryman in France, 1916-1918*, ed. by Will Davies (London: Transworld Publishers, 2006), p. 127.
[42] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 209.

which would have discharged him from the military. By burying a soldier in a structure created by the fighting or the marking of a grave with the belongings of a soldier it confirmed that the deceased belonged only to his military community.

Despite their best efforts, soldiers hoped that one day their fallen would have a proper grave which could be found and visited. As it could not be guaranteed that the dead would remain buried at the front, the act of burial could often feel futile and pointless. The acts soldiers carried out in the care for the deceased often reflected how they wished to be treated if they were to meet their end during the conflict. As Max Plowman recorded in his memoir,

> A boy in Hardy's platoon has just been killed. Hardy is upset… Hardy has gone off to find the padre, and is very anxious the lad should be properly buried. I didn't even know we had a padre, but it appears there's one attached to every brigade. Personally I should never have dreamt of seeking him now, but Hardy has a great respect for the conventions; moreover his own feelings about decent burial is strong. His own, almost his only, fear for himself is lest his own corpse should be left unburied. He told me the other day he simply could not stand the thought of his body being left to rot, and he extracted a promise from me to do what I could if he were killed. I made no compact with him, for I don't share his feeling, not having too much concern for my living body to care what happened to it dead.[43]

Men who saw death as final and had little concern for their mortal remains, were often content to ignore the traditional rites of burial and carry out the work themselves. On the other hand, men who were concerned about what would happen to their own remains following death often took more care over the deceased, whether they knew them well or not. This was perhaps done in the hope that their friends, or at least their comrades, would do the same for them. It is clear, not just from Plowman's account of Hardy's response to a death, that for some soldiers the concept of a decent burial bordered on obsession, stemming from the belief that they themselves did not want to remain unburied on the battlefield if their time came. This interchange between two soldiers suggested that beliefs concerning burial were not homogenous throughout the British Army and for some soldiers the ritual of burial offered no comfort in the face of a bereavement or their own death.

[43] Mark VII, *A Subaltern on the Somme in 1916* (London and Nashville: The Imperial War Museum, Department of Printed Books and The Battery Press, 1996), p. 99.

As many accounts attest to, despite the best efforts of soldiers, the dead still littered the Western Front. Many were ignored, left where they fell on the way to the line or in the trenches, as comrades were compelled to hurry on. Others were disinterred through shell fire or dug up when soldiers entrenched. This image of discarded bodies may be used to suggest apathy towards the dead. Cannadine has argued that soldiers felt compelled to give their comrades a decent burial even if they ignored a man they did not know.[44] This is unsurprising as the purpose of funerals, and even burial in its simplest form, were constructed in a way to allow the living to sever their ties to the dead, whilst simultaneously creating a relationship to the deceased as a way to keep their memory alive. Funerals are conducted to offer healing to the living and re-establish order into the lives of the bereaved.[45] Therefore, passing by the unknown dead did not represent indifference but an understanding amongst soldiers that there was nothing to be gained when burying a stranger, especially when no amount of effort would prevent the dead from littering the frontline. The soldier did not need to employ the rites and rituals of burial if he shared no bond or identity with the deceased as there was no bereavement to mediate. In a handful of cases soldiers would bury men they did not know or attend funerals of strangers. This demonstrated an innate respect for the dead within the army, even if it was not present at all times. For the most part, soldiers were often motivated by their own desires concerning what they wanted in the event of their own death.

Mass Burial

Burial took on even greater significance after battle but not to help men grieve. Instead it was seen as damaging to morale and bad for hygiene to allow the ground to be littered with the decomposing dead.[46] The act of burying the dead after battle could be completely demoralising, even if the losses on the field had been borne with courage.[47] Mass burials of dead from offensives had been common from the early engagements of the war. However, it was at the Somme with death on such an industrial scale that many of the soldiers who served there in 1916 had be involved in burial details. The

[44] David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. by Joachim Whaley (London: Europa, 1981), p. 207.
[45] Hay, *Do Funerals Matter?*, p. 74 and p. 118.
[46] Madigan, *Faith Under Fire*, p. 103.
[47] S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), p. 179.

sheer scale of losses meant that the dead needed to be buried more efficiently and command ordered the dead to be buried en masse in trenches.[48] The interment of numerous dead came to punctuate the accounts of the Somme, unlike any other battle. These mass burials could only be carried out hastily and devoid of ceremony. As demonstrated in chapter four, mass death at the front was destabilising for the military community as a whole, making the need for ritual more important for the soldiers involved. Nothing else created chaos in the ranks like offensive action. Even those who did not have a close military bond with the dead required at least the small comfort of basic rituals to help them process participating in mass burial. Due to the absence of rites many soldiers who buried the dead in large numbers went on to experience impaired mourning.

A cultural image that has been constructed around mass burial during the Somme appears in Martin Middlebrook's *The First Day on the Somme*. Middlebrook wrote about the Somme, that 'every possible result of battle was being anticipated' and that 'logically, mass graves were dug.'[49] At Colincamps 'the men were marched past several freshly dug, wide trenches – graves ready for mass burial.'[50] Denis Winter and Roper have also used Middlebrook's findings as evidence of an official and necessary step taken by command before battle.[51] It has also become popular as it plays into the lions led by donkeys trope that became prevalent in the aftermath of the war; it portrays the image of soldiers knowingly being sent to the slaughter. However, no other evidence has been offered to support Middlebrook's claim that trench style graves were ever dug prior to an offensive action. The endurance of the myth perpetuates a notion which stands in contradiction to the reality of burial at the front; that the dead simply needed to be disposed of as quickly as possible, without any care or reverence for the sacrifice they had made.

There is evidence that mass burial did take place at Colincamps in the days which followed the opening attack. Gerald Brenan recorded in his memoir,

> It was not long before I was brought face to face and in the most repellent way with the final consequences of this battle. Perhaps ten days had passed since our attack or perhaps it was longer, when I

[48] Madigan, *Faith Under Fire,* p. 103.
[49] Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme: 1 July 1916* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1984), p. 83.
[50] Ibid., p. 109.
[51] Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 259. Roper, *The Secret Battle,* p. 208.

> got orders to take my platoon to Colincamps for a burial party. The bodies – hundreds of them – were being brought up every night… A sickening stench filled the air and obscene flies crept and buzzed about, not to speak of the worms that wriggled in the putrefaction. Our job was to cut the identity number from these corpses and then to shovel them into shallow trenches which we had dug nearby. At the end of three days of this – and I took a shovel and worked myself – I found that my morale had completely vanished: I knew that if I were asked to go over the top next morning I should not be able to. The stench has brought the fear of death to my very bones.[52]

Although Brenan provided evidence that mass burial did take place at Colincamps during the Somme, the dead were not buried in trenches that had been dug prior to the battle. Brenan's testimony suggests the graves were dug by himself and his men once the dead had arrived. Alistair Thomson, in his work on the Anzac legend, composed from interviews with veterans, concluded that oral testimony is beneficial when attempting to understand the soldiers' experience of war and their memory of it. However, the retelling and remembering of events was never an exact representation of what happened.[53] This claim is also supported by the work of Rodney Earl Walton, who also argued that the oral testimony of veterans is helpful for discerning what happened on the battlefield but memories could be altered overtime and become impaired.[54] Therefore, it is possible that the soldier Middlebrook interviewed marched past Colincamps and did see trenches dug for burial but in the aftermath of the 1st July. This did not mean that he was not still shocked by the mass burial he witnessed.

Brenan's account is also significant due to the trauma it reveals for men who were involved in these types of burials. This work has considered that soldiers who touched the dying or had contact with a body immediately after death, experienced the full horror of the fatality which took an emotional toll. A body which had begun to decompose, particularly in the conditions of the Somme in the summer of 1916 were, as Brenan's account demonstrated, too much for some soldiers to bear. In the same way that interacting with death in the moment was an assault on the senses, undertaking burying of the dead brought with it a new range of experiences. The smell was often overwhelming and the reality of death became all too apparent; men were

[52] Gerald Brenan, *A Life of One's Own: Childhood and Youth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), p. 204.
[53] Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 8-10.
[54] Rodney Earl Walton, 'Memories from the Edge of the Abyss: Evaluating the Oral Accounts of World War Two Veterans', *The Oral History Review*, 37:1 (2010), pp. 24-5.

forced to confront what happened to mortal remains post-mortem. Men had to interact with the dead bodies more than they would have wanted to by having to remove identity discs and pay books where necessary. This was compounded by the violence with which the men had been killed. Their bodies were subsequently damaged by the impact of shells and putrefaction intensified the horror of the experience. The bodies were often unstable and broke up in the process of being moved. These experiences are a true reflection of the ideas present within the work of Santanu Das. Through touch the war became an overwhelmingly emotional experience as industrialised death became all pervasive.[55] Unlike accounts which reconstructed an individual's interaction with the death of a single friend, the assault on the senses during mass burial was not sanitised but recorded with all the horror of the experience. Sue Malvern has argued that this destruction of the body allowed war artists, such as Paul Nash, to use the destroyed landscape as a metaphor for 'human suffering that was literally unspeakable' in their paintings.[56] The consequence of participating in a mass burial, as identified by Brenan, was the almost complete sapping of morale. Men were brutally brought face-to-face with the reality of battle, so much so, that they themselves could not stand the prospect of undertaking an assault on the line. The complete absence of burial rites and the overwhelming number of dead created a rupture in the Combat Grief Cycle caused by the oversaturation of the senses. This indicates that a personal bereavement was not always necessary to break through a soldier's defences of hardening in relation to the dead.

Even though there is little evidence to suggest that the army ordered trenches to be dug in preparation for burial of the dead after an offensive, there are a number of accounts which suggested that, particularly at medical facilities, individual graves were pre-dug. A. J. Stacey commented in his memoir, 'Capt. March asked me to go up to the Shugaree (sous terre) on the main road just outside of Mailly, where there was a military cemetery already dug and pick out a grave for Steele. I saw the man in charge and selected one. It was arranged for that Sunday that Steele's Company, "D" would attend his funeral.'[57] Importantly here, in comparison to the other accounts from

[55] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[56] Sue Malvern, 'War Tourism: "Englishness", Art, and, the First World War', *Oxford Art Journal*, 24:1 (2001), p. 56.
[57] A. J. Stacey and John Edward Stacey, *Memories of a Blue Puttee: The Newfoundland Regiment in World War One* (St. Johns: DRC Publishers, 2002), p. 57.

the front, Steele died behind the line a few days after he was initially wounded. This meant that arrangements could be made for a funeral and his company could be in attendance. Not only were graves pre-dug, it was also acceptable that graves could be selected by the friends, or at least comrades of the deceased, although it was likely that this was just done for officers. Given the losses sustained in the Newfoundland Regiment on the first day of the Somme, it was perhaps decided by Captain March, that being able to honour one of their dead properly would be an important moment for the survivors. This included also being able to pick the final resting place for this officer. This account does not reflect the same images of trench-like graves present in Middlebrook's work.

There is also evidence to suggest that pre-dug graves were not just reserved for fighting on the Somme and it was a practice which had begun in the early years of the war. Stanley recorded in his memoir an incident which took place during his first time at the front in 1915, 'Turning a corner we came across a dressing station and a cemetery and seeing troops digging a row of what undoubtedly are graves, we asked the corporal what the idea is and after cadging a cigarette he answers in a matter of fact way "we like to bury 'em decently we gets the chance and there's a do coming off to-night".'[58] Stanley's account revealed that the reasoning behind the pre-digging of graves, at least in this incident, was not simply about speeding up the disposal of the dead. Instead, it concerned being able to give the fallen a 'decent' burial where possible. Even though this may have been interpreted as callous by new recruits, veterans of the front were well aware of the number of casualties which could be expected following an attack. Instead, of representing hardening at front, these acts demonstrated a deep sense of reverence for those who had died. These graves were also being dug at a dressing station and therefore made sense that these medical facilities should have been able to bury the dead quickly for sanitary reasons as well.

Communal burials also took place on a smaller scale and were not always directly related to offensive action. In these cases, the men who carried out the burials often had a connection to the dead. Lynch recorded one such burial during his time on the Somme,

[58] Horace Reginald Stanley, *Grandad's War: The First World War Diary of Horace Reginald Stanley, ed. by Juliet Broody and Heather Broody* (Cromer: Poppyland Publishing, 2007), p. 18.

> I land the padre at the cemetery where a long row of shallow graves are dug. Near each open grave lies the body of an Australian soldier. A few are sewn up in blankets. And others just lie there in their muddy uniforms, waiting to go to their muddy beds… The men nearby stand to attention. A few of them remove their steel helmets and the padre says a brief burial service and passes on to the next, whilst the wet mud is showered upon the body of an Australian lad… Hard livers, hard doers – yet there's a tightening of the jaws, a treading softly through the muddy lanes between the graves and hushed serious over all tonight. A communing between man and Maker, unspoken, unproclaimed by lip, but our innermost hearts are furrowed by grief for mates gone west… Men stoop, rise and lower into a grave a gunner clad only in breeches and singlet… "Cripes, mate, you'll sleep cold tonight," a man remarks as he tenderly straightens the poor broken body in its grave of mud. There's nothing irreverent or callous or frivolous in the remark. It's just familiarity of the sad side of soldiering.[59]

Mass burial was not always conducted in trenches, as demonstrated above and where possible men were buried in an individual grave. The nature of the work close to the frontline meant that burial had to be carried out as quickly as possible with limited ritual. The brief words of the chaplain, in this case, were there to lay the dead to rest and not comfort the living. Instead, solace had to be derived from the act of burying their fellow countrymen together and the shared understanding of grief. Although Lynch did not know the men being buried, the connection between Australian soldiers and concept of mateship throughout the A.I.F. meant that soldiers felt a wider sense of grief within their community, intensified by the fact they were fighting miles from home. Although the uniqueness of this bond has been proven to be a myth, its strong presence within Lynch's account demonstrated the potency of mateship for those who survived the war.

Furthermore, Lynch draws attention to the men who had shrouds and those who did not, with particular focus paid on a soldier who was wearing very little. The covering or wrapping of men in a shroud was significant at the moment of burial. Holmes has argued that even the most primitive covering of the body hid the 'ravages' of war, 'restoring order and decency to a violated corpse'.[60] In this case, it saddened the men involved that the man should buried in the cold without a shroud to keep him warm, a small comfort in a final resting place that was not fit for their 'mates'. The

[59] Lynch, *Somme Mud*, p. 71.
[60] Holmes, *Acts of War*, p. 201.

importance of this communal burial was soldiers of the same expeditionary force sharing their grief and carrying out an act of mourning, so that their fallen could be honoured and comfort shared between the living, even if it could not be provided through the proper rites. These were aspects which were often missing during mass burial.

Mass burials and battlefield clearance did not just take place after the Somme but was a fixture after many of the set piece battles. Lieutenant H. J. Knee recorded about being part of a burial party at Passchendaele,

> We did not go about our task with very good grace. Hamlet's grave digger had a humour all his own but [in] this corpse-strewn field men could hardly joke in the presence of some many mangled bodies, bodies of comrades, who, but a few days back, had known "slumber and waking; loved… seen dawn and sunset," and now here they were to lie forever in a filthy muddy grave, far from home and kindred… Nothing we could do could "back to those mansions call the fleeting breath," but at least we, their comrades, could show some measure of respect of those who had irrevocably lost the greatest thing they had possessed – life itself.[61]

In contrast to Brenan, for Knee, his experience with mass burial was not only about coming into contact with the realities of war but also brought him face-to-face with his own bereavement. This group of men were not only clearing the battlefield of the dead but of the 'mangled' bodies of their comrades. Grieving for their fallen, these men were confronted with, and shared in, the deep pathos of their comrades' final resting place miles from home, with little comfort to be offered. Knee demonstrated, that by being involved in the process of burying friends and comrades, they were able to find a channel for their grief. Rather than strangers interring the fallen, as their comrades, they were able to show them the reverence and respect the dead of war deserved at the last. Therefore, although morale was dented through the act of burying numerous dead, it was not destroyed as it had been for Brenan, Knee was able to find comfort in the act of offering the dead a decent burial.

[61] London, IWM, Documents. 6972, 'Private Papers of Lieutenant H. J. Knee'.

The Significance of the Grave

Graves, especially when they were marked with crosses, became a defining feature of the battlefield on the Western Front. Despite the effort made by the military to ensure that all men were buried in the appropriate cemeteries, individual and lone graves were a feature of a soldiers' experience, throughout the landscape, by the side of the road or sometimes stumbled across in the strangest of places. As Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker have argued, tombs on the Western Front were placed to be visible as a way to 'counter the invisibility of the slaughter' and 'restore individual humanity' to shattered bodies.[62] Although in many cases soldiers did not have much choice in the burial place of their friends, such as on the roadside, men chose not to move bodies to more secluded places, even if it was just a matter of a few yards. On occasion, the body was shattered and mutilated to such an extent, men did not want to touch it. Intentional or unintentional the effect was still the same. The power of the dead dominated the scenery of the Western Front. They did not fade into invisibility and they certainly could not be forgotten. The overriding desire amongst soldiers to mark the grave of the dead by whatever means further demonstrated the need to restore individuality, and perhaps in some cases, restore some of the civilian identity to the man who had been killed.

The commitment to honouring the dead became an obsession for the soldiers of the British Army. The men who served at the front became fixated upon the maintenance of the graves of the fallen, whether or not they knew the men who were buried there. There are numerous incidences of men behind the line maintaining and looking after cemeteries and burial plots. Dr Frank Steadman wrote in a letter to his wife in 1916, 'Behind the church was a pretty cemetery... It was well covered with flowers, and looked so peaceful and pretty!... These graves are being kept by our soldiers at present, in the village.'[63] Moreover, *The Canadian Daily Record* in August 1917 included on its front page the image of a soldier tending to a grave near the frontline.[64] Graves in cemeteries, often behind the lines, were well cared for by soldiers on rest. It does not seem that this was an organised duty but simply taken on by soldiers themselves, in some cases probably as an activity to occupy their time

[62] Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), p. 122.
[63] IWM, Documents. 18927, Major F. St. J. Steadman.
[64] See Appendix Two.

away from the line. However, these acts represented more than a mere pastime and demonstrated a willingness within the army's wider community to care for the dead. It was most likely motivated by the desire to ensure the dead were not forgotten rather than this type of behaviour being an act of mourning. It is also perhaps evidence of a continued connection to civilian life, where people expected the graves of their loved ones would be maintained in cemeteries and church-yards. With no one there to do it for them, it became a worthwhile occupation for soldiers themselves.

The visiting of a friend or comrade's grave became a significant mourning ritual for some, especially if they had not attended the burial. Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker have noted for the French Army, from eyewitness testimony, that where possible, men maintained the graves of the comrades they felt close to, with many at least making the effort to place flowers on the grave.[65] This was not too dissimilar from family members who undertook pilgrimages to the grave sites post-war, and was certainly the case for St. Leger. His friend Christie died of wounds in late 1916, together with some of his other comrades, 'Berkeley and I rode over to Grove Town this afternoon. We found the cemetery, and I found the graves of Christy, Cromie and Butler.'[66] This act was not out of the ordinary for soldiers but what was to follow bordered on an obsession for St. Leger. Just over a week after this entry, on 2 December 1916 St. Leger returned to the cemetery, 'This afternoon Porritt and I walked over to the Grove Town cemetery to see the erecting of the of the crosses of Christy, Cromie and Butler, which the pioneers had made'.[67] Not only did these men wish to visit the graves of the comrades but they also wished to erect their own crosses for their friends, despite the fact they would already have been marked by the Graves Registration Unit. It was clearly important for these men to offer the right and proper memorials to their friends and, as will be explored in greater detail, regiments and battalions had their own style of cross they installed over the graves of their fallen.

St. Leger was quite a unique case as he almost obsessively visited the graves of his friends whilst he was in the area. He visited again on 4 January 1917, 5 February 1917 with his last recorded visit being 25 May 1917. Furthermore, it was not just limited to St. Leger but Christie's other friends also seemed to have been equally as

[65] Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p 205.
[66] IWM, Documents. 20504, Lieutenant W. B. St. Leger, 24 November 1916.
[67] Ibid., 2 December 1916.

invested in the grave, 'Pokey Law told me when he dined here the other evening, that he had had Christy's grave railed in, and that McMahon had taken some photographs of the grave.'[68] It is unclear what drove these men to continue to actively mourn their friend through the continued maintenance of his grave. Perhaps it was because the bond in life had been strong or the feelings of grief too painful to assuage during the war without observing traditional mourning practices.

This obsession was not confined to one loss for St. Leger but was even stronger after he had been over the top at Passchendaele, where he had put himself in great danger to retrieve and honour the dead.

> I went up with corporal Knight to our trench where we dug in beyond Captain's Farm to find sergt. [*sic*] Harris's, Turner's and Corpl. Jefferies bodies and put up crosses. Corpl. Knight was going on leave the next day so when we got to the canal I thought he had better go back as before one went on leave was always very unlucky. But he was very indignant, said work like that was "a pleasure" so we went on together… We found the bodies of sergt. Harris, Turner, and I think Cpl. Cook. Jeffery's body we could not find. We put up crosses for Sergt. Harris and Pte. Turner.[69]

The act of commemorating the fallen was of such importance to some men that they would risk their own lives to carry it out, even if their leave was imminent. It was one of the great superstitions of the war that a soldier due to go on leave was a marked man and was more likely to be killed than usual. As many accounts will attest, it was not an uncommon occurrence at the front for this particular superstition to become a reality. These sentiments were echoed by A. S. Carter: 'it was a firm belief amongst some men at least, that by going on leave you signed your own death warrant.'[70] This was the response of a man who had become highly fatalistic in his outlook and incredibly pessimistic about his chances of survival.[71] A death before leave was more tragic than that of man whose chance of respite was still months away. A man killed just before leave was robbed of one of the most joyous aspects of the war and therefore these events were more likely to be poignant to those who survived. Knight's desire to continue on with St. Leger demonstrated the level of devotion soldiers felt to their dead and that this alone could compel them to risk their own lives in its pursuit.

[68] Ibid., 13 June 1917.
[69] Ibid., 2 August 1917.
[70] IWM, Documents. 11606, A. S. Carter.
[71] Madigan, *Faith Under Fire*, pp. 185-6. Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 28.

Honouring the fallen was not considered to be unnecessary work, but it was a 'pleasure' to have the opportunity to bury a comrade decently and a chance that should not have been missed.

This was not the end of the story for St. Leger who returned a few days later:

> We disinterred Sergt. Harris, Cpl. Cook and Pte Turner, and buried them behind Captain's Farm, putting up their crosses with Bumble, Legatt and Fisher-Smith. We railed in the six graves with iron stakes and telephone wire… We found Cpl Whalley and Sergt Smith, but they were buried in a large shell hole half full of water. After trying vainly to get them out, we shovelled earth on top of them from the top of the shell hole and made their graves where they were. We made two mounds over them and planted their crosses at one end on the side of the shell hole. The two graves looked very well.[72]

The process of proper burial seemed to be of greater importance to these men in comparison to other soldiers who were content to just recover and bury the dead. It was unusual, but not unique, for men to disinter bodies they had already buried in order to create a makeshift cemetery. St. Leger was a soldier in the Coldstream Guards; a regular regiment with a glorious history established prior to the First World War. Through their training, soldiers would have been imbued with the honour and pride of a regiment which had a long history of great battle honours. Not only would this have established strong bonds between soldiers but would also have created a deep connection with the glorious dead of the regiment. Honouring of the historic dead of the regiment was of great importance and this could only be done through sacrifice on the field of battle. Therefore, those who died during the First World War were able to take their place amongst the fallen of previous conflicts and deserved honouring in the same way. The deep sense of grief these bereavements created was a reflection of an element of the Coldstreamers' military identity which instilled in survivors a compulsion to remember. It may have become part of the Coldstreamers' ethos, especially as the regiment was part of the original BEF, that the dead should be commemorated properly and graves marked accordingly at every opportunity. This would not only sustain the community beyond death but would extend and continue to honour the glorious history of the regiment.

[72] IWM, Documents. 20504, Lieutenant W. B. St. Leger, 29 August 1917.

It was the degree of St. Leger's obsession that marks his case out as truly different. The exhuming and reinterring of friends in more appropriate ways was not uncommon on the Western Front, although it was a practice more commonly reserved for officers carried out by officers. H. R. Williams recorded one such incident,

> Sammy Dykes, the fighting Scot with his long Gallipoli service, had risen from the ranks step by step to wear his stars only a few months – and then go west. He was Fanning's right-hand man, coolness itself under fire, respected and admired by every man in the company. His body was put over the parados and buried in a shell hole, to remain there till many months later when his pals Bobbie Myles and Bill Brunt walked several kilometres to give him a decent burial and put a white cross over his grave.[73]

The act of travelling great distance in the hope of reburying the dead decently was not unique but only happened in a handful of cases. It was usually officers who reinterred their friends, as they had the time and freedom to travel to carry out these acts of mourning. The men who were reburied, as in other circumstances, had to meet the criteria of hero in order to gain this kind of devotion. As other accounts attest to, many soldiers were happy to make do with the knowledge that their fallen friends would be reburied later or after the war in proper cemeteries with grave markers. However, this was not enough for some men. Myles and Brunt walked what would have been a great distance across the front in the hope of reburying their friend decently, without knowing for sure if Dykes' body would still be where they had left it. They also knew, if he was still there, that they would be uncovering a body that would have been substantially decomposed by the time they returned, making their task unpleasant. These acts demonstrated the lengths that some soldiers would go to in order to ensure their friends found an eternal resting that they deserved.

It is likely reburial was not only for the dead but also for the living; carried out for the peace of mind of survivors and an attempt to assuage the feelings of grief. It was perhaps difficult for them to mediate their bereavement knowing that the body had not been laid to rest with the rites that would have discharged him from active service and allowed him to be at peace. By returning to the spot where their friends had been killed, the carrying out of what could then be deemed by those involved a decent burial could offer some comfort. It would also enhance the dead man's chances

[73] H. R. Williams, *An Anzac on the Western Front: The Personal Reflections of an Australian Infantryman from 1916 to 1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2012), p. 66.

of being properly laid to rest at the end of the war if his marked grave could be found. They were undertaking an act of mourning many months after they had lost their friend and an act they had not been able to carry out at the moment of death. This demonstrated the enduring nature of bereavement at the front; those who were loved could not easily be forgotten. This further shows how important concepts of decent burial were to men who had suffered the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle. Soldiers perhaps carried out such acts in the hope that their grief and disillusionment with war could be eased.

Frontline Commemoration

Commemorating and remembering the fallen became as important to military communities as it did on the Home Front. As Jay Winter has argued, 'after August 1914, commemoration was an act of citizenship'. Through acts of remembrance individuals confirmed their place within the community and reflected its moral values.[74] Thomson has argued monuments and commemorations served as 'focal points for mourning' where the bereaved could 'share their suffering' and 'solace', as well find 'meaning' through 'collective affirmation of the significance of death'.[75] Soldiers' battalions, and to an extent their regiments, became the communities that dictated their behaviours and values, and through their shared sense of loss and bereavement became communities in mourning. Therefore, commemoration became a way for soldiers to mediate their grief and express their belonging to their military unit. It also allowed the military bond to continue after death, ensuring the dead maintained their place within the community. Although soldiers' memorials took different forms, it did not matter how basic or insignificant they may have seemed in comparison to the national memorials which followed, the significance for military communities should not be underestimated. Men at the front did not have the resources to build elaborate memorials but expended a great deal of energy to utilise what was at hand.

Winter has concluded that war memorials were 'sites of symbolic exchange, where the living admit a degree of indebtedness to the fallen which can never be fully

[74] Winter, *Sites of Memory*, p. 80.
[75] Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 128.

discharged'. This interpretation, as Winter himself argues, should also include the individual response to the memorial, as their purpose is to help the bereaved come to terms with the realities of war.[76] Winter's comments mostly pertain to Home Front memorialisation, however the same theories should be viewed as applicable to military communities. Although they were fully aware of the realities of the battlefield, soldiers still needed help to come to terms with them and grieve their fallen. As the memory of the dead became consumed into the military unit as a motivation for carrying on, soldiers became indebted to the dead for their continued support. By commemorating them and not just honouring them with individual burial, the living cemented their bond with dead. As the testimony of soldiers has demonstrated there was a moral obligation for survivors to remember so the dead were not forgotten.

One of the permanent memorials which has endured in the landscape of the Western Front is the Devonshire Trench Cemetery. The story behind the famous cross, how and why it was placed there, remains a mystery. Pegum's work and others research on the Devonshire Trench has assumed that the original wooden memorial cross was erected by the Devonshire Regiment in the aftermath of their losses on the Somme.[77] The account of the burial by Crosse, the chaplain who carried out the service and organised the interment, revealed the process with which the 163 8th and 9th Devons were laid to rest. On the 3rd of July he wrote: 'With a party of fifty men of the 8th and twenty of 9th I started to collect the dead. Fortunately I met Riddle Webster who authorised me to bury in Mansell Copse.'[78] Despite the subsequent significance of the dead being buried at Mansell Copse, where they left from on the 1 July 1916, there seemed to be little deeper meaning behind Crosse's selection of the site other than its convenience and proximity to the dead at the front. It was of greater importance that the act was carried out by the men who remained of the 8th and 9th, who were certainly battle weary and had little energy left to give. This meant that the survivors did not have to move the dead a great distance to a pre-authorised site and dig a new grave, sparing the bereaved from greater anguish.

[76] Winter, *Sites of Memory*, p. 94.
[77] John Pegum, 'The British Army Trench Journals and a Geography of Identity', in *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History*, ed. by Mary Hammond and Shafquet Towheed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 140-1.
[78] IWM, Documents. 4772, Canon E. C. Crosse, 3 July 1916.

The actual burial at Mansell Copse took place on the 4th July: 'No party from the 9th being available I had to work with about thirty of the 8th only. All together we collected 163 Devons and covered them up in Mansell Copse… At 6.0. p.m. in the presence of the General, Foss, Milne and about sixty men I read the funeral service and the Thanksgiving for victory.'[79] Although far enough from the frontline trench to carry out this funeral in comparative safety, this service would have taken place close to the fighting. Nevertheless, it was fairly well attended. Crosse's decision to use the 'Thanksgiving for victory' service seems to have been an interesting choice given the heavy losses sustained by the Devonshires. However, on 2 July the events for the 8th and 9th Devons were more favourable as they beat off a German counter attack and were able to push forward. In this advance they were able to take part of the German position, taking a number of prisoners in the process of consolidating their objective.[80] Therefore, with the burial taking place two days later on the 4th, this victory could be used to comfort the survivors. This allowed the memorial service delivered by Crosse to make use of the ideals surrounding glorious sacrifice with the hope of helping the living. Through this service Crosse allowed the living to not only remember the dead but also celebrate the achievements of the 8th and 9th.

The following day Crosse returned to the site a final time to install crosses in memory of the dead. 'I got a pioneer Sergt. to paint a board with red lead borrowed from the R.E.'s and went up to Mansell Copse to mark the cemetery. I put up the board.: Cemetery of 163 Devons killed July 1st 1916. I placed twelve crosses in two rows, and after wiring in the area I rode back to Ribemant.'[81] The memorials Crosse erected in the immediate aftermath were simplistic and unremarkable in nature, but he had laid the foundations for the IWGC to turn this battlefield cemetery into a permanent memorial to the 8th and 9th Devons. The words 'the Devonshires held this trench, the Devonshires hold it still', were not installed after the original interment of these soldiers. This work has not been able to identify when or by whom the second cross was erected. The simple act of burying these men within the structures of war and in the exact place for which they fought and died made the landscape their enduring memorial. The choices of those in the immediate aftermath of battle laid the

[79] Ibid., 4 July 1916.
[80] C. T. Atkinson, *The Devonshire Regiment, 1914-1918* (Eland Brothers, 1926), p. 153.
[81] IWM, Documents. 4772, Canon E. C. Crosse, 5 July 1916.

foundations for soldiers to create their memorial landscape when time and space allowed. After all, it was in the 1980s that the Devonshire Regiment themselves replaced the wooden cross with a permanent stone version.[82] The installation of such a poignant memorial served to strengthen the Devonshire's bond, both for the living and dead, to the battlefield.[83]

The practice of erecting crosses to the memory of those who had been killed in battle was not unique to the Devonshire Regiment. There is evidence to suggest, particularly on the Somme, that other battalions also used this practice to remember the fallen of the offensive. *The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette* recorded in their February 1917 edition that,

> A Cross has been placed by the side of the trench which was captured on the evening of Sunday August 27th. It bears the following inscription.
>
> In loving Memory of
>
> Lieut. C. W. Winterbotham.
>
> Lieut. L. W. Moore.
>
> Sec. Lieut A. L. Apperly.
>
> 3399 Pte C. H. Bird.
>
> 3324 Pte S. Smith.
>
> 4922 Pte L. T. Aylesbury.
>
> 28669 Pte D. Walters.
>
> 2781 Pte G. Hayden.
>
> 4270 Pte C. Stephenson.
>
> *Missing*
>
> 2nd Lieut C. Brien.
>
> 4933 Pte W. Pardy.
>
> 5115 Pte J. Finch.

[82] The Great War 1914-1918 [online]. Devonshire Cemetery, Somme Battlefields, France [cited: 11 May 2020] Available from: <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/somme/cemetery-devonshire.htm>.
[83] Tim Godden, 'A Greater Memorial – the architecture of the Imperial War Graves Commission, memory and the old Western Front' (unpublished doctoral thesis, the University of Kent, 2020). Tim Godden's recently completed doctoral thesis explored how the IWGC architects created features in cemeteries that would resonate with veterans.

> 2131 Pte E. L. Keen.
>
> 4105 Pte T. Brown.
>
> 4412 Pte E. King.
>
> "Officers and men of the ---------- Regiment who fell near this spot at the capture of this trench on August 27th 1916."
>
> We hope to erect similar crosses to the memory of those who fell on or about July 23rd and August 16th.[84]

This article demonstrated that memorials to the fallen did not have to be installed immediately after combat. Instead, battalions held particular dates in their memory until they could honour the dead properly. Therefore, it could be that soldiers of the Devonshire Regiment returned to Mansell Copse in the years following the Somme to erect the memorial cross. For 1/5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, engagements they participated in the Somme continued to hold significance for them into 1917. In order to erect their memorials, they needed to wait for the fighting to move on so they could access the areas of the battlefield they felt needed to be marked. This demonstrates that honouring the dead was an important part of the military community. As well as remembering the fallen they were also marking victory by placing the cross over the German trench that had been captured, reminding them that their losses had not been in vain. This was perhaps an attempt by the battalion to regain some sort of sense of the glory of death on the battlefield. This battalion set its commemorative practices directly in the landscape of the war and remembered its dead with the missing, who were likely to be lying close by and unrecovered.

Other memorials on the Western Front erected, or intended to be installed, were conceptualised by soldiers to be a permanent reminder of the dead and were not intended to commemorate battles. *The Sprig of Shillelagh* reported one such scheme in October 1916,

> A fund has been started by the Battalion, with object of perpetuating the memory of its fallen heroes, by the erection of a permanent memorial in the private cemetery of the battalion in this country…The memory of all who fall and die in this country, whether from wounds or sickness, and whether they are buried in

[84] 'The Battle of the Somme', *The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette: A Chronicle, Serious and Humorous, of the Battalion while Serving with the British Expeditionary Force*, 1 February 1917, p. 9.

> the above cemetery or not, will be perpetuated in the above scheme.[85]

The idea behind this particular monument was that all men who had been killed in France should be remembered in the same place. It was not uncommon for battalions to have established their own cemeteries on the Western Front where only their dead were buried. For the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, a regular regiment with some territorials and service battalions, having all of their dead commemorated in one place, regardless of where they fell was important to their military community. It would then serve as a place where the whole regiment could come together to remember and mourn their fallen as a community and confirm their continued military bond with the dead.

For other military units, rather than focusing on singular memorials, grave markers became the way to unite their dead. The identity of a soldier after death was a complex state and depended upon his regimental or battalion community. This was then complicated by attempts to understand military service as a hiatus from civilian life. Although the sounding of the Last Post was supposed to discharge a soldier permanently from his military duty, the living were unable to sever the link with the dead. Some regiments went to great lengths to keep the dead as part of their community. P. H. Jones recorded about the Queen's Westminster Rifles, London Regiment grave markers,

> Our regimental cross is now alas fairly common in this district. It is a plain varnished cross about 3 feet high with the soldiers name painted on it, and below this the Westminster porticullis badge engraved on a steel plate. On the plate is stamped the soldiers name, which will thus remain legible as long as the cross exists… The same type of cross is erected for each member of the regiment, irrespective of rank. It is the most substantial and tasteful cross made by any battalion in this district, and fine tribute from the regiment to its late members.[86]

Jones demonstrated the combining of regimental and battalion identity. The grave marker was a regimental cross with the Queen's Westminster Rifles insignia also prominent. These grave markers united the dead of this battalion no matter where they fell on the Western Front. The uniform cross for all members of the unit, bolstered by

[85] '7th Batt. News', *The Sprig of Shillelagh: The Journal of the Royal Innskilling Fusiliers*, 21 October 1916, p. 2.
[86] IWM, Documents. 12253, P. H. Jones.

the individual identification of the battalion, set the dead of the Queen's Westminster Rifles within their military community even after death. These elaborate crosses, the finest in the area, were designed to stand for a long period of time to distinguish their dead from other military units and honour the fallen appropriately, a symbol of the regiment's prowess. Instantly identifiable amongst the mass graves that littered the Western Front, the living of the Queen's Westminster Rifles would be able discern their dead from the rest.

Not only did battalions and regiments place memorials on the battlefield, many also had them built at home. *The Listening Post* reported in March 1918 that

> A suggestion was made that a memorial (to be erected in B.C.) to all Officers, N.C.O.'s and men who have laid down their lives in the War should be erected by the members and ex-members of the Battalion, without any assistance from the general public. On a vote, the Battalion decided, practically unanimously, in favour of the proposal, and a Committee as under were appointed by the Commanding Officer to handle the matter.[87]

This demonstrated a desire by soldiers to remember their dead at home as well as at the front. They also believed they should decide how their fallen would be commemorated once they returned home. This agency was retained by funding the memorial themselves. A memorial on home soil was perhaps more important to the 7th Canadian Infantry Battalion due to their status as a Dominion force. Throughout the war they were aware that they would have to leave their dead behind where they had fallen. Although the final word had not been said on repatriation, having been at the front for the majority of the war, the C.E.F. had many unknown and unrecoverable dead that could not be returned to Canada. The building of memorials at home was not unique to Dominion soldiers. For example, the Buffs Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral became a place where the Buffs' (Royal East Kent Regiment) dead of the First World War were remembered through 'The Book of Life', which contained a list of all those killed during the conflict.[88] When an individual's time came to leave the Western Front, for whatever reason, he would be leaving his fallen comrades behind perhaps never to return. Therefore, it became important that men should have some form of

[87] '7th Canadian Infantry Batt. Memorial', *The Listening Post: 7th Canadian Infantry Battalion (1st British Columbia Regt.)*, 1 March 1918, p. 8.
[88] Canterbury Cathedral [online]. The Buffs return to chapel, 2017. [cited 11 May 2020]. Available form: <https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/whats-on/news/2017/04/24/the-buffs-return-to-chapel/>.

memorial at home, something that was their own, to mourn and remember the dead left on the battlefields.

Trench Journals also become memorials to the dead. *The Outpost*, produced by the 17th Service Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry, has featured prominently throughout this work. The 17th was a battalion who used their journal as a way to come to terms with their losses. Their edition for July 1917 was dedicated to the memory of those who had fallen in the previous year at the Somme.[89] Moreover, the majority of their editions contained obituaries for the dead and *In Memoriam* pages to remember their officers killed in action. Following the Somme these pages became titled 'Our Fallen Officers' and were image tributes to the officers who had been killed in action, continuing into 1917.[90] The purpose of these commemorative pages was to inform the readership of who had died, with the pages offering a memorial to their memory. This formed a more enduring and personal tribute compared to the traditional *Roll of Honour* printed by most publications. The fact that it was only officers remembered in this way reinforced the understanding that communal grief was reserved for officers and not generally extended to ORs. After battle the officers served as a focal point for grief in the military unit. This coupled with the overall acknowledgement, as seen in *The Outpost,* that all men had lost friends, made grief acceptable and created a homogenised community of mourning within the battalion.

The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette used a similar formula to *The Outpost* in their Christmas 1915 edition to remember fallen officers, using their photographs to memorialise those recently killed. Unlike *The Outpost,* this page carried an inscription: 'They are commemorated not only by the columns and inscriptions in their own country, but in foreign lands also, and by memorials graven not on stone but on the hearts of men.'[91] Firstly, this article demonstrated that the practice of printing images of the fallen in trench journals predated the Somme. Secondly, the inscription placed with images is indicative of a culture of open and widespread grieving in 1915 and before. It was significant throughout the war that the dead were not just remembered where they were buried but were commemorated whenever and wherever possible. The 1/5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, took ownership of remembering the

[89] See Appendix Three.
[90] See appendix Four.
[91] 'R.I.P.', *The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette: A Chronicle, Serious and Humorous, of the Battalion while Serving with the British Expeditionary Force*, 1 December 1915, p. 4.

dead as the men who survived and carried the memory of the fallen with them, through the pain of their grief.

Images, rolls of honour and obituaries were not the only ways trench journals remembered and commemorated the dead, with each battalion or regiment who produced a publication undertaking memorialisation in different ways. Even within different editions of the same publication it varied, as editors changed or different contributions were penned by the ranks. Many used more common forms of commemoration, such as poems written by soldiers to remember their friends. In April 1916, *The Mudlark or the Bedfordshire Gazette,* ran an *In Memoriam* advert to commemorate 2nd Lieutenant C. A. Cook and Private C. Simms.[92] As these losses were not contextualised by the article, it is impossible to know why these men were commemorated together in such a way, the only common denominator being that they were killed in action albeit on different days. It is possible that these were the only losses that 1st Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment, suffered in this period of time which is why an officer and a private were remembered together in the same commemorative advert. Published on the Western Front, it was most likely a journal published just for the men of the regiment and suggests that the advert was perhaps intended for the friends and comrades of the two men to keep and remember them by.

Some trench journals became an integral part of sharing news of loss and grief with the Home Front. However, as records do not survive it is impossible to know for sure which were read by families at home. It is likely that those which consistently acknowledged civilian grief were aware that they had a readership beyond the military unit. There is also evidence to suggest that journals were important to some families. In the private papers of Second Lieutenant Eric Mercer, held at the IWM, his family kept a copy of the *Lancashire Fusilier Annual, 1914-1915.*[93] Produced by a regular pre-war battalion, and with Mercer himself from a military family, this annual was clearly issued for a community beyond the frontline troops. This annual contained Mercer's name on the role of honour, as well as his eulogy, appearing alongside other fallen comrades. Although, this does warrant further exploration, it seems that

[92] See appendix Five.
[93] London, IWM, Documents. 2025, 'Private Papers of 2nd Lieutenant E. C. Mercer'.

regiments with longer traditions produced journals with a wider reach and they became a significant way of remembering the dead, that could be shared by the home and front.

The Western Front as a Sacred Landscape

The English garden cemeteries of the Western Front are an indelible reminder of the cost of the First World War. The power and resonance of the cemeteries has endured for the hundred years since the conflict. For the British it is the rounded and uniform headstones chosen by the IWGC which dominate the landscape, rather than the cross of the war years. The poignancy of a war cemetery and war grave was not lost on soldiers during their time at the front. The cross became more than a Christian symbol. It came to represent the war itself. Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker have suggested it became a significant symbol of life after death, in the sense that the belligerents might be able to find some redemption from a war which had caused so much destruction. [94] The small wooden crosses for the fallen dominated the destroyed and barren landscape of the front, with both crosses and landscape forming an important part of the soldier's experience. As the war continued, the devastation of the landscape became more widespread and crosses increasingly abundant, meaning those deployed in the later years of the war were greeted by an increasingly impressive and apocalyptic scene. This sight had the greatest impact on men who came out towards the end of the war. By 1918 the numbers to which the cemeteries had swelled moved and impressed the soldiers who visited them or happened across them.

As early as mid-1915 the landscape in which soldiers existed had already been altered by the large-scale burial of the dead. Large cemeteries were juxtaposed by smaller ones and battalions had also shaped the landscape by creating their own private cemeteries. Second Lieutenant W. R. H. Brown wrote about visiting cemeteries,

> I must here mention the military cemeteries in France, which were very impressive. When a battalion occupied a certain area for any length of time, a battalion cemetery was usually formed and was well cared for. My battalion made a wonderful little cemetery in a quiet corner of Plugstreet Wood, where twelve or thirteen of our brave fellows were laid to rest. The usual practice, however, was to provide general cemeteries, which were of large dimensions. I visited one of these a few weeks later in Noeux les Mines. Here were over 600 British soldiers, and many French. Thirty coffins were

[94] Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p. 123.

> placed side by side in one long grave, and a neat wooden cross, painted white and bearing the name and regiment of the hero it commemorated, was erected to each soldier. Another cemetery I visited contained some 1,400 graves. To look upon such an array of these crosses – standing erect and still like a ghostly arm – produced thoughts and emotions too deep for words and set one wondering as to the "glories of war." War and the deeds of heroes makes fine reading, but for those actually engaged in war nothing on earth could be more miserable, more fearsome or more difficult to undergo, and nothing could produce more profound suffering, both of mind and body.[95]

Battalion identity was significant to soldiers throughout the war and some units in the early part of the conflict established cemeteries where only their dead could be buried. As with the Devonshire Trench, this established a piece of a foreign land which was only for the dead who shared a military identity. This again reiterated the significance of the military bond in death. More significantly here, Brown recorded the feelings which were roused by looking at such large burial sites, which highlighted the enormity of the losses suffered. Brown reflected a general sense of grief and sadness for the losses of the wider military community at the front, not just British but French as well.[96] The cemeteries and their small crosses were a visual reminder, and sometimes an emotional blow, to soldiers who served at the front. These sights usually conveyed to soldiers how much the war had cost, even as early as 1915 when losses were far below the peaks they reached later in the war. The cross, rather than being a symbol of sacrifice and everlasting peace, brought home to Brown an irrevocable sense of disillusionment related to death in war. This confirmed that a glorious war was a concept of old, not applicable to the mass losses of industrial warfare. Brown also demonstrated the spasmodic experience of disillusionment at the front; it was not a permanent state and certain sights and experiences could cause these feelings to return to the forefront of the soldier's mind.

It was in 1918 that the landscape of the Western Front was at its most powerful. Towards the closing stages of the war, especially for soldiers who had only seen a short service, the battlefields served as a reference point for what had been lost in the

[95] IWM, Documents. 4566, 2nd Lieutenant W. R. H. Brown.
[96] Chris Kempshall, *British, French and American Relations on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 131. Kempshall alludes to the importance of shared losses between the French and British as significant for Allied relations.

previous years of fighting. Seabury H. Ashmead-Bartlett recorded about his visit to the Somme,

> There are thousands of these little white crosses dotted indiscriminately about the Golgotha, for men that were buried hastily where they fell… Our very horses snorted and grew restive as if afraid to traverse this land of sorrow, from which, though two years have past since the battle of the Somme, there still arises a stench of corruption… They did not die in vain, for to-night comes the news we have broken through the Hindenburg Line east of Arras.[97]

Ashmead-Bartlett connected with a deep and lasting sadness which emanated from the Somme battlefield and the landscape itself. As a man who had experienced action, he felt a bond with the men who fell there. However, he had only made it to the front halfway through 1918 and it is likely his feelings were partly a reflection of the memory of his unit he learned when he joined them at the front. He was probably also influenced by public sentiment regarding the war he had picked up on the Home Front. Although he felt that he could speak for the fallen, he revealed the greener nature of his soldiering; he was able to see their sacrifice as being vindicated as the Allies began to repel the Germans. A seasoned soldier may not have seen this in the same light. As the Somme battlefields were accessible in the later years of the war they became a place for soldiers at the front to see the destruction of war and remember the dead.

The care and attention that soldiers devoted to marking and maintaining graves meant that crosses and cemeteries became the dominant feature of the Western Front, but not all graves were confined to cemeteries. By 1918 graves by the roadside were a common feature, as Ashmead-Bartlett recorded during the British advance,

> At Bauchavenes we entered on the 1916 battle-field, and from here onwards nothing but a wilderness of desolation was to be seen… A chill came over me as we entered this land of crosses, and I felt that I should never be warm again. Crosses and shell holes everywhere. Armies marching hastily had scraped graves in the ditches all along both sides of the road. One particular one I noticed, erected by the Germans to the memory of a British soldier... Many... are taking their long sleep in this battlefield.[98]

[97] Seabury H. Ashmead-Bartlett, *From the Somme to the Rhine* (London and New York: John Lane, 1921), p. 33.
[98] Ibid., p. 66.

The fact there were such a large number of graves placed at the side of the road, demonstrated the haste with which men were buried by their comrades as they made their way to and from the battlefields. It also demonstrated the drive amongst soldiers to inter the dead and mark their graves regardless of the circumstances. The psychological impact of graves by the roadside, as shown by Ashmead-Bartlett, was immense, creating the sense that death was all around. Even the enemy buried the dead of their foe, going to great lengths to remember the dead where they lay. Therefore, it was not simply a cult of the dead based on nationality but a wide held respect for the fallen amongst all combatants which existed at the front. These graves served to remind Ashmead-Bartlett, not only of the losses which had been sustained and the vast numbers of the men who had fallen, but also those who were yet to join the ranks of the dead.

Therefore, the dead came to sanctify the battered landscape with their blood, with some battlefields retaining importance to the battalions who fought there. As already demonstrated the 17th Service Battalion, Highland Light Infantry, cemented their identity as a community in mourning around the losses they suffered on the Somme in their publication *The Outpost*. Through articles which appeared in the journal, they adopted the ground over which they fought as sacred for their military community. Layla Renshaw has stated that some have argued 'the dead sanctified the soil with their presence, invoking a mystical transference of properties between the dead and the soil surrounding them.'[99] *The Outpost* ran an article titled 'Hallowed Ground' in December 1916 which commented,

> Now the tide of war has passed over the spot, leaving the land ugly in its hideousness… the trenches are scarcely distinguishable in this scared and wasted country, this desolation of mud and death. Scattered here and there are a few neat, well-finished crosses with the names of those whose graves they mark: but far more frequent occur those mounds marked with a piece of broken rifle or rude cross of timbers picked from the debris of the battlefield. Here rest those whose names shall only be known when the grave gives up its dead – buried where they fell, near the scene of so many months of hard, nerve-racking, unremitting toil… What impression man has made on the face of Nature will fade away in a season or two – time heals all her sores. The well ordered graves will become moss-

[99] Layla Renshaw, 'The Archaeology and Material Culture of Modern Military Death', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Burial*, ed. by Liv Nilsson Shutz and Sarah Tarlow, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 768.

> grown, the wide mounds will sink into the bosom of Mother Earth. The foot of the stranger will tread sacrilegiously over the consecrated scene, and in his curiosity or materialism, he will not understand the tragedy, the pathos, the glory of the land whereon he walks. But to us, this spot of common earth will be an eternal monument to the nobleness of our race, a glorious page of self-sacrifice for humanity, for right as we saw it.[100]

Of significance to this author are the unknown and unmarked graves of the fallen, with the focus on nature eventually reclaiming this war-torn land. The sacredness of this battlefield was only known to the men who fought there as they alone had a connection to the men who would remain unrecovered from the landscape. The land in which they fell and were buried served as a monument for the men who survived, an enduring reminder of the sacrifices they had made. As Pegum has concluded a soldier's job was to die, then the land for which he had laid down his life then belonged to him as 'his reward'. As the dead were consumed by the land, they became part of the landscape and therefore the landscape became their memorial.[101] To take this one step further, as military units sought to keep their connection to the dead alive, due to their shared experience became custodians of the landscape in the name of the dead. Anyone else who trod this sacred soil could only do so 'sacrilegiously' as they would never know or understand what had been lost there. Furthermore, the author intimates that although nature would eventually recover from the damage that had been wrought on the Somme, soldiers never would recover from the pain which had been caused by their loss. Mosse suggested that frontline soldiers, 'used nature as a symbol of hope' in the ideal that once peace came what had been lost could be regained.[102] The landscape, with its unmarked graves, would also be a place of collective grief and mourning for the battalion, wounds which could not be healed by time.

The gaining and losing of land was significant throughout the war, but it took on even greater importance in 1918. As the exploration of the disparate war experience of soldiers suggested, for the men who fought in 1918 and if they had seen a number of years of the conflict, they felt an attachment to the land which was being lost or regained. *The Outpost*, recorded in their June issue of 1918,

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[100] 'Hallowed Ground', Brancardier, *The Outpost,* 1 December 1916, p. 63.
[101] Pegum, 'The British Army Trench Journals and Geography of Identity', pp. 140-1.
[102] George L. Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of War Experience', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 21:4 (1986), p. 500.

> We forget too soon. To-day the anguish of yesterday is dead. With a shrug of the shoulders and a snapping of fingers, we tell each other that all we have lost is a few square miles of war-haunted territory, a few shattered villages. And we speak the truth, but not the whole truth… He has fallen back from hallowed ground. He remembers the weeks and months of endless striving, the harrowing days and still more harrowing nights when yard by yard he pressed the enemy back… But to him it was sacred; for everywhere he looked he saw the graves of comrades. The little white crosses dotted the barren undulations. There were so many of them. He had redeemed that land – and the price was heavy.[103]

Although the 17th Service Battalion, Highland Light Infantry had not been involved in this fighting, they had been observing it from the rear. This article suggested that soldiers retained a connection to the land that they had fought over due to the dead which lay beneath the soil. It also demonstrated that these thoughts and feelings were shared by the entire military community, as more men were killed in the pursuit of re-claiming land which had been given up to the Germans during the Spring Offensive. The editor intimated that soldiers in 1918 were motivated to fight for this land again in order to reclaim the dead and own the land which was sacred. Here comrade is most likely extended to include all soldiers of the British Army and not just those who shared regimental or battalion identity.

It seems that the landscapes, along with cemeteries which punctuated them, drew the soldier there in the same way it did the post-war pilgrim and tourist.[104] In many accounts, soldiers recorded simply visiting a cemetery or making the journey to visit the infamous battlefields from where the war had moved on. This seems to have been more the pastime of the officers, as they had the freedom and means to travel greater distances. The distinction here, in comparison to those who re-visited the graves of the fallen, is that these men often did not know or have any military connection to the men who had been laid to rest in the cemetery they visited. Some stumbled upon them by accident and took time to read the graves, whereas other men specifically sought out particular places, in some cases to pay their respects to the dead, an act which reflected broader feelings of community within the military, as well as a debt to the dead. For others, it was the case that they needed to witness these sights to bring some understanding of the scale of destruction which had been wrought,

[103] 'Editorial', *The Outpost,* 1 June 1918, p. 18.
[104] David W. Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998).

particularly in the pursuit of victory towards the end of the war. It was often in these quiet and beautiful cemeteries that men allowed their feelings of disillusionment with death in war to dominate their thoughts.

Overall, burials and funerals were significant to all cohorts. They provided the means with which soldiers could find stability within the chaos of war. Men went to great lengths, often endangering themselves, to bury and even re-bury their close friends. These collective acts of mourning and the administering of the simplest rites allowed men to process their bereavements and even abate the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle. However, military funerals and burials created tensions when it came to the identity of the dead. The sole purpose of many of the rites was to discharge the dead from their military service and create a connection to peacetime and civilian life. In reality, a man's military community had no desire to remove the dead from its memory as they became a significant aspect of their military identity and their reasons for fighting. Therefore, the grave, where possible, was marked to indicate that the dead man was a British soldier. Moreover, he had died a soldier's death, killed by the weapons of war and then buried in the structures of war. These two aspects confirmed a man's identity as a soldier and he was now unable to return to his pre-war self regardless of any rituals that were observed in his burial. The belonging of the dead to the community was also assured by the building and placing of memorials on the front. Their military identity was finally confirmed by the work of the IWGC during and after the war, which ensured every man who fell on the Western Front would maintain his place as one of the 'glorious' war dead. As the result of the unrecovered dead and the living's understanding of them as sacred, the land of the Western Front became an enduring memorial to those who had been lost. The landscape and the dead it held were important to military communities both during and after the war.

Chapter Six

Armistice and Aftermath:

Demobilisation and Post-War Mourning

This thesis has considered soldiers' responses to death and the manifestations of their grief. It is apparent that soldiers were compelled to mourn their dead through private and communal rituals intended to process their bereavements. The rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle could be mediated through participating in funeral rites and burial. This was just the first act of the mourning process, if available to the bereaved at all. To consider that soldiers experienced bereavements of such magnitude that it caused grief potent enough for them to become disillusioned, it must be determined if this grief repeated itself in 'episodic pangs' after the war had finished. Soldiers' responses to death on the front were not confined to their identity as soldiers and came to permeate their lives as civilians. This meant many veterans failed to interpret the war as a hiatus from their ordinary lives. Emotional responses to bereavement, for most, could only be realised once soldiers considered themselves demobilised from battle. Those who recorded feelings of intense grief in their diaries felt that these moments came during the war. For others this happened after the Armistice and full military demobilisation. This chapter begins to explore the grief ex-servicemen experienced, with the Armistice as the starting point for the soldiers' post-war journey. Evidence present in soldiers' post-war testimony, up until the death of the last surviving Tommy, Harry Patch, demonstrates that grief was ever present in the lives of those who survived. Furthermore, when soldiers left the army, they struggled with the destruction of their military units which were integral to keeping the memory of the dead alive. This created a number of anxieties which concerned the forgetting of the dead and the loss of a support network which shared their grief and mourned together.

Soldiers' post-war mourning was experienced against the backdrop of civilian commemorations and grief. After the war the British government devoted great

attention to what the national memorial landscape should look like both at home and abroad. Post-war societies in all belligerent nations remembered the dead 'diligently', both locally and nationally, with veterans expected to participate in civilian rituals.[1] However, the focus for national commemoration was not the grief of the ex-servicemen but the bereaved at home. Adrian Gregory has argued that as long as ex-servicemen retained a place in post-war commemoration it had to be remembered as a 'subordinate' one, as the bereaved civilian had to remain the focus to avoid a clash of interests.[2] This led to feelings of disenfranchised grief for veterans, as not only did their grief remain unacknowledged on the Home Front, but the memorials in Britain did very little to offer them comfort.[3] This marginalisation led to some tension between veteran communities and the public, as returned soldiers, particularly the disabled, struggled to adapt to civilian life. Some ex-servicemen came to believe that instead of erecting expensive memorials to the dead, the government should have invested in survivors who could not, or needed help to, reintegrate into civilian life.[4] This also needed to be carefully balanced with concerns that the dead would be forgotten if society did not strive to remember them.

Furthermore, Layla Renshaw has argued that soldiers, living or dead, represented a connection for the domestic sphere to the trauma of the event itself, creating the tension between individual and collective memory.[5] It is possible that veterans themselves felt like pariahs on their immediate return home and at remembrance services. They were a reminder to the civilian population of the cost of the war and those who had not returned. As Paul Connerton has argued about disabled veterans, commemorative practices only mentioned the dead and not the living who shamed society with their presence. The living haunted the collective conscience and

[1] Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), p. 184.
[2] Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994), p. 51.
[3] Ibid., p. 27. Gregory uses the example of the Unknown Warrior, arguing that as soldiers were all to aware of where the dead of war were buried, they were incapable of believing that their friend may have been buried in the tomb, leaving them unable to derive comfort from the site.
[4] Stephen Ward, 'Great Britain: Land Fit for Heroes Lost', in *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, ed. by James P. Shenton (Port Washington and London: National University Publications, 1975), p. 30.
[5] Layla Renshaw, 'The Archaeology and Material Culture of Modern Military Death', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Burial*, ed. by Liv Nilsson Shutz and Sarah Tarlow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 764.

were a group the public wished to forget.[6] These notions can also be extended to those who returned without physical disability. The close bond formed with the Home Front through letters meant soldiers were aware of the emotional toll the war had taken on wives, mothers, fathers and children of the dead and what their presence represented. They were a reminder to many that they would not see their loved ones again. Ex-servicemen felt shunned by society because they were the men that had been asked to break the greatest taboo, killing their fellow man. On their return civilians did not wish to acknowledge those who now represented the horrors of war. This tension left soldiers feeling isolated from the Home Front commemorative practices and seeking alternative outlets for their grief.

The Armistice

Soldiers' feelings on the Armistice are difficult to define, or indeed even find, and they were certainly not homogenous. Gregory has suggested that in the years after the war, the Armistice was conceptualised in a binary way; civilians celebrated hedonistically whilst soldiers greeted the news with melancholy and bitterness. However, this black and white view of the Armistice Day is misleading, as many soldiers at the front would have celebrated had the means been available to them.[7] In the years which followed veterans treated 11 November as an opportunity for revelry, suggesting the day itself did not cast a great shadow over the emotions of the soldiers who had survived.[8] Whilst this thesis is strictly concerned with those who reflected on their losses or demonstrated a sense of grief on 11 November 1918, it recognises a particularly important caveat: not all men were hit by a wave of sadness on this day or on the day of their demobilisation. Private A. Griffin commented in his diary on the Armistice, 'The happiest day of my career in the Army November 11th … What a relief to know this hell was over.'[9] Griffin was a conscript who had only been deployed to the front in March 1918. He had a short but difficult war and certainly did not enjoy soldiering, making his relief and happiness on the day of the Armistice understandable.

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[6] Paul Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 48.
[7] Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, p. 64. Gregory has cited Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That,* as the type of work that fed into this interpretation.
[8] Ibid., p. 68.
[9] London, IWM, Documents. 4512, 'Private Papers of A. Griffin', 11 November 1918.

Whilst some soldiers were jubilant, others turned to more pressing concerns about what the return to civilian life would mean. Others simply recorded no thoughts for the end of the war. Those who kept diaries perhaps struggled to comprehend what had happened or, due to their position on the frontline, felt that nothing much had changed. For the men who wrote memoirs, the experiences of the Western Front faded from their minds as they waited for demobilisation or marched to Germany to form the Army of Occupation. When it came to recording their memories after the war, the Armistice represented an unremarkable moment within their best and worst recollections of their time in the military. Numerous soldiers who had seen a long service found themselves back home or behind the line doing staff jobs before the end of the war. Others were on leave, on courses or convalescing, anxiously waiting to see if they were to be redeployed before the fighting ceased; some were in the process of being deployed. All these factors influenced how soldiers responded to the Armistice.

For men who were stationed at the front on Armistice Day, 11 o'clock signalled the moment when the threat of death was no longer omnipresent. The end of the fighting, supposedly, signalled the end to witnessing death at the front, meaning the dead themselves were no longer the primary concern for the survivors. However, the Armistice certainly did not represent a moment when men simply shed their military identity and entered a state of euphoria for their long hoped-for, imminent return to civilian life. A. J. Turner recorded, 'We for so long had been cogs in the gigantic war machine, the machine now having ground to a halt in no way altered our status – we were still cogs.'[10] Turner makes no mention of the Armistice itself; how he and others behaved. The only feelings he had concerned his position in the 'war machine'. For four years men had been cannon-fodder for the Western Front and feelings of dehumanisation were not easy to shake off. Turner had come to see himself as a 'cog' in the British Army, along with the men he fought with. His principal worry on Armistice day was not for friends who had sadly gone west, but what would happen to the men of war now there was no fighting to be done. For some men, the Armistice was the first day since they arrived at the front that living was their primary concern and not the dead, a feeling which would have consequences for the survivors on their return home.

[10] IWM, Documents. 4617, A. J. Turner.

Further uncertainty was created for soldiers as they realised that the Armistice was the death knell for their military communities. As this work has considered throughout, soldiers relied on the formal and informal bonds which existed in the army. It was the destruction of these relationships through death which led to grief. The Armistice signalled the beginning of the end for groups soldiers had come to rely on. They would also no longer be communities in mourning, supporting each other through their continuing grief. Charles Carrington wrote about the event,

> On armistice morning the surface tension broke. Whatever cohesion had held the army together, "like a great machine", worked no longer. My five hundred or six hundred comrades… were mine no more but living their own lives, and my delight in being with them was romantic. I was savouring an unreal atmosphere that had vanished into the past.[11]

Soldiers like Carrington, who had seen a long war service, were aware of the importance of the communities they had built and the friendships they had forged in the army. These relationships were unique to armed conflict and soldiers realised that any friendships formed in the civilian sphere would not compare. Even though their military training had provided them with their identity, fighting units were subsequently held together after battle by communal mourning. Without the constant fear and reliance combat brought men in the army, these military units could not be the same if there were no battles to fight. Whilst some men rejoiced that the war was over, other men were in mourning for their military units and the comrades they had lost on the moment of the Armistice, not because they had died but because these men were no longer comrades-in-arms.

The silencing of the guns on the Western Front was a profoundly confusing moment for many, leaving little space for thoughts to be dominated by the dead. Men were forced to confront an uncertain future outside the military communities they had come to rely on. The army had given soldiers a clear purpose; to kill or be killed, a black and white reality which civilian life did not offer. This was compounded by the feeling that the war had ended as abruptly as the baptism of fire had introduced men to its realities. Brenan recorded his reflection of the Armistice,

> The war was now over and the future I had so long looked forward to began to peer over the horizon. But I could not rouse myself to

[11] Charles Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1965), p. 248.

> any proper degree of elation… I felt listless and lacking in enthusiasm. Only those who have served a term in the army know how deadening its effects can be and how completely it destroys the roots that connect one with civil life. And war, however deeply it is hated, is a stimulant like alcohol and leaves a lethargy behind it when its powers of arousing excitement are removed.[12]

Brenan had spent much of his service longing for home and imaging returning to civilian life once it had finished. As this concept had been intangible for most of the war, soldiers looked upon it with romanticism and idealism, yearning to return to their previous life. The Armistice signalled the beginning of a cold reality for the soldiers who had survived; war had changed them. Now stretching before them was the uncertainty of peace and the realisation that by surviving, they would have to begin the process of coming to terms with the horrors they had seen and the grief they felt. Soldiers throughout the war strove to maintain the connection to their civilian life, with many believing they had never ceased to retain their place in it. It was at the moment the fighting ended that soldiers realised, not only had their friends died in battle, but also had their civilian identity. Anxiety for the future left no space for men to look behind them and consider the dead. This would ultimately compel some ex-servicemen to actively remember their friends and the dead of their unit by writing about them, for fear that they had been forgotten.

Conversely, other soldiers were affected by feelings of disillusionment and futility at the end the war. On the moment of the Armistice, a number of varying experiences converged, from those men who had barely experienced the war to those who had served majority of the conflict. As men fought up to 11 o'clock losses continued to occur until the very end. Therefore, for some the Armistice reflected a moment of tragedy rather than triumph. The arbitrary nature of the date and time the war was to end, meant more lives were lost when they could have been spared. Lieutenant B. J. Green commented 'Despite this thanksgiving and the relief felt by all who lived to see the end of the hostilities, it was tragic that the lives, on both sides, were sacrificed on the morning of the Armistice Day. Why, oh why!'[13] Green had served in the C.E.F. since the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915 and experienced the first gas attack of the war. By 1918 and the Armistice he was no longer a frontline soldier

[12] Gerald Brenan, *A Life of One's Own: Childhood and Youth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), p. 237.
[13] London, IWM, Documents. 15073, 'Private Papers Lieutenant B. J. Green'.

but serving as a Warrant Officer behind the lines. Despite this, he had still experienced three and half years of war and was aware of the fighting which had occurred on the final day, particularly as the C.E.F. had pushed on to gain more ground before the end. These losses drove home how futile and pointless death in war had really been. Green demonstrated here traces of survivor guilt, although not in the traditional sense. He was able to appreciate his survival and spare a thought for those who had lost their lives right at the end. This was perhaps made easier for Green because he had not been in the thick of the action for over a year and had not lived with the extreme threat of death in this time. However, Green's account goes some way to explain why many of the celebrations at the front on Armistice Day were muted, with some soldiers affected by the tragedy of deaths which happened on the day when the fighting ceased.

Soldiers who had participated in a number of battles during their long service and had suffered a significant number of bereavements, were more likely to be consumed by thoughts of the dead at the end of war. Robert Cude had been at the front since 1915 and commented,

> "Stand fast" was sounded by the buglers, and our minds were taken back to our training days, so many years ago. With the thoughts of the past, comes thoughts of those good chaps who were then with us, but have now departed for all time, having paid the supreme price, for the cause of freedom. When I think of them I have a keen sense of loneliness come over me, for in 4 years out here almost, I have missed hundreds of the very best chaps that have ever breathed, and men, who ought to have been spared to take active part in the destiny of their country.[14]

Cude reflected the experience of many men who had endured large swathes of the war and witnessed a number of men killed. He still personally grieved for many of them at the moment the war came to an end. His sense of loneliness hit him and he came to recognise all the men he had missed over the years and would continue to miss after the war. He suggested his feelings of loss were heightened due to the death of the best and the brightest, a concept that was consistent throughout his diary. It was an idea that became all the more poignant as soldiers prepared to re-enter civilian life without them. Society would have to be rebuilt without the men who had fallen and without the skills they had to offer. These thoughts were included in the retrospective account

[14] IWM, Documents. 129, Robert Cude, 11 November 1918.

Cude constructed from his diary after the war. This gives some indication of the long-term grieving soldiers experienced commencing at the moment of the Armistice.

Soldiers' publications can illustrate how soldiers' communities felt collectively about the end of the war. *The Outpost,* a publication which has featured throughout this work, carried comments on the meaning of the Armistice for the 17th Service Battalion, Highland Light Infantry in December 1918,

> The signing of the Armistice on 11th November, 1918, marked for us the end of four and a half years of soul-destroying sordidness and hopelessness of outlook, which cannot be realized fully except by the soldier who has borne the miseries of mud, the gradual depletion in his own circle of comrades-in-arms, and the daily overhanging menace of almost inevitable death… Therein lies the reason for the subdued nature of our rejoicings, but a deeper joy than bears outward expression is springing up in our hearts – the joy of work done better than we dreamed of in our most optimistic mood, the jot that looks to a future the brightness of which will outshine the dull aching pain of those four terrible years.[15]

The Armistice was a moment of bewilderment due to the removal of the oppressive feeling of living with the omnipresence of death. This article was printed with the intention of offering comfort to the survivors of this battalion. It openly demonstrated the complexity of emotions the Armistice stirred within the ranks of the British Army. This editorial suggested survivors of the war should be relieved but could also, despite this, remember their comrades who had fallen. This focus on the dead indicated why soldiers were not joyous on the 11 November 1918. The memory of the death and destruction they had lived through was no cause to rejoice. However, once survivors had allowed time for the dust to settle, *The Outpost* encouraged them to find happiness again in the comfort of a job well done as a way to the ease the pain of losses. Journals which continued to publish whilst soldiers awaited demobilisation, did so to help men process the array of emotions the Armistice created, as well as continuing to honour the memory of the dead. Through this, soldiers could be comforted by the ideas of the enduring nature of their military unit as they prepared for the final breaking up of their community.

For some soldiers the Armistice had little effect on their emotions. Instead the day they left the Western Front created a deep sense of sadness. E. P. F. Lynch wrote

[15] 'Editorial', SCOTT Lord of the Isles, *The Outpost,* 1 December 1918, p. 122.

at the end of his memoir, 'It's 15th April, our last day in France, and teeming rain. All morning we sit in huts watching the rain and thinking. Somehow there's a sadness behind our apparent gladness at leaving France, for we're not only leaving France but leaving dozens of fine mates who fell whilst we lived through it all.'[16] Lynch demonstrated the mixed emotions some soldiers felt when it was time to finally leave the war behind. For Dominion soldiers, this meant leaving their dead, not only in a foreign land, but also on the other side of the world. In Lynch's case it was exacerbated by strong feelings of survivor guilt. As many post-war writings reveal some soldiers struggled to come to terms with the reality that they had survived unscathed when their comrades had been killed. For the Dominion Expeditionary Forces the decision that the dead were to be left where they fell proved more difficult to come to terms with, creating a deep sadness amongst their soldiers. Therefore, it was not survivor guilt in the traditional sense, but guilt which concerned the ability to return home when those who had made the greatest sacrifice would not. Dominion troops knew that they would perhaps never have the chance to visit the graves of their friends again, permanently severing the connection with the dead. Even though men were happy to leave the war behind them, they still felt the pain of their losses, compounded by leaving the fallen where they fell. The memory of the dead had been of great significance to the identity of the military units which were being broken up as soldiers left the front. Leaving them behind represented another blow, as time and distance would weaken the link with the dead.

There is a tension apparent within many of the accounts left behind by soldiers, as to whether their feelings of guilt represent evidence of 'survivor guilt' or not. For example, the journalist Stephen Graham wrote in his memoir about the Armistice, 'Doubtless every man who was in the army and took a chance of death and yet escaped, must have reflected on his good fortune, and strange light of providence which fell upon his destiny and spared him whilst on all hands his friends and neighbours and fellow countrymen had fallen.'[17] Graham is reflective of the attitudes of other authors who struggled to come to terms with their own survival when their friends and comrades had been killed. Bourke has argued bonds of comradeship ran so deeply that

[16] E. P. F. Lynch, *The Experiences of an Infantryman in France, 1916-1918*, ed. by Will Davies (London: Transworld Publishers, 2006), p. 319.
[17] Stephen Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead* (London and New York: Cassell, 1921), p. 127.

if a comrade died then the survivor should have died too. If he did not, he carried this guilt with him for years after the event.[18] Conversely, as Graham demonstrated, there was not a sense of guilt at surviving but instead soldiers were confused as to why they had lived and their friends had not. This can be seen as a continuation of the soldiers' attempts to rationalise the randomness of death during the fighting. Furthermore, survivor guilt is a difficult concept to apply to those who survived the First World War as it was a term coined to describe the guilt of those who had survived the Holocaust.[19] Seeing the phrase as anachronistic is not necessarily correct in itself but the gulf in experience between the two groups makes them difficult to compare. Soldiers were trained with the express purpose of risking their lives and having agency over their fate, whereas the victims of the Holocaust were innocent civilians systematically killed through persecution. Furthermore, soldiers had ideas of sacrifice to draw upon, whether they had retained faith in the idea or not. Therefore, when it comes to explaining soldiers' guilt in the same way as those who survived the Holocaust, it should be done with extreme caution.

This does not mean that soldiers did not experience guilt. Grossman's interpretation of soldiers' guilt is the most compelling. He has stipulated that guilt for a soldier is created when he failed to 'fully support' a man he was bonded with. The example given by Grossman is the failure to fire whilst comrades were being killed.[20] This can also be extended to soldiers being unable to sustain the life of a wounded friend. Dan Todman has also suggested that for many soldiers 'triumph over death' was a key memory of their war experience, suggesting that survivor guilt would undermine these feelings.[21] For Grossman guilt is associated with the failure to act rather than the failure to die. This is supported by J. Glenn Gray's notion that friends did not expect to die for each other as comrades do.[22] The trauma of the Combat Grief

[18] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1999), p. 152.
[19] Samuel Juni, 'Survivor Guilt: A Critical Review from the Lens of the Holocaust', *International Review of Victimology*, 22:3 (2016), p. 321. See Juni for definition of survivor guilt. Initial consideration of this idea has been made in Natasha Silk '"Some Corner of a Foreign Field That is Forever England": The Western Front as the British Soldiers Sacred Land', in *Expeditionary Forces in the First World War*, ed. by Alan Beyerchen and Emre Sencer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 298.
[20] Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), p. 89.
[21] Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005), p. 47.
[22] J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), pp. 90-1.

Cycle was created in the regret of not having ones' friends survive as well. Survivor guilt is a difficult state to widely ascribe to veterans and should be seen as the exception rather than the rule.

Between the Armistice and demobilisation there existed a liminal space for soldiers. The ending of hostilities represented not a moment of reflection and realisation of grief, but instead a moment of apprehension and anxiety. After being completely immersed in death and destruction, whether it was for four years or four months, soldiers were unable to contemplate a life without threat to their mortality and that of their friends. This situation of omnipresent death meant soldiers merely imagined an intangible and idealised version of life for which they longed to return to and escape the hand of death. The Armistice made these rose-tinted fantasies a harsh reality in which soldiers were forced to realise that, not only would the world never be the same again, but also they would not be the same either. The cessation of the war meant the end of their military communities and, for most, the end of their occupation as a soldier. The community of mourning they had existed in, as well as the necessity for building the dead into their military units as an active force, was now at an end. Soldiers had gone to great lengths to preserve the memory of the dead as an integral part of the corporate identity of their regiments and battalions. Whilst fighting together at the front, the deeds of the unit carried out in the name of the fallen kept their memory alive. The disillusionment of these groups at the end of the war felt like the dead were being killed again, as their memory was no longer needed to motivate the living. This created a new wave of grief for those who survived as they were forced to rebuild their lives without the support of all those they had known during the war, both alive and dead. Men had to confront an uncertain future which forced the memory of the dead from the forefront of their minds. The Armistice was a moment of conflicting emotions throughout the British Army which did not ease as soldiers returned to civilian life.

The Aftermath: Post-War Mourning

Following demobilisation and the return home, soldiers came to the end of the liminal state the Armistice had created. Men began their return to civilian life, not as soldiers or civilians, but as veterans. This started a new process for ex-servicemen in which they were forced to confront the memory of the dead. Rather than living with the physical remnants of friends and comrades, veterans became haunted by the spectres

of the past, often in dreams and memories of the war. Ex-servicemen had briefly forgotten about the dead, as they had been eclipsed by anxieties concerning the return to civilian life and the upheaval of demobilisation. This led to a deep concern amongst veterans that the dead had been forgotten. Jay Winter has argued soldiers' lives were shaped by their connection to the dead and veterans became motivated by the need to bear witness; driven to write by the need to speak for the dead.[23] Therefore, memoirs became a way to mediate grief, remember the dead and preserve the memory of the fallen. As considered in the cases of Lynch and Eyre, the memoir was a place where men could reimagine and reconsider their bereavement, in a way that offered them a more comforting version of the situation than in reality. They were then able to feel they had said goodbye to their friends in a more appropriate way. Chapters three and four demonstrated that writing a memoir was a cathartic exercise which allowed veterans to sanitise their memories and process the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle. Those who chose not to record or confront their experiences of war risked becoming stuck in the 'death imprint' if they did not find another way to come to terms with their bereavement.

The conclusion of the fighting and demobilisation began a period of discovery for veterans. As ordinary soldiers were only aware of their immediate surroundings whilst at the front, once home men were able to fill in the gaps with a renewed emotional capacity to quantify what had been lost. The return home and the realisation of how many young men had been killed allowed ex-servicemen to place their individual bereavements within the understanding of their entire generation. Charles Douie commented,

> Figures are rarely eloquent, but these figures may serve to tell the tale of the losses of my generation; they may illustrate how empty the world seemed to many of us on our return. Throughout our childhood we had to look forward to the great adventure of life. We had had our dreams; in them we had perhaps envisaged life in terms of "high heart, high speech, high deeds 'mid honouring eyes." But always in those dreams the adventure had been shared with our friends. The great game was unthinkable without the companions of

[23] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 245.

> our smaller enterprises. But in its place we were given a greater adventure.[24]

Once home, veterans began to mourn more widely for what had been lost on the battlefield. They returned burdened with the loss of friends and comrades with whom they had shared military identity, only to find that many of their friends who had joined different units, had also been killed. Once aware of the total cost of the war, ex-servicemen began to grieve for their whole generation. Douie's emotions were complex; he intimated that he was not worried about the general enjoyment of life he had once looked forward to prior to the war because it had been replaced by the 'greater adventure' of war. This revealed an understanding amongst veterans that their lives would now be a great disappointment as the war had changed their outlook on life. Although men accepted that they had lived through an extraordinary event and occupied a unique place in history, they still mourned deeply for the men who were not there to share in the memories of a 'great adventure'. The idea of a 'lost generation' has since been disproved by historians such as Mark David Sheftall;[25] many more returned than were killed. However, it was the veteran's perception of what had been lost that informed their grief and not the reality.

For the ex-servicemen of the Dominion nations the end of the war and memory of those who had died was a more politicised affair. As already noted, the First World War became an exercise in nation building for the Dominions. The dead became a key foundation on which this new independence was forged. This meant for the Canadian veteran the ideas surrounding the best and brightest took on greater significance; these were men the new nation could not do without. John Harold Becker wrote in his memoir, 'Here was a group of young fellows in perfect physical condition, a credit to Canada, who be honoured in my city of our native land and who could then have gone out into civil life and helped build up their country. Before the end of the war, most were dead and injured.'[26] Canadian soldiers had a more collective sense of loss than the British Army. The Dominion Armies focused more strongly on national identity within the military, developing a solid understanding of how they could further

[24] Charles Douie, *The Weary Road: The Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry* (London: The Naval and Military Press, 1929), p. 221.
[25] Mark David Sheftall, *Altered Memories of the Great War: Divergent Narratives of Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada* (London and New York: I B Tauris, 2009), p. 32.
[26] John Harold Becker, *Memoir of John Harold Becker, 1894-1956: World War One recollections published by his Daughter Catherin Jane Becker Monroe* (Minneapolis: Catherin Jane Becker Monroe, 1998), p. 82.

improve of their nation. Due to this, their losses took on a different meaning as the dead were needed alive to help develop their nation and write their great histories. This contradicted the public belief that sacrifice was necessary to achieve greatness, although this was an idea mobilised by trench journals to offer survivors comfort in their losses. This tension was exemplified in Canada's memorial landscape on the Western Front. Walter Allward's memorial at Vimy Ridge was a monument to the greatness of the Canadian nation. However, veteran Frederick Chapman Clemesha's 'Brooding Soldier' at Vancouver Corner was an embodiment of the grief and protracted mourning soldiers experienced in the pursuit of a great nation.[27]

Ex-servicemen had to find ways to process their grief both personal and communal. Veterans who took it upon themselves to write down their memories of the war were compelled to do so by the weight of the loss they felt. William Linton Andrews wrote in his memoir, 'I call them haunting years, for nothing in our time will haunt us like the war. Our dead comrades live on in our thoughts, appealingly, as if afraid to be forgotten. Peace came, but not at once for those who survived. The war pressed down on some of us like a doom for years after the final shot was fired.'[28] Veterans were consumed by the pressure not to forget those who had been killed. Andrews himself was driven to write his memoir by the ever-present memory of lost comrades. His poignant reference to being 'haunted' denotes, not only the weight of his experience during the war years, but also the presence of the ghosts of the friends he had lost. Andrews perhaps hoped that by writing about the war he could exercise his demons. He wrote about being 'pressed down' in the past tense, suggesting that he had managed mediate the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle and enter a more natural state of mourning, akin to that observed for non-violent bereavements. On the other hand, he wrote about remembering his comrades in the present, indicating that the motivation behind writing was to create an enduring memory of the dead. Andrews offers evidence that constructing a memoir was part of the mourning process employed by veterans, to mediate the rupture moment and overcome the feelings of being 'haunted'. This allowed them to move past disillusionment with war and develop a grief more in line with that experienced in relation to peacetime bereavements. Ex-

[27] Silk, '"Some Corner of a Foreign Field That is Forever England"'. See for a greater explanation of the history of and interpretation of the 'Brooding Soldier'.
[28] William Linton Andrews, *Haunting Years: The Commentaries of a War Territorial* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1930), pp. 1-2.

servicemen were afflicted by a number of negative emotions which were caused by their relationship to the dead and the uncertainty of continuing their lives without them. Despite the fear that they would forget the dead, in reality, the horrors of the war made this impossible.

Although many soldiers worked to come to terms with their grief, they were still deeply affected by their bereavements for years after the war. The interviews recorded by the IWM allows for a partial completion of the post-war picture of veterans' mourning. Conducted from the 1970s up until the 1990s, these interviews show that men were still affected by the industrialised death they witnessed to the very end of their lives. [29] Although it cannot be said with certainty, many of the men who were interviewed did not write, or at least publish memoirs, suggesting that they had not made an active attempt to mediate their grief in this way. Some men were seemingly still locked into the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle. This research is interested in identifying how veterans responded to recalling a bereavement at the time of the interview. More specifically, whether or not he was still affected by intense feelings of grief.

There is evidence in the IWM interviews to suggest veterans had failed to come to terms with their bereavements in the post-war era. Arthur Savage told his interviewer,

> No bloody trenches for them [generals], no mud. Ever heard of all screamers he drowns in mud, I have. Oh the scream of the shells, oh the men as they get their guts blown out [pause] or choke to death on the poison gas [inaudible due to tears] … (crying) I hate those people more than I do any German, that's for sure. In fact I had a lot of respect for the Germans.[30]

Savage demonstrated a powerful emotional reaction to recalling the horrors of war. His response was not a result of one loss but the general violence and death he had seen at the front. Savage's testimony from 1993, suggests that not all survivors managed to successfully mediate their grief after the war and were still moved to tears

[29] Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 8. Although this work is primarily concerned with identifying the presence grief within testimony as a current emotion at the time of testifying, Thomson offers compelling framework in which soldiers' memories can be read as altered by their post-war experience, employing the common theories of composure and discomposure to assess how comfortably soldiers constructed traumatic incidences in relation to popular memory.
[30] London, IWM, Sound 34537, 'Savage, Arthur (Oral history)'.

at the memory of their experience. His sobbing is evidence of a veteran being pushed over the threshold of emotional tolerance by the memory of his war service. This extreme feeling of emotional turmoil could linger for the rest of a soldier's life. Although soldiers harboured scepticism and dislike for generals during the war, it is likely that Savage was influenced by the post-war derision of command. Thomson argues the memories of the Anzac veterans he interviewed were coloured by 'present-day situations and emotions'.[31] Savage's memory of the dead was perhaps altered by the lions led by donkeys trope, which became popular in the latter half of the twentieth century.[32] Savage represents a memory of war transformed by feelings of anger in the present towards generals stemming from a post-war understanding of what he now felt had happened on the battlefield. This anger offered Savage an acceptable platform for his grief, demonstrating that even after the war the rupture moment of the Combat Grief Cycle could be cemented and exacerbated instead of mediated. However, to argue definitively that Savage had not mediated his feelings, more information on the intervening period of his life between the end of the war and his interview is required. For example, it would need to be established if he had written about his experiences or had previously been interviewed. At the very least, Savage indicated that grief remained episodic for veterans, even in the event that evidence of successful mediation can be identified.

These reflective IWM interviews suggest, that for some, the post-war period was a time of processing and mediation of grief. It provided time for soldiers to come to terms with their bereavements. Robert Owen discussed in an interview in 1994,

> I remember the names of the boys who were killed, one night we were going to the er… on a working party. And there's what they call in every battalion a battalion runner… on this occasion he got lost… he couldn't find his way and we were halted by some old huts… Frank Motler and another boy… They were both killed by me and do you… do you know this Motler I was next to him and I was, he was a great to great pal of mine, it worried me for, oooooh, for a long time. He said Owen you're not leaving me here and he got his arms round me and I had to. And do you know I felt a proper coward. I had to leave him. I had to leave him and I don't know what ever happened, what, happened to him. And, um [pause] I had to go out you see, we, were, commanded out… Do you know I had nightmares about those things when I came home from the army…

[31] Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 8.
[32] An example of this is Alan Clarke, *The Donkeys* (London: Pimlico, 1961).

> from about four or five years. It had a pronounced effect on my life.[33]

Leaving a friend alone to die had a profound effect on survivors. Men who were forced to leave dying friends often struggled with guilt over not being able to save them, compounded by the knowledge that they had not comforted them in their final moments. For soldiers who could not be present at the time of death, doubt was allowed to creep in concerning whether or not their friend had really died. Owen shows through this interview, many years after the end of the war, that on his return home he had been deeply affected by the grief and trauma of war. Although Owen suffered intense psychological damage in the years following his demobilisation, he suggested that space away from combat allowed him to come terms with his bereavement and enter a more natural state of mourning. This is exemplified by the difficulty he had in articulating this incident, he paused and struggled to find the right words, demonstrating he was still affected by the event. Unlike Savage, he did not breakdown when recalling this painful bereavement suggesting that Owen had processed the extreme emotional response. However, as in the case of Savage more information is required about Owen's activities in the post-war period in relation to dealing with his trauma. It is possible that Owen simply demonstrated a greater ability to compose his emotions publicly than Savage. Therefore, Owen's interview may suggest that time proved to be a great healer for some. Ultimately, this line of enquiry requires a more detailed study into the lives of veterans to provide more definitive conclusions.

Some ex-servicemen were able to find comfort in the memorials which had been erected on the old Western Front. Alf Razzell commented in one interview,

> The two things that have haunted me most are the day at Ovillers that I had to collect the paybooks and when I left Bill Hubbard in No Man's Land behind the German lines, obviously dying… I had a look at his wound, rolled him over and I could see that it was probably a fatal wound. And did the best I could for him, Germans wouldn't help… I dressed him the best I could with a piece I cut from his shirt because he had a huge wound in his back… after I'd gone about three shell holes… he pummelled me 'put me down, put me down, I'd rather die'… he couldn't stand it anymore. I had to leave him there, in No Man's Land. Years later I saw Bill Hubbard's name on the memorial to the missing at Arras and when I saw his name I was absolutely transfixed. Seeing it was as though he was now a human being instead some kind of nightmarish memory I had

[33] London, IWM, Sound 14765, 'Owen, Robert (Oral history)'.

> of leaving him all those years ago, and I felt relieved, and ever since I've felt happier about it because always before, whenever I thought of him, I was saying to myself was there something else that I could have done. And that always sort of worried me but having seen him and his name in the register… it sort of lightened, lightened my heart if you like.[34]

For many years, Razzell had remained affected by the 'death imprint' in relation to the loss of Hubbard. He continued to be haunted by the fact he had been forced to leave Hubbard to die. The event was Razzell's rupture moment in the Combat Grief Cycle and he was unable to process the event on his return to civilian life. However, the Memorial to the Missing at Arras provided the mediating moment which allowed him, not to overcome his grief in its entirety, but to leave the cycle and move on from this traumatic event. Razzell was unable to visit the memorial until 1984, demonstrating the longevity of combat grief for those who survived the war. It also suggests that through engagement with rituals which were designed after the war to counteract the absence of burial, veterans could to come terms with the aspect of their grief which had been rooted in violence.

The reaction to seeing friends remembered on memorials to the missing was not unique to Razzell. Edmund Blunden wrote in his introduction to Phillip Longworth's book, *The Unending Vigil*:

> Time has not altogether taken them: so it seemed to me in 1965 when on the wall of Tyne Cot Cemetery I saw two names I knew – I take it these missing soldiers died in the Passchendaele battle, and one whom I never heard of since that battle had been one of my most amusing and affectionate school fellows. A few months ago three names together brought three of our finest officers into the sunshine again as on that incredible last day in the river valley below Thiepval in 1916. Three names on a quiet stone… Three, familiar figures, not much changed.[35]

Blunden demonstrated, along with the Razzell, the power that memorials to the missing had on veterans and their relationship with the dead in the post-war era. Assumed to be monuments mostly designed to comfort civilians and honour those who had no known graves, there has been little exploration of what these monuments meant to veterans. Through the carving of the dead man's name and the ex-serviceman

[34] *A Game of Ghosts*. Stephen Walker. Alf Razzell. BBC. 1991.
[35] Edmond Blunden in *Philip Longworth, The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2010), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

bearing witness to it, it brought the same closure that visiting a grave could. It finally confirmed to survivors that their friends were dead and the memorial, due to the absence of a grave, honoured them appropriately and laid them and the memory of their violent death finally to rest. These monuments had the power to reconstruct these men's shattered bodies in the minds of the living and allowed veterans to remember them as they once were, in the landscape in which they died.

Harry Patch, the last surviving Tommy in the twenty-first century, was often used as evidence for the long-term impact of the First World War. Prior to the attention Patch was given as one of the last survivors of the war, there is no evidence that he had attempted to mediate the grief he felt for the loss of three men from his Lewis gun team at Passchendaele.[36] He recalled about his first return to the Western Front since he had been invalided out in the explosion that killed his friends, 'I was on a coach and we parked opposite, and the idea was that I would lay a wreath to the memory of my dead friends, but I couldn't. I looked from the window and the memories flooded back and I wept, and the wreath was laid on my behalf.'[37] Patch was 105 years old when he made this visit to Pilckem Ridge and the memorial to 20th Division. It seemed, that for Patch at least, revisiting the sites of war brought back the painful memories of the event which had led to his rupture moment in the Combat Grief Cycle. It is clear Patch was a man who had been deeply affected throughout the rest of his life by grief.

There is perhaps evidence to suggest that a conduit of mediation was offered to him by those who organised his visits to the Western Front, as well as Richard van Emden who interviewed Patch in order to write his memoir. Following his first visit, Patch went on to revisit the Western Front although he did not feel compelled to by the memory of dead. It seemed through his testimony that each time he visited the frontline it became easier for him to process his emotions. He did not recall another incident in which he broke down whilst visiting the sites of the war. However, Patch must be regarded with some scrutiny when it comes to the ideas present here, as it is clear in his very old age he was perhaps becoming weary of the attention he was given. Patch was unsure whether he would visit the Western Front for the 90th Anniversary of Passchendaele at the age of 109, not because of the emotional trauma in relation to

[36] Harry Patch and Richard Van Emden, *The Last Fighting Tommy: The Life of Harry Patch, the Only Surviving Veteran of the Trenches* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 111.
[37] Ibid., p. 200.

his wartime losses, but because he was finding the exertion of the trip itself too exhausting.[38] Patch was a unique case for a veteran of the First World War, simply because he was the last survivor of the conflict and not because his grief for his friends lasted for the rest of his life. Although there is no clear evidence to suggest that the opportunities he was presented with very late in life mediated his grief, it is possible they did help him come to terms with his bereavements. The evidence from other veterans suggests that the processes undertaken by Patch had helped them come to terms with, at the very least, the violence with which their losses had occurred.

The soldiers present in this chapter demonstrate that bereavements suffered in the military sphere were not confined to the war but returned to them periodically for the rest of their lives, even if they had eventually come to terms with what had been lost. However, this chapter has only scratched the surface of the soldiers' post-war struggles with grief, with many aspects requiring more detailed study. The Armistice began a long and painful transition for many soldiers into civilian life. As veterans, men did not always have time to consider their dead as they had done within their military communities at the front. Many were anxious that the breaking up of their battalion would kill the memory of their fallen, in reality this did not come to pass in the post-war era. Although marginalised on the Home Front, veterans were haunted by the memory of what had happened during the war with many actively seeking to mediate losses. For some this was through the penning of memoirs or literature but for others it was perhaps more accidental. Some veterans found unexpected comfort on the old Western Front in the form of civic memorials. It was powerful enough to allow them to pass from the disillusionment phase of the Combat Grief Cycle, which had locked them into the deep pain of their bereavement, and let them move on from their combat grief. This did not mean the end of their mourning for their fallen but allowed veterans to remember their dead without the intense pain created by the 'death imprint'. The ex-serviceman's return to society was complicated, with many still affected intensely by their grief. For some it remained unmediated and they were haunted by the memory of the war dead until the very end of their lives.

[38] Ibid., p. 201.

Conclusion

Soldiers' responses to death are often viewed by scholars of the war through the prism of societies' expectations. Soldiers were required to not only protect civilians from physical threat, but also emotionally from having to acknowledge that men killed and were killed in their name. However, soldiers' experiences of the First World War were incompatible with the civilian understanding that they should bear the consequences of combat stoically. Previous bodies of work have argued that the horrors of war are inaccessible to those who have not participated in battle. This thesis has demonstrated that although the experience of combat in its entirety is impossible to comprehend, soldiers reconstructed their responses to bereavement and death so they could be accessed by outsiders. They did so by using a varied lexicon which, when analysed in detail, reveals the true depth of the pain they felt. Writing also provided soldiers with an important outlet to mediate their experiences and reconcile their grief. As the numbers of dead swelled at the front, death's omnipresence infiltrated military communities becoming a central part of the soldier's everyday existence. Death and bereavement caused soldiers to lose faith in the ideals of glorious sacrifice and disillusionment reigned at the front. They became trapped in their confrontations with death, unable to move on and incapable of mediating their grief.

The Combat Grief Cycle offers a framework which charts soldiers' responses to losses and how their relationship with death evolved during their time at the front. It organises soldiers' varied responses to death in combat and identifies a pattern that relates more generally to fighting men. The stages evolved from the witnessing of violent death for the first time and learning the importance of indifference with an ensuing period of hardening. This eventually gave way to a rupture of the protective façade and an outpouring of grief. After this a soldier's relationship with death in war was irrevocably changed, leading to disillusionment. Finally, some soldiers were able to mediate the excessive pain of suffering a bereavement as the result of violence and move to a more sustainable and less disruptive grief. The true test of this framework will come when it is applied to other theatres of the First World War and then to other conflicts. When the Armistice came with its supposed relief, anxiety and grief were caused instead; men feared the future without their brothers-in-arms. The return home

made them all too aware they were no longer civilian and had been changed by war, haunted by a loss that civil society did not want to comprehend.

The relationship with the soldiers killed were responsible for the intensity of the grief survivors felt. Soldiers constructed complex communities in the martial sphere. Men developed intense friendships and came to rely on the corporate identity of their battalions during times of danger. This thesis has fully acknowledged the ability of a soldier to harden himself to death. However, it has demonstrated the folly of assuming this outlook was achievable and applicable throughout the war to all who served. This work has shown that the term hardening as a homogenous indicator of the general experience is ambiguous and virtually impossible to define. It was the loss of close friends who could not be replaced which led to the most severe rupture moment of a soldier's defences. Men cried, sobbed and mourned friends who died in battle, with some bereavements so powerful that they broke through a soldier's motivations to fight. Some men were even compelled to endanger themselves in order to comfort their friends in their final moments. These were the losses responsible for individuals experiencing the debilitating effects of the death imprint, the beginning of a long journey of painful and impaired mourning. Diaries and memoirs became significant places where soldiers and veterans could mediate their protracted grief. The dead could be reimagined safely and offered a stoic death, with the possibility of parting words and comfort from comrades. Tears were often present in these accounts, framed as the natural, initial and spontaneous response to a bereavement that a man could not comprehend. Writing also represented an attempt to understand. It was a way to remember and rebuild a man as he was before his death, allowing the bereaved to remember the dead without the repulsion the violence of the death had caused. Memoirs in particular became an important site of memory and an object which served as a proxy-grave, a place where men commemorated and remembered their fallen. The sanitisation of memories in relation to violent death and the rebuilding of the shattered bodies of the dead through words was an important coping mechanism for soldiers. Not just apparent from private testimony, it was also a significant aspect of condolence letters. Men spared the bereaved at home from the nature of death at the front, allowing their friends to be remembered as they were, whole and unbroken.

This thesis has shown that tears were not enough to demonstrate how devastated soldiers were by the deaths of friends and the destruction of their military

units. Instead, men used the language of sorrow to inform the readers of their accounts of the painful mourning they had suffered and were still enduring. Through the sending of condolence letters, soldiers made it clear to the bereaved at home how deeply men mourned at the front. Although soldiers' grief reflected the same intensity as that felt by civilian bereaved, survivors were always humble, elevating the grief of the civilian above their own. The soldier was burdened with knowledge he could not share and shouldered the pain of all affected by a loss, in order to protect civilians from violence. However, the marginalisation of soldiers' grief in favour of those at home led to feelings of disenfranchisement as soldiers' pain went unacknowledged. This only became a real issue in the aftermath of war because soldiers' communities had offered the bereaved of the martial sphere the recognition they craved in relation to their pain. This alienation of soldiers mourning in the post-war years created the silence which has since surrounded this aspect of the soldiers' war experience. The evidence for their pain was not hidden by them and was often a key theme in many published accounts. The language soldiers and veterans employed made their grief accessible for those willing to acknowledge its existence and exercise one of the worst aspects of combat. Nevertheless, it has never been in the civilian interest to acknowledge the emotional pain of those considered to be the embodiment of society's greatest masculine qualities. Therefore, soldiers, despite their best efforts, continued to suffer this aspect of impaired mourning even if they had managed to exercise the psychological traumas of violence in relation to a bereavement.

As this thesis has established those who had died on the battlefield were considered to be the best the army and society had to offer, intensifying the grief which already surrounded bereavements. In the case of the death of an officer, the deceased came to embody the glorious aspects of the battalion or company, depending on rank. Officers could not be mourned by ORs as close friends but still represented a significant loss in the life of a private. Only through sacrifice could an officer win true honour on the battlefield in the eyes of survivors. The living mourned the loss of the great men and the best aspects of their corporate identity which perished with them. All men desired glory in battle but it was a complex honour to achieve. A soldier had to accept the death of the self, something which many were unprepared to do. Anxiety surrounding mortality was one of the most common responses to witnessing death on the battlefield, as many feared dying painfully and alone. This was not always a

permanent concern for soldiers and on occasion men came to envy the dead. Tired and battle weary, military funerals and post-battle rest periods could lead men to long for death. Fed up of their precarious existence, some men wanted it to be over by any means necessary. This thesis has demonstrated that soldiers often had a complicated and fluctuating relationship with their own death depending on the stage they were at in the Combat Grief Cycle.

This thesis has not been able to cover all types of death a soldier encountered. It has focused on the concept of personal and shared losses on the line as this was an aspect of the war experienced by the majority of infantrymen. In the course of this research other areas of interest have been identified. For example, some soldiers' bereavements were as a result of accidental death behind the line. Chapter three briefly covered deaths which were seen as pointless on the frontline due to an individual's actions being interpreted as unnecessary, leading to conflicting emotions of sadness and anger for survivors. Those who suffered bereavements as a result of accidents require exploration due to the loss occurring in the relative safety of back areas, with emotions of tragedy and wastefulness often present. Furthermore, soldiers' interactions with dying strangers could create a rupture moment for some. This requires focused analysis in relation to the idea that men could create sudden and intense bonds with an individual at the moment death. Furthermore, the framework presented in this thesis can now be tested against other groups who experienced the war.

Greater exploration of the Dominion nations is necessary to complete the full picture of their war experience, particularly in relation to ideas of nation building and whether this really offered soldiers any comfort. Other theatres would also offer an interesting comparison to those who served on the Western Front. Not only this, but consideration of how fighting in another theatre before or after serving on the Western Front affected soldiers' interactions with death, would be of great interest. For example, it is unlikely a soldier who had experienced Gallipoli would have had the same reaction to the Somme or Passchendaele as a soldier from their cohort who had not. There is therefore scope for greater exploration of the divergent experiences between men in the same group. Moreover, this framework could benefit from being tested against the wider experience of the war, not only in relation to other arms but the rank of the men who served. This thesis has not considered in detail the responses

of soldiers above the rank of Lieutenant, only briefly considering the emotions of Captains and Colonels. Consideration as to whether the Combat Grief Cycle could be applied throughout the command structure would greatly add to the framework's understanding of responses to death. This would be particularly useful in relation to hardening or indifference, criticisms that have often been levied against the men who held the highest ranks. An additional aside to this line of inquiry, which would enrich the understanding of the ordinary soldiers' experience, is how promotion, commission and the role of the temporary gentleman during the war could alter the individual's response to death from a position of acquired responsibility.

This thesis, whilst offering an analysis of a unifying experience has sought to stress the uniqueness of the individual's responses to war. The First World War was a relative experience for men and the cohort to which they belonged depending on when they were deployed to the front. The Somme has been reinterpreted as one in a series of watershed moments rather than the only turning point. This is not intended to undermine the experience of the soldiers who fought in Picardy in 1916, instead it is designed to rehabilitate and reimagine the war experience of the soldiers who did not fight there. Any offensive or defensive action could serve as a collective watershed moment for the individual groups which were present and this is certainly an area requiring greater study. This thesis has identified that the key offensive from each year of the war, the First Battle of Ypres, Loos, the Somme, Passchendaele, the German Spring Offensive and the Hundred Days Offensive, all represented the same type of breaking point for the different cohorts of the army. These were the offensives where the men of these groups witnessed mass death together for the first time. The effects of combat were powerful and caused men to lose their faith in the glories of war. One death caused intense bereavement and mass death created grief for the collective. A soldier's military identity was not given to him by his battalion or regiment alone but also by the men he fought besides, both friends and comrades. Without them, there could be no comfort or fleeting enjoyment from the war. These losses caused individuals and communities to experience widespread and long-lasting disillusionment, itself a complex state which could fluctuate and intensify in relation to subsequent experiences. However, this did not cause a complete loss of will to fight and the majority continued on, mostly in the name of the dead but partly because survivors did not see an alternative.

Soldiers' communities at the front were in an almost constant state of mourning for those who had been lost. This could have been in relation to individuals grieving alone for friends, shared grief for officers and well-liked men, or both. This meant that funerals and burials became a key part of the soldier's time at the front. Soldiers were drawn to the rituals from civilian life to help them come terms with their bereavements. These acts had a powerful effect on a soldier's response to losses and could abate the worst elements of the rupture moment. They created a space where men could mourn openly through shared tears, often regardless of the rank they held. Where funerals and rudimentary burials were not carried out, the impaired mourning men already suffered from the violence of the loss could be exacerbated. Rituals were important as they re-established order in the chaos of war. Often a burial carried out by the closest friends of the deceased could offer enough comfort to sooth the deepest pain. It allowed survivors to hope the dead would eventually receive a proper and permanent grave, assuaging concerns that a friend might join the vast legion of unknown dead. Military funeral rites were invested with the rituals to discharge a soldier from his military duty and allowed the dead to be at rest, attempting to return him to his civilian identity. However, it was not in the interest of survivors to allow this to happen as soldiers strove to make the dead the foundations of their communities. Men died a soldier's death and were buried as one, with the identity of the dead as the fallen of war cemented by the work of IWGC. Through these acts the dead could not be a civilian and a soldier, leaving them stuck between the two as both spheres tried to claim them for their own. There is room for more study concerning the ownership of the dead. This thesis has demonstrated that during the war at least, soldiers shared their grief with civilians often elevating Home Front mourning over their own. Men had gone to great lengths to ensure the dead were identified as soldiers, even in relation to their individual military community, allowing for the possibility of tension with those at home to appear. Furthermore, as soldiers harboured a deep desire to carry out the acts of burial and commemoration at the front, there is scope to explore whether or not this led to conflict with the work of the Graves Registration Unit.

However, it was survivors who suffered the most at the end of the war in terms of their identity. Even though soldiers believed they had only taken a hiatus from their civilian lives, veterans struggled to reconcile the deeds of combat with their pre-war identities. Having briefly forgotten about the dead at the moment of the Armistice,

their concerns turned towards returning to their civilian lives and a deep anxiety was caused in relation to the memory of the fallen. This meant on their return home survivors were haunted by the dead, compelled to remember them as the impaired mourning created during the war took its psychological toll. This was compounded by the marginalisation of soldiers' mourning from the national commemorative landscape. They had left the dead behind and now had to live life without the support of those who understood the horrors they had experienced. Many ex-servicemen returned to the front in the hope of reconnecting with the dead, with some finding it a helpful exercise in finally coming to terms with their losses. Although ideas in relation to feelings of tension caused by the sanitisation of the front by civilians have been considered elsewhere, this requires greater study. A broader analysis of soldiers' interactions with civilian monuments would garner a deeper understanding of how they could both help and hinder a veteran's mediation of mourning. Many veterans suffered for years due to guilt over their own survival whilst others had perished, especially as death had been random. However, as this thesis has demonstrated traditional understandings of the term survivor guilt are incompatible with the emotions of the soldier. Men who survived battle were often relieved, if not overjoyed, at having emerged unscathed, although any feelings of happiness were soon overshadowed by grief. One of the principal arguments of this thesis is that many of the relationships soldiers had at the front should be considered friendships. This was a relationship that was incompatible with comradeship and the demands of the martial sphere, where a man should have felt guilt at not doing his true duty and dying with his comrades on the battlefield. Friends did not die but lived for each other. Therefore, guilt was not felt in relation to surviving or not sacrificing the self to save another, but having failed to sustain friends' lives and surviving together. Although this work has demonstrated that men were emotionally scarred for the rest of their lives due to their experiences of death in the war, many bore their pain with resilience. Soldiers and veterans attempted to mediate the worst aspects of their grief by achieving a type of mourning more akin to that of peacetime. In reality, individuals at any time can never truly come to terms with the death of loved ones due to the destructive nature of bereavement. This thesis has revealed that perhaps the greatest sacrifice in war was to survive whilst watching all of one's friends die.

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Appendix One

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