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KEPI ROUGE TO BLEU HORIZON

THE EVOLUTION OF THE FRENCH MILITARY UNIFORM & THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HEADDRESS, 1871 - 1918

YANNICK A. OLIVÈRES

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51. A true rarity to find, this French cavalryman of the 4th Dragoon Regiment (Commercy-Sézane) still wears the beautiful pre-war 1872/74 helmet instead of the steel Adrian helmet, despite him donning the new horizon blue uniform. Note the fourragère. **(YO) - p.96.**

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57. French troops of the 30th Infantry Regiment (Annecy) occupy a frontline trench while a CSRG 1915 "Chauchat" machine gunner observes no man's land, c.1916. Notice the man second from left (leaning on the sandbag wall), who is likely an NCO. He wears a helmet which has been deliberately covered in chalky mud, resembling a camouflage pattern. **(YO) - p.105.**

58. French trench sweepers investigate a ditch filled with dead comrades during the Third Battle of Champagne, April - May 1917. Although 1917 was the least bloodiest year for the French army, the losses sustained during the Chemin des Dames and Champagne offensives led to the outbreak of cases of collective indiscipline which affected half of the army, suspending all offensive operations. The losses would have proportionately been higher had the steel helmet not been fully adopted by this time, as it was noticed that the introduction of the Adrian helmet had saved the lives of many French soldiers. **(ML) - p.106.**

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As for the members of the institution of the University of Kent, I would like to extend my sincerest appreciations to Dr. Mario Draper, my primary supervisor as well as Director of Studies, Senior Lecturer in Modern British and European Military History, and author of *The Belgian Army and Society From Independence to the Great War*. He had proposed and encouraged me to undertake a project revolving around French military uniforms and headdress, seeing my passion for the subject due to my growing collection of authentic pieces and photographs of the French army of the Great War. I would also like to show my appreciation to Dr. Timothy Bowman, my secondary supervisor, Reader in Modern British Military History and the Deputy Head of School, and author of *The Edwardian Army: Manning, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902-1914*, *Irish regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale*, *The Disparity of Sacrifice: Irish Recruitment to the British Armed Forces, 1914-1918*, *Carson's army: The Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910–22* and the Cambridge University Press published book *The British Army and the First World War*. Both Dr. Draper and Dr. Bowman have shown me undiminishing support for my project throughout the past year and beyond.

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Preface

Although the subject of French military kit is a rather unexplored niche outside of the collector and military fashion enthusiast circle, it is a popular theme that has received much recognition and interest worldwide within said circles, inspiring a variety of books to be written on well documented subjects ranging from the French First Empire to the Third Republic. The subjects are typically documented with period ephemera, designs and prints intricately detailing the design of a uniform or a piece of headwear, whether it be standard issue, a prototype, or private tailored.

Studying and collecting French First World War headwear has been a passion and hobby of mine since the winter of 2019, when I started off as an eighteen year old enthusiast. The first complete helmet I acquired was a Great War French Model 1915 Adrian helmet in early-war horizon blue paint and badged to the army Engineers, which was a gift from my mother. Over four years later, such early-war examples are scarce to find. I decided to take upon this project by infusing my hobby as well as my passion for French military fashion to create a thesis in a very niche subject area, that can perhaps inspire a new generation of collectors and military historians who appreciate the complexity and aesthetic of an army's appearance.

However, one must note that not all discussed components of headgear will be physically presented here - some examples are simply unable to be acquired, both in physical form and/or in photography medium. For example, of all the wartime statutory badge branches of the steel Adrian helmet, the *Intendance* badge has yet to be located in period photography, simply due to the rarity of the insignia. However, known examples of these helmets do exist, but are of course, very scarce.

In this thesis, there is a provision of photographic evidence/examples of the main uniforms and headdress discussed in this project, and if possible, a physical specimen to accompany it for a more in-depth inspection and understanding. It is also important to note, that the field of French pre and First World War uniforms and headdress is impossible to fully cover, due to the variety of non-regulation patterns, private-tailored kit, and field modifications, which therefore results in a wide array and variety in certain designs and fashion styles. Thus, this thesis will explore just the most important components.

All of the physical items presented here, which are all authentic and original, have been acquired through years of searching, hard-work, and perseverance. All of the artefacts featured in this thesis are from my own private collection apart from a few period photographs, which have been sourced from the collection of Merlijn Leijdekker, who has kindly permitted the author to use as many of his photos as required for the thesis.

This thesis will try its best to present to the reader a basic rundown and understanding of the world of French military uniforms from the pre-war period up to the First World War, demonstrating the intricacies of political influence and the eventual compromise with modernists that was made for the development and progression of the French army uniform.

Private Collections:

At the end of the description of each artifact or photograph presented, initials are shown in parentheses to attribute the article to its rightful owner. The private collections featured in this thesis belong to the following:

YO: Yannick Olivères (author)
ML: Merlijn Leijdekker

I. Introduction

In the past decades, the French army in the pre-war period and the Great War with regards to the doctrine, the development of the army, and the adaptation to modern warfare has been a subject of intense scrutiny by French historians. There has been a fairly recent surge of interest in the subject by Anglophone historians thanks to the works of some notable historians such as Alistair Horne, William Philpott, Jonathan Krause, Robert Doughty, and Elizabeth Greenhalgh, among others. This is largely due to the monumental impact the war had on France, along with the massive price they paid in terms of the demographic, geographic, and financial losses sustained in the brutal four-year defence of their homeland. The French army suffered greatly by the end of the Great War despite being the strongest and most advanced in the world by the end of it. They made a significant contribution to the defeat of the German Empire by making sacrifices never seen before in French history. This was only achieved because of the significant modernisations and adaptations the French army made during the conflict. This thesis will analyse this process in relation to the development of the French uniform and headdress in the pre-war period and during the Great War, which falls under a necessity as a result of the changing nature of warfare.

Between 1871 and 1918, the French army underwent some significant transitions with regards to the development of its military uniform as a result of internal political conflicts between the traditionalists and modernists of the age. Therefore, the title of this thesis, *Képi Rouge to Bleu Horizon*, is a reference to said period with a focus on the eventual transition and development of the French army uniforms, with a particular spotlight on the headdress of the period. The focus on headdress was chosen due to the significant representation that a piece of headgear possesses regarding the identity of a nation and its army. For example, the képi and Adrian helmet are two pieces of headwear that typically represent the image of the French *Poilu* during the Great War. The same can be said about the Germans and their famous *Pickelhauben* and *Stahlhelme*, as well as the British and their steel helmets.

However, one can argue that the French army of the early twentieth century was too keen on maintaining traditionalism as one of their primary motives for retaining their outdated military uniforms which were reminiscent of the period of the *Belle Époque*. This was for two main reasons. Firstly, the illustrious history and national pride of the French linked heavily with their usage of the red trousers and dark blue uniforms, especially when looking into previous military campaigns of the Second Empire. The defeat to Prussia in 1871 however was an outlier in a fairly successive string of military victories (Algeria, Crimea, Italy), and thus promoted a sense of national revival. Abandoning these traditional uniforms meant abandoning France's strong cultural ties to this identity forged over time. Secondly, the traditional colours resonated strongly with the spirit of the cult of the offensive, a French way of waging war that emphasised *élan vital*, a belief that courage, morale, and an overpowering offensive spirit could overcome technological disadvantages on the battlefield. Thus, vibrant and loud colours symbolised courage, tenacity, and offensive power.

The details of the uniform therefore matter because they reflected the French military thinking, cultural identity, and technological adaptations of the period. The examinations and analyses of these pieces of kit highlights the conflict between tradition and the changing nature of warfare, the transition of French military thinking, and the broad technological changes which occurred during the war. In this sense, uniforms provide historical proof of how armies reacted to novel techniques of warfare and how soldiers' utilitarian attire reflected national identity.

This is interesting to compare with that of the German army, as they did not share the same sentiment as the French regarding the attachment to its glorious past. In the previous century, the Prussian army and German states had performed remarkably well in several European campaigns, donning their traditional colours of their representative states. However, in the early twentieth century, they had left the past behind and opted for more practical kit as reflected in Maurice Pellé's report from December 1909 while serving as the military attaché in Berlin, in which he describes viewing the brand new German uniforms in *feldgrau*.[1] This raised some concerns back in Paris with regards to needing to make steps towards modernisation as the German army had, but the French were still persistent on linking the present with the past regarding its nationalistic presentation. The Germans did not share this point of view in their own army.

The French uniform also illustrated tension between form and function, as it characterised the modernisation of armies at the turn of the twentieth century. The vibrant French uniforms of the pre-war period (and early war) emphasised form, as they represented national pride, honour, and continuity in representing previous military campaigns. However, the changing nature of warfare and the realities of modernised weaponry rapidly exposed the impracticality of these outdated uniforms and kit. The adoption of the "horizon blue" uniform in 1915 demonstrated a shift towards the concept of function, as it prioritised efficiency, not only on the battlefield, but also economically. This thus shows how uniforms (a representation of traditional military culture) was forced to adapt to the urgent demands (technological and tactical) of modern warfare.

The broader modernisation of European militaries was also reflected in this shift. Standardised equipment, camouflage, protective gear (such as the steel helmet which will be explored in Chapter V), and logistical efficiency became increasingly important. Armies restructured their equipment and tactics to suit modern, industrialised warfare. The transition from the colourful, vibrant pre-war uniforms to more practical ones therefore parallels the broader, cultural movement towards modernity, where symbolic traditions and nationalistic fervour yielded to more rational and functional designs. In this sense, the evolution of French military uniforms is representative of a broader historical process: the shift from heroic display ideals of the nineteenth century to systems characterised by technology, mass organisation, and practical efficiency in the twentieth century.

This shift from decorative to functional uniforms and kit was also a result of both industrial society and the changing nature of warfare. The French army was largely shaped by

[1] *SHD*, GR 7 N 1109, «*Tenue de Campagne*» 13 December 1909.

industrial and bureaucratic systems that emphasised standardisation and mass production which were values frequented in modern liberal capitalist societies. However, the transition into modern warfare and the introduction of devastating weaponry and methods of waging war rendered pre-war uniform and kit obsolete (largely through liquidation in the field), and the adoption of the new standardised uniform in 1915 reflected the dual pressure of an industrial society enabling large-scale, rationalised military productions, while modern combat demanded functionality. Thus, the overall concept of uniforms and kit emerged as a minor but distinct illustration of the larger shift to modernity, in which utilitarian design gradually replaced traditional symbolic form.

This thesis promotes the idea that the French army and politicians eventually came to a compromise between aesthetic and practicality. This was particularly challenging, as the aestheticists linked strongly to traditionalism, with the preference of a loud, symbolic representation of France to be the most important factor when it came to the uniform and kit of the army. This was linked to both cultural and economic ties, with the former being associated with the history of the French army and its utilisation of such colours and patterns deemed "traditional", and the latter being that change would force more military spending and would lead to a waste of existing stock. The functionalists were the ones who opted for modernisation, possessing no significant ties to cultural or economic reasons. They were largely driven by the motivation of the changing nature of warfare and the fact that other states had moved to modernise the visual aspects of their armies. To them, France was lacking behind. The specific stances backed by the traditionalists and the modernists will be examined in *Part III: The Period of Trials and Potential Reform*.

So, how did the army, modernists, and the politicians rise to the challenge and work towards a solution, and how did they eventually get there? Before all of these are thoroughly investigated, one has to delve into the pre-war period, an era filled with traditionalism, militarism, and political rivalry, which had an impact on the evolution of the French military uniform and the development of the headdress and how the army had initially prioritised aesthetic and budgetary concerns over practicality, which eventually changed.

This particular investigation into the uniforms (not inclusive of the historiographical review), is divided into three separate chapters with several subchapters each: *The Period of Trials and Potential Reform: 1903 - 1915*, *The Képi: 1884 - 1918*, and *The Steel Helmet: 1915 - 1918*. The first chapter that properly delves into the subject of uniformity, *The Period of Trials and Potential Reform: 1903 - 1915*, investigates the pre-war period which covers French militarism, nationalism, and traditionalism in the face of necessary modernisation, as well as the the period of trials of the newly proposed uniforms, the clothing crisis of 1914/15, and the introduction of the horizon blue uniform that went on to symbolise the French army of the Great War. *The Képi: 1884 - 1918*, looks at the origins of the képi, the pre-war Model 1884 képi (that saw service in the first year of the war), the simplified képi: the 1884/14 & the 1914 models, as well as private purchase & commercially manufactured models. The final chapter of a uniform component, *The Steel Helmet: 1915 - 1918*, looks at the production and distribution of the steel

helmet during the Great War, the success and practicality of it as a piece of protective headgear, as well as its legacy as not only a statement of military fashion, but also as a piece of historical memorabilia.

The sources utilised in this thesis are of both the primary and secondary kind, ranging from period documents consulted at the archives of the *Service Historique de la Défense* (Vincennes) and at the private archive of the *Musée de l'Armée* (Paris), to excellent books on the French army uniforms and equipment by Laurent Mirouze, Stéphane Dekerle, and Frédéric Coune to name a few. Ground-breaking books and articles on the French army during the Great War by notable historians such as Jonathan Krause, Robert Doughty, Elizabeth Greenhalgh, Leonard Smith, Michel Goya, etc., are also consulted and cited. Each provided source pertains to supporting this thesis, as well as providing information regarding the development of the uniforms of the era.

II. The Historiography of the French Army: 1871 - 1918

France, 1914 - 1918

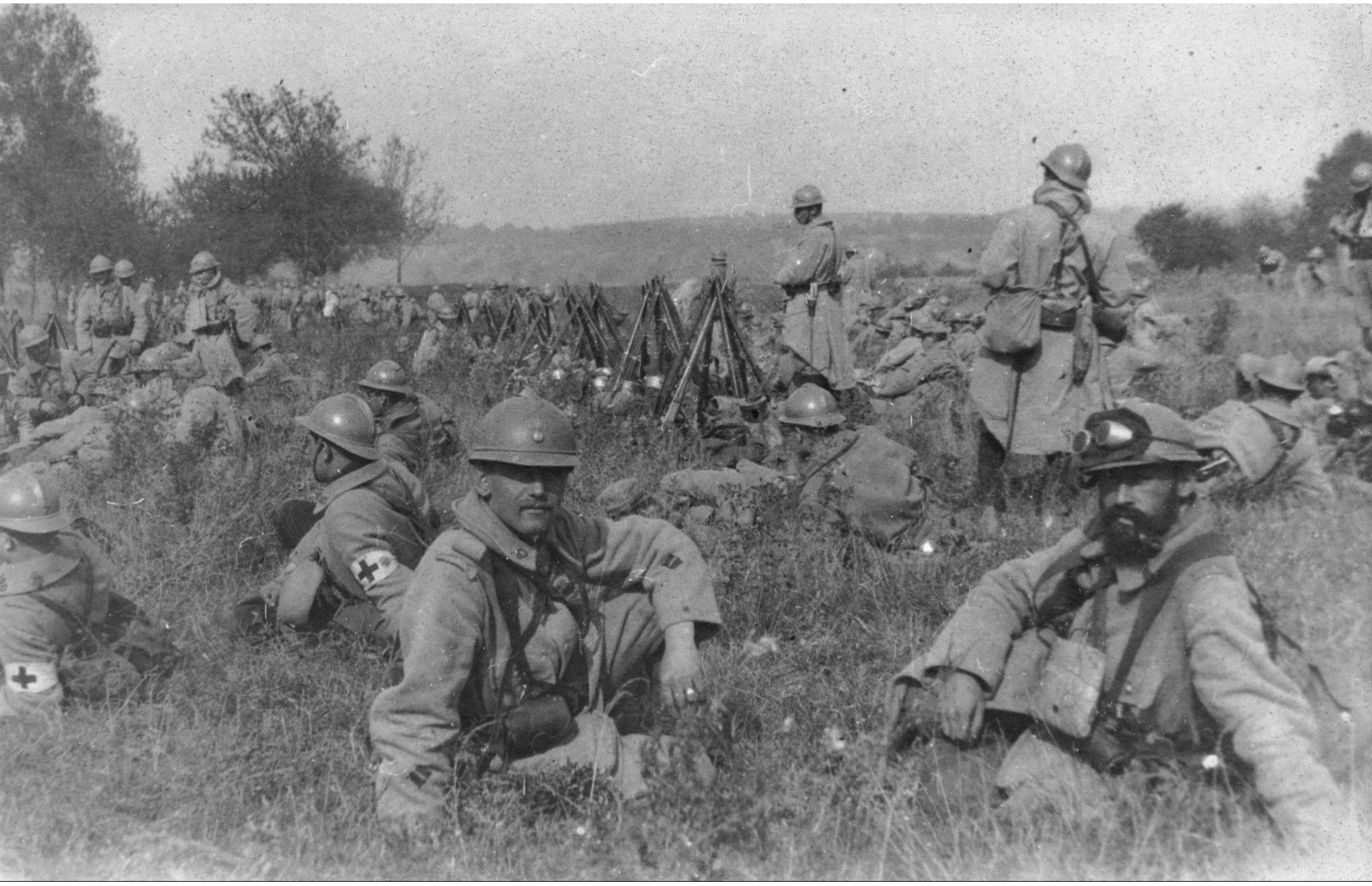

Photo (1): French troops of the 20th Infantry Regiment (Marmande) at rest, c.1915. **(YO)**

> If France of to-day stood alone against the world's enemy, it would be almost inconceivable to imagine her defeat now; wholly so to imagine any surrender. The war will go on till the enemy is finished. The French do not know when that hour will come; they seldom speak of it; they do not amuse themselves with dreams of triumphs or terms. Their business is war, and they do their business.[2]
>
> - Rudyard Kipling, *France At War*, 1915.

[2] Rudyard Kipling, *France at War: On the Frontier of Civilization* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1915).

11 November 1918 - the guns fall silent. After having been constantly pushed back by advancing allied forces during the Hundred Days Offensive, and while having lacked the industrial and basic survival necessities to carry on fighting, the German Empire was defeated. An official armistice was signed at Compiègne at 5am. on 11 November 1918, with the official ceasefire having taken effect six hours later, at 11am.

Despite being the most powerful and advanced force in the world as a result of the 1917–1918 modernisation programmes, the French army had suffered greatly throughout the entire course of the Great War. According to Michel Goya's *Les Vainqueurs*, the French military had developed during the four years of combat, but not without hardship. By making these sacrifices, the French military had been instrumental in toppling the German Empire. Robert Doughty states in his work, *The French Armed Forces: 1918-1940*, in a reflection of the army of 1918 and the potential seen in the army of the interwar period, that "by the usual criteria - relatively modern weaponry, large size, ample logistical support, and sound leadership - the French military seemed to be capable of ensuring France's safety and eventually winning, when supported by its allies, the long total war foreseen by political and military leaders."[3]

Nonetheless, one cannot overlook the substantial losses that amounted in the struggle for liberation from the grasp of the Imperial German eagle, especially regarding demography and topography. Regarding demographic impact, the French incurred the most devastating casualties among the victorious allied forces.[4] André Tardieu encapsulates France's losses in a poignant piece:

> The war bled us terribly. Out of our population of less than 38,000,000, 8,500,000 were mobilised; 5,300,000 of them were killed or wounded (1,500,000 killed, 800,000 mutilated, 3,000,000 wounded), not counting 500,000 men who have come back to us from German prisons in very bad physical condition.[5]

The casualty count for the French army was so astronomically large and challenging to deal with, that "wounded men were being abandoned in dug-outs or left in no-man's land, and the hospitals remained overcrowded and messy…"[6] Undoubtedly, these losses had an impact on the French army's active army statistics, especially in 1918, when the number of active servicemen had significantly decreased since 1917. To make matters worse, 1917 was also France's least deadly year. The statistics of the full-strength of the active French army between 1917-1918 is highlighted in the work of Michel Huber, in *La Population de la France Pendant la Guerre*. Compared to the numbers between 1916 and 1917, the French army was much weaker in

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[3] Michel Goya, *Les Vainqueurs: Comment la France a gagné la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Éditions Tallandier, 2018). Robert Doughty, 'The French Armed Forces, 1918–40', in A. Millett & W. Murray (Eds.), *Military Effectiveness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.39.

[4] Disregarding the Russian Empire which officially withdrew from the war in March 1918.

[5] Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La Grande Guerre des Français: L'incompréhensible* (Paris: Perrin, 1994), p.7. André Tardieu, 'The Policy of France', *Foreign Affairs* 1 (15 September 1922), pp.12-13.

[6] Jonathan Krause, *Early Trench Tactics in the French Army: The Second Battle of Artois, May-June 1915* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013). p.112.

terms of active combatants from early to summer 1918 (with between 100,000 and 200,000 fewer men in 1918 than in 1917).[7] By November 1918, the army's size was actually smaller than that of the active army in 1915, which was the deadliest year for the French army - they had suffered greatly during the Champagne and Artois offensives. This indicates that even though the war was won, French casualties were on an unprecedented scale. Regarding losses outside of the genre of demographics, Tardieu continues:

> Almost 4,000,000 hectares of land were devastated, together with 4,000 towns and villages, 600,000 buildings were destroyed, among them 20,000 factories and workshops, besides 5,000 kilometres of railroads and 53,000 kilometres of roads. About 1,400,000 head of cattle were carried off. Altogether a quarter of our productive capital was annihilated. The financial consequences of the annihilation of all these resources bear down on us heavily today. The war cost us 150 billions of francs. The damage to property and persons comes to 200 billion. Our ordinary budget has increased from 4½ billion to 25 billion; our debt from 36 billion to 330 billion.[8]

The sacrifice and the decisive role France played during the Great War could not be solely summarised in terms of their military, demographic, geographic, and financial losses - it is important to acknowledge the nationwide physical and cultural mobilisation in this conflict for France's survival that led them to fight so intensely, as stated in *France and the Great War 1914-1918*:

> In the end, the 'war culture' of 1914–18, resulted from a vast and extraordinarily diverse creative activity, whose origins lay in individuals and not in governmental institutions. Tens of thousands of people created the images that mobilised the French between 1914 and 1918 – journalists, teachers, writers, actors, popular singers, photographers, painters, designers, film directors, artisans, industrialists, and many others. A surprisingly broad cross-section of the French population developed and disseminated the themes constructing the war, themes then interiorised by their compatriots.[9]

The impact of the war on France has naturally led to a wide array of both primary and secondary sources being published in the Francophone world. A sentiment that is shared with Jonathan Krause, a leading historian on the French Army of the Great War, is that the decisive role that France played during the Great War has been extremely overlooked in the Anglo-speaking world.[10] However, that does not mean that there is a limitation of excellent, published sources in the field, which will be explored in this historiographical review. Krause himself wrote some excellent works on the French army during the Great War, ranging from the Second Battle of Artois (*Early Trench Tactics in the French Army*), to their artillery (*From*

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[7] Michel Huber, *La population de la France pendant la guerre* (Paris: PUF, 1931), pp. 113-15.
[8] Tardieu, *The Policy of France*, pp.12-13.
[9] Leonard Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.54.
[10] Krause, Jonathan, 'The Worst Year: The French Army in 1915' (Birmingham, 2015).

Balletics to Ballistics: French Artillery, 1897-1916), and even about French development of gas warfare (*The Origins of Chemical Warfare in the French Army*). His works, though, are fairly recent, and only in the last twenty years has there been a significant increase in Anglophone interest about the French war effort.

In the field of secondary literature, Alistair Horne arguably famously introduced the role of France in the war with his prize-winning book, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (1962), a battle which tends to dominate in the memory of the French army during the conflict. Paul Jankowski, Alan Axelrod, and William Buckingham followed up with their own works on Verdun in 2016 and 2017. Authority pieces on the French army include Robert Doughty's *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy & Operations in the Great War* and Elizabeth Greenhalgh's *The French Army and the First World War*.[11] Both books investigate the army's structure, contribution, achievements, failures, performances, and leadership across all fronts of the conflict. They contextualise studying the French army in the grand scheme of things, investigating and analysing how the army had adapted to the challenges of modern and coalition warfare, as well as delving into the importance of the development of military doctrine, logistics, as well as the development of modern military technology.[12]

Douglas Porch's *The French Army in the First World War* was at one point a leading piece of historiography in the Anglo world surrounding the French army, however, his work presents contrasting thoughts from more recent publications. His assessments on the French army do not mirror that of recent historiography as his attachment to analysing the failures overshadow that of recent pieces that assess the French army's modernisation processes and successes, a theme which is heavily looked at in Michel Goya's works *Flesh and Steel* and *Les Vainqueurs*.[13]

Rudyard Kipling's *France at War*, published in 1915, gives an Anglo perspective of the Franco-German war experience in the early stages of the conflict.[14] Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Visit to Three Fronts*, published the following year in 1916, also gives an interesting first-hand account of the wartime situation on the French front (along with the Italian and British lines) from the perspective of an Englishman, offering a foreign, yet allied insight.[15]

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[11] Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).
Robert Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy & Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008).
Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[12] Greenhalgh's book is a comprehensive history of the French army's decisive and critical contribution to the First World War. *Histoire de l'Armée Française 1914-1918* by François Cochet and Rémy Porte, can be argued to be French equivalents of Greenhalgh's work. Even older Francophone publications revolving around the French army of the Great War would be from the French *Ministère de la Guerre* themselves who published a series in the 1920's titled, *Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre* (though not comparable to Greenhalgh's work, as it was not published by an external historian, but by the Ministry of War themselves in a contemporary period).

[13] See the works of Michel Goya: *Flesh and Steel During the Great War: The Transformation of the French Army and the Invention of Modern Warfare* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2018), and *Les Vainqueurs* (2018)..

[14] Kipling, *France at War*.

[15] Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Visit to Three Fronts*, (New York: George H. Doran, 1916).

However, to really understand the situation of the French in the Great War who suffered so terribly during four years of conflict, one must delve into the situation of the Republic in the pre-war period. The outbreak of war launched a constant modernisation effort, a project that initially faced a tremendous battle against the traditionalists which had been raging since the turn of the nineteenth century. This contest involved a clash of doctrine and technology which eventually led to the modernisation of army uniforms and kit which will be explored later. To understand the development of the French uniform and kit which is what this thesis will investigate and analyse, it is important to look into the historiography of the initial struggles between the traditionalists and modernists, and the process of moving forward with the transformation, modernisation, and adaptation of the French army which naturally led to modernisations of the appearance of the French military. The latter possesses a clear link with the previous two subjects.

Transformation, Modernisation, & Adaptation - A Historiographical Analysis

To comprehend the difficulties and stubbornness the French faced with modernisation (and the eventual compromise), one must delve into the historiography pertaining to this subject matter. The defeat of the French in 1871 spawned a nationalist revival. In his work, *The March to the Marne: The French Army, 1871 - 1914*, Douglas Porch argues the point that even before the Franco-Prussian War had reached its inevitable conclusion, the founding fathers of the Third Republic had declared their favour for the traditional aspects of republicanism. This, in turn, was directly associated with traditionalism; not in the sense of the monarchy of the Empire (which he strongly opposed), but in its institutional and military beliefs of a nationalist dominance.

In this book, Porch argues that the link between the new army of the Republic and that of the Second Empire had been spotted, not solely in the case of uniforms and kit which will be explored later, but rather the overall attitude and presentation of the army: "The new era of national dedication and reconciliation behind the army announced by Marshal MacMahon's June 1871 Longchamps review, when 120,000 troops filed past in an atmosphere shimmering with patriotic emotion, caused the more cynical spectators like the novelist 'Gyp', to conclude that 'it was still the magnificent army of the empire'".[16] This therefore demonstrated the early Third Republic's attachment to the nationalistic identity of its past and contributed to the traditionalism favoured by many politicians when it came to the modernisation of the army's appearance which will be explored in *Chapter III: The Period of Trials and Potential Reform: 1903 - 1915*.

In *The French Army and Politics, 1870 - 1970*, Alistair Horne argues that the army of 1914 still relied on the values and institutional beliefs drawn out in the 1870's and expected it to be as relevant in 1914.[17] This point of view is comprehensible, as linking a victory in the modern day with the defeat of the past is something of a symbolic resurrection. This revival and

[16] Douglas Porch, *The March to the Marne: The French Army 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.2.
[17] Alistair Horne, *The French army and Politics, 1870-1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), p.15.

nationalistic fervour of the French people, expressing the strong sense of revanchism in 1914, is comparable to the attitudes that the French public felt in 1870 upon declaration of war, with their patriotic cries of "to Berlin!".[18] A large part of the French reliance on moral force to project a victory, was as explained in the introduction, a core part of French doctrine post 1871, which carried on into 1914 showing little signs of adaptation to the changing nature of warfare. French troops charged into battle in 1914 with "the red trousers selected, in preference to less conspicuous colours, by nationalists who thought red more helpful to morale in *l'attaque*". This once again demonstrates the French army's initial stubbornness in ditching the concept of *élan vital* in being the decisive factor in winning a battle.[19] This, however, did not last, as the mindset changed thanks to compromise between all political parties of France and the military, an eventual positive outcome of the *Union Sacrée*, which Horne argues saved France:

> The remarkable patriotic compact, formed between all political parties on the eve of war… The *Union Sacrée* was backed by politicians of all hues - even the left-wing pacifists, despite the tragic assassination of the great Socialist leader, Jaurès, on the eve of war - showing a degree of unity not seen in France since Napoleon I (and nor was it to be seen again in the Third, Fourth or even Republics)... it also meant that the political had abdicated power to the military.[20]

Although the unique mood for the Union had been set in 1911 (evident by the attempt at compromise between politicians and modernists regarding proposals for a new modern uniform which will be explored in *Chapter III: The Period of Trials and Potential Reform: 1903 - 1915*), the establishment of this vitally important lifeline on the eve of war in 1914 guaranteed unity within France, and those who ran the army became the main driving force behind the modernisation processes.[21] Granted, it still took some time before everyone was entirely on board, but a lot of the traditionally-dominated mindsets of politicians had to give way to the more appropriate methods of waging war as per its changing nature. The eventual compromise made between the traditionalists and the modernists led to more appropriate doctrinal developments and technological advancements as a result, which in turn contributed to the eventual modernisation of the visual presentation of the French army (which will also be investigated and analysed in Chapter III).

Simon House also discusses the much needed aspect of modernisation in the French army and its core beliefs, especially with regard to the overwhelming dominance of nationalism and wholehearted belief in spiritual supremacy and its impact on the battlefield. He criticises the erroneous traditional doctrine of the cult of the offensive, citing Cyril Falls in the process to demonstrate his opinion on the subject, describing it as a "disastrous doctrine, a sort of fanaticism a veritable mystique of the offensive' that caused the unnecessary slaughter of tens of

[18] Ibid., p.7.
[19] Ibid., p.34
[20] Ibid., pp.34-36.
[21] Ibid., p.36

thousands of young innocent French conscript soldiers".[22] This thesis agrees with House's assessment of the outdated offensive doctrine, and leans towards the idea of necessary reformation which came after the harsh lessons of 1914. The adjustments made following the bloody battles of the opening phases of the war in Belgium and Northern France rectified this. Joseph Joffre had been a staunch supporter of the *élan vital* and the cult of the offensive, and House argues that one of the first aspects of the army's doctrinal modernisation occurred when his Plan XVII failed:

> Joffre's Plan XVII stopped once the armies were in place and was then superseded by a series of General and Specific Instructions issued by the commander-in-chief's office (GQG) to the army commanders for the conduct of operations in the field. Far from demonstrating stubbornly inflexible adherence to a single stupid frontal attack on the German frontier defences, this was a most flexible system of command and control, which worked so effectively that it enabled Joffre to plan and execute successive attacks, from right to left along the whole northeastern front (i.e., what we today call the 'Western Front') in France and Belgium, culminating in the successful counter-attack on the Marne in September 1914.[23]

This excerpt demonstrates the initial carelessness and outdated thinking that plagued French military leadership, and it is due to examples like this where the perception of the inept high command sending millions of men to the slaughter became established, notably via Alan Clark's 1961 study of the Western Front of World War I, *The Donkeys*, which had moulded the mainstream perception of poor allied leadership during the Great War. Although this argument may perhaps (arguably) hold some truth especially in the early days, this incompetency was not with purposeful ill-intent towards the average fighting Frenchman in the trenches. At the time, generals and corps commanders led armies with the lessons they were taught from the War of 1870-1871. The tremendous loss of life was an unfortunate feature of the changing nature of warfare clashing with outdated doctrine. It was General Charles Mangin (nicknamed "the Butcher", who bluntly stated "*Quoi qu'on fasse, on perd beaucoup de monde* (Whatever you do, you lose a lot of men)".

William Philpott and Jonathan Boff's work, *Transforming War, 1914-1918*, presents an introduction that sets out the parameters of debate regarding military adaptation and modernisation in the face of a changing nature of warfare. The perceived view of the Great War throughout the decades preached creative and scientific haemorrhages in military thinking, which contrary to popular belief, wasn't the case. Philpott and Boff argue that, "what had already been lost in simplistic post-war critiques was the complexity, variety and dynamism of the art of war between 1914 and 1918 - a period which saw a terminal break with Napoleonic paradigms of warfare and the emergence of proto-modern tactical and operational methods - because the

[22] Simon J. House, *Lost Opportunity: The Battle of the Ardennes, 22 August 1914* (Amherst: Helion & Company, 2017), p.8.
[23] Ibid., p.8

theatre in which it developed remained in strategic stalemate."[24] The narrative that stalemate was a mere reflection of technological stagnation and a lack of doctrinal change has been debunked extensively by scholars of the Great War in recent years.

Warfare arguably experienced its most rapid and profound shift between 1914 and 1918, despite the conflict predominantly occurring in static field entrenchments throughout most of its duration and across most of its theatres of operations. The war "had a profound impact on military theory and operational practice thereafter which defined warfare until the turn of the twenty-first century", as well as the massive technological and doctrinal developments which catered towards the ultimate goal of breaking the stalemate and forcing a decisive victory.[25] This thesis is in agreement with Philpott and Boff's assessments, as it is a general consensus among established historians of the Great War that there has been an unfair representation of "lack of military thinking and innovation" during the war. Static, positional warfare does not necessarily equate to a stalemate of ideas or innovation - it can happen when two effective doctrines clash with one another. This is the reasoning behind how further developments are made to overcome the deadlock through decisive breakthroughs.

The eventual decisive breakthrough in 1918 which forced through the stalemate was only possible thanks to intensive military modernisation - in technology, doctrinal developments, and logistical changes. Philpott and Boff argue:

> Transformation of material, method and military culture took place at both the tactical and operational levels of war. What scholarship has definitively demonstrated is that the pace of military change was rapid. The opposing armies co-existed in a dynamic equilibrium of tactical and operational innovation and counter-measure that ironically sustained rather than ended the strategic stalemate. By the end, however, the opposing armies were very different in their organisation, method and understanding of war. It had been transformed into the 'modern style' of warfare through the integrated processes of technological adaptation, institutional learning and conceptual rethinking.[26]

Although four years may seem like an extensive period of time, in the history of military innovation, it really isn't. This period of military innovation is unparalleled in the history of warfare. The war began with cavalry charges and ended with thousands of tanks taking over the battlefield. Michel Goya shares the same viewpoint, arguing that the French army transformed tremendously in four years of conflict. He backs the idea that the French army underwent a complete evolution in all regards, which he details in his book, *Les Vainqueurs:*

> For anyone who saw the departure of the infantrymen of 1914 in their red trousers and blue greatcoats, the contrast is striking. The French army of 1918 is more understated, but more impressive in steel helmets and accompanied by all those weapons whose use no one would have

[24] William Philpott and Jonathan Boff, 'Introduction: Transforming War, 1914–1918', in *British Journal for Military History*, 5.2 (2019), p.3.
[25] Ibid., p.4
[26] Ibid., p.7.

> imagined four years earlier: airplanes, armoured cars, heavy artillery, and finally, tanks… This French army, a giant organisation of four million men, transformed itself in just a few years with a vigour and speed that no other institution in the country, public or private, would ever match. The change was radical.[27]

This excerpt demonstrates the quick modernisation efforts of the French army once faced with the threat of the changing nature of warfare, an undertaking that was largely postponed in the pre-war era until it was deemed very much necessary to tackle it during wartime. In his book *Flesh and Steel*, Goya is also adamant that the French army was the first modern army in which the modernisers were the driving force behind the allied victory of 1918, and it was the changing nature of warfare which forced them to adapt.[28] This thesis agrees with this argument. The French army started off on the backfoot but eventually gained ground and surpassed their adversaries through a significant military overhaul involving the modernisation of doctrine, development of cutting-edge technology, and mastery of combined arms. However, these changes did not occur without challenge.

Robert Doughty highlights these specific challenges in his book, *Pyrrhic Victory*, and identifies that the French path to the complete transformation of the army as a modern fighting force was "neither obvious nor simple", as the "political and military leaders could not copy the institutions and methods of the Germans, for France's strategic situation, political and economic systems, and historical traditions required something different".[29] However, concerns regarding the military's political dependability were eclipsed by the need to strengthen the army and quicken the pace of transformation.

In the case of the French army specifically, the nature of modern war and how the army should react were the subject of heated theoretical discussions in military circles and service journals prior to 1914. Still attached to the traditional pre-war mindset, when war broke out, "the army was in the grip of unresolved doctrinal debates between the advocates of 'firepower' and 'shock' and struggling to elaborate the newly emerging operational level of war".[30] This thinking handicapped the French army in 1914, leading to severe losses and an overall poor performance in their first engagements, but lessons were learned and experience led to the production of positive outcomes: "the French high command responded appropriately to the unexpected challenges of positional warfare with a firepower-based tactical doctrine and a scientific operational system that employed a modernising and increasingly technological army to ever

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[27] Goya, *Les Vainqueurs,* p.8.
Michel Goya has also written excellent works about the development, transformation, and modernisation of the French army in its structure, doctrine, and technological advancements. His books, *La Chair et l'Acier*, and *L'Invention de la Guerre Moderne: Du Pantalon Rouge au Char d'Assaut*, takes significant steps towards gaining a better understanding of how the conflict on the Western Front affected French army doctrine, tactics, and technologies.

[28] Goya, *Flesh and Steel*.

[29] Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory*, pp.4-5.

[30] Philpott and Boff, 'Introduction: Transforming War, 1914–1918', p.12.

increasing effect, by late 1916 overtaking the German army in its development."[31] This is an important point, because a lot of doctrinal and technological innovations are attributed to the Germans, whereas the French, in Anglo historiography, are often ignored. This is unfair, as the French started off the war being behind their German counterparts in most fields of military innovation but by 1918 emerged onto the highest point of the podium. This can be attributed to the lessons learned, particularly those from 1914 which carried on into the following years.

The case of the French army in 1914 is proof that a defeat in battle forces adaptation. Philpott and Boff agree with this concept, and argue that "only innovations compatible with the dominant military culture can succeed. Innovation can thus come about in one of three ways. First, senior leaders can change the culture to bring about planned change. Secondly, external shocks - defeat being the most obvious - can reshape the culture. This certainly happened in the French army, beaten on the frontiers in August 1914 and needing to adapt to a war of attrition on national soil".[32] This necessary transformation stemmed from the experiences of the changing nature of warfare, and "the French army's approach to transformation can be characterised as an intellectual or philosophical exercise, a re-conceptualisation of warfare in response to the experiences of battle by pre-war theorists such as Foch, Pétain and Marie-Émile Fayolle.[33] Thus, it is evident that an army learns more from defeats than the other way around. This can be compared to the doctrine of both the French and German armies during the French campaign of 1940, where the French army lacked innovation because it was still intent on fighting the previous war (one which they won), while the Germans had learned the lessons from their defeat in 1918 and had put intensive effort into refining their doctrine and technology.

Thus, the defeat of the French army in the early battles of 1914 forced their hand at playing "catch up" to their German counterparts, since a war had not been fought in forty years and their doctrine and technology, which was perceived as improved from that of 1870, became once again, obsolete. Gerd Krumeich's work, *France's Armaments and Military Situation in July 1914*, details the factors which forced the French army to catch up in the arms race and technological developments which contributed to the modernisation of the French army. However, he argues that a significant motive for this modernisation of armaments and technology was tied to France's perceptions of fear of war with Germany which set the frame for the pursuit of armament and military reforms, as opposed to technical competition: "Just as the Germans were convinced that they were being 'encircled', the French firmly believed that, sooner or later, they would find themselves on a collision course with Germany. Everyone in France agreed that it was necessary to prepare for an impending German attack".[34] But the motive for technological modernisation wasn't solely to prepare for a German attack; it was to

[31] Ibid., pp.12-13.
[32] Ibid., p.10.
[33] Ibid., p.13.
[34] Gerd Krumeich, 'France's Armaments and Military Situation in July 1914', in *Bid for World Power? New Research on the Outbreak of the First World War*, ed. by Andreas Gestrich and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p.166.

prepare for offensive manoeuvres in case of a German attack, which therefore justified France's reliance on light artillery.

> The reason for French armament was not merely to provide effective protection against a feared 'sudden attack' (*attaque brusquée*) by the Germans, as the government claimed to parliament, and as the national press and most politicians incessantly repeated… France's whole armaments project has been presented as self-evidently serving to protect the country against a German attack. But this protection consisted not in defending the Fatherland's soil, as the people were constantly told, but in a sophisticated offensive strategy, for which a particular type of soldier and offensive formation had to be developed. It was less about rebuffing an ostensibly feared 'sudden attack' on France by the German army than setting up an offensive operation that had to be as quick and effective as possible. This, however, was concealed, and 'emergency measures' against a German attack were invoked instead, in order to persuade the French people and parliament of the necessity for arming.[35]

Thus, with this in mind, the specific developing technology of utmost importance which laid the groundwork for the French army's modernisation and adaptations and thus heavily scrutinised, is that of the artillery. Jonathan Krause argues in his work, From *Balletics to Ballistics: French Artillery, 1897-1916*, that "The First World War, fundamentally, was an artillery war. Central to every tactical question was the use of artillery: that of the attacker and the defender. The reason for this is largely technological. With the development of accurate, quick-firing artillery field armies would possess an unprecedented level of firepower".[36] The war became one of artillery because the situation demanded it, and therefore urgently required a modernisation of the branch and its technology. This process had already begun in the 1890's (with the introduction of the French 75mm gun, a revolutionary field gun that could wreak consistent havoc on enemy positions with its hydraulic recoil system allowing consistent, targeted, rapid fire), and carried on until the end of the war and beyond. Krause references Robert Ripperger, who argues that "heavy artillery was reserved for sieges, a type of operation completely outside of the French emphasis on speed and mobility on the battlefield".[37]

By the time of first blood, it became very apparent to the French that heavy firepower kills. By far, Germany's heavy artillery caused the most damage, and France severely lacked stock of it especially when compared to their adversary. The debate between Senator Ch. Humbert, reporter for the army committee, and Minister of War Adolphe Messimy on 13 July 1914, confirmed this, when the former demonstrated to the stunned Senate that the French army

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[35] Ibid., p.167.

[36] Jonathan Krause, 'From Balletics to Ballistics: French Artillery, 1897–1916', in *British Journal for Military History*, 5.2 (2019), p.1.

[37] Robert M. Ripperger, 'The Development of French Artillery for the Offensive, 1890–1914', *The Journal of Military History*, 59.4 (1995), p. 616.
(*l'Artillerie de la Grande Guerre 1914-1918: Une Arme en Constante Evolution* by Henri Ortholan is also a fantastic book that follows the evolution of the artillery in the technical, tactical and strategic fields).

was unprepared on the eve of the war.[38] Krause highlights how this unpreparedness led to the development of static, positional warfare: "A lack of modern heavy artillery (of which the French had only 104 pieces extant on the outbreak of war) was to be a major preoccupation of all armies on the Western Front (even the German) and was the primary driver which gave the early trench battles their shape and scope".[39] It was not ideal for armies to be locked into positional warfare - it was merely the result of the pre-war situation that led to this.

Furthermore, the inefficiency of outdated pre-war heavy artillery in existing stock made them obsolete in the face of modern war, and attempts to modify pre-existing field guns to act as heavy pieces in an attempt to tackle the challenge of lacking them proved fruitless.[40] Additionally, "the loss of France's industrial north-east in the initial German advance of 1914 put incredible strain on France's ability to keep its armies supplied with the ever-increasing materiel needed to conduct modern war", but was in reality, a blessing in disguise.[41] "The loss was especially trying as France did not simply need to replace spent munitions and lost weapons, but needed to create an entirely new armoury of heavy artillery, which was sorely lacking. This lack of modern weaponry made itself sorely felt in the initial trench battles", but it gave the French reason to repurpose their production capabilities to manufacture weapons more suitable for this type of modern war.[42] The French only really caught up to their adversary when nationwide industrial mobilisation promoted factory refitting and redirection to prioritise the manufacturing of heavy artillery.

Despite all the transformations in technology, where was the army caught up in all of this? Against this new killing power there was little that infantry could do; little, that is, except dig. Trenches have always provided soldiers with protection from firepower.[43] Thus, the widescale digging of trenches which came to symbolise the Great War was a response to changing and developing doctrine, as explored in Krause's *Early Trench Tactics in the French Army: The Second Battle of Artois, May-June 1915.*[44] Krause investigates the French army's tactical development in the spring of 1915 when it made a concerted effort to comprehend and master the conduct of trench warfare. This particular time frame is vital in understanding, as it is during these months in 1915 that the French army acquired and acknowledged the fundamentals

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[38] Arpad F. Kovacs, 'French Military Legislation in the Third Republic 1871–1940', *Military Affairs*, 13.1 (1949), p.11.
Annales du Sénat, Debats, 1913/Il, 1199-1268.

[39] Krause, 'From Balletics to Ballistics', p.6.

[40] Jonathan Krause notes in his article *The Origins of Chemical Warfare in the French Army* (p.546 in *War in History, Volume 20*) that the French army had adapted the 75mm gun to be able to fire lachrymator perchloromethyl mercaptan gas shells, demonstrating their ability to adapt to the changing nature of warfare. He argues that France was potentially ahead of Germany in the modernisation race and the development of chemical weapons, being the first to deploy gas on the battlefield, though it was deemed to be of no military value.

[41] Krause, 'From Balletics to Ballistics', p.13

[42] Ibid., p.13.

[43] Ibid., p.1.

[44] Jonathan Krause, *Early Trench Tactics in the French Army: The Second Battle of Artois, May-June 1915* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013).

of effective trench warfare, which would guide their conduct of warfare for the remaining majority of the war. Krause makes the case that a number of cutting-edge techniques that are frequently credited to the German army, including the rolling barrage, infiltration tactics, and the efficient organisation and coordination of artillery bombardments, can in fact all be linked to early 1915 French writing, studies, and action, demonstrating their modernisation efforts:

> Spring 1915 saw GQG (*Grand Quartier Général*) attempt to achieve an unprecedented level of influence over the tactics and operations conducted by its executors in the field. Facilitated by the trench stalemate, which both eased communication difficulties and posed a serious problem that demanded solving, the men at Grand Quartier Général would begin a process of vertical integration in the hope of creating a single tactical system that could break the trench deadlock and drive the Germans from French soil. This system, while it would not reach full maturity in 1915, would be the basis for the French successes in 1916 and afterwards.[45]

Those successes are largely attributed to the further development of artillery doctrine, notably with the creation of the tank corps which helped to turn the tide of the war. It was a modernising technological extension of the artillery branch of service. Tim Gale, utilising primary sources acquired from the archives at Vincennes (much of which have not yet been previously cited in English publications), asserts in his book, *French Tanks of the Great War: Development, Tactics and Operations*, that 1915 saw the early developmental ideas for a French tank corps, which became a reality by 1917.[46] Gale argues that the tank corps was derived due to the changing nature in warfare, in order to seek solutions in the face of deadlock in wide-scale trench warfare forced by the modernity of weaponry. Though the British were off the mark first with their famous variants of the "Mark" tank line, it was the French army which largely pioneered the utilisation of mobile artillery in combined arms warfare, largely thanks to Jean Baptiste Estienne's experience in analysing artillery reports from the Russo-Japanese and Balkan Wars, determining that "fieldcraft and long-range infantry weapons were making direct artillery fire significantly less effective".[47] Thus, ideas were hatched regarding artillery of indirect fire which could be propped by a motor vehicle that could traverse rough terrains. This was the foundation and basis of the mobile artillery which eventually came to form the French tank corps that went on to perform magnificently during the Hundred Days Offensive in 1918 which led to the war's end. In Gale's book, each tank action is evaluated in terms of how it affected French tactics and tank tactics specifically, demonstrating the adaptation to modernising technology in warfare.

The sources cited, examined, and analysed in this section all demonstrate the modernisation processes of the French army in its development, doctrine, and technology, with the latter heavily encompassing the concept of uniform adaptations during the war which will be

[45] Ibid., p.21.
[46] Tim Gale, *French Tanks of the Great War: Development, Tactics and Operations* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2016), p.15.
[47] Ibid., p.16.

scrutinised in the following chapters. Before doing so, a basic rundown of the historiography specifically in the field of French uniforms will be given in the following section.

The Relevance of Historiography with French Military Uniforms

This section will look at the historiography regarding the French army's visual appearance on the battlefield in response to the required modernisation (inclusive of technological and doctrinal) due to the changing nature of warfare. Modernisation in doctrine and technology needs to be accompanied by a modernisation of uniform and kit.

French military uniforms, a changing aspect of presentation in response to technological adaptations, is a subject much less explored in the Anglophone world especially when compared to studying the French army, which is why the majority of sources consulted for this project will be both primary and secondary French sources.

The modernised uniform and kit of the army which were introduced in 1915 can be linked to the idea of both technological and doctrinal change. The former being associated with the improvement in concealment in modern warfare, the necessary reflection of industrial dye production capabilities, and the adaptation to the realities of the changing nature of warfare which eventually welcomed one of mechanisation. Therefore, it is evident that extreme technological pressure (industrialised warfare) can override a strong sense of cultural resistance, even in nationalistic states like that of France.

The latter, regarding doctrinal change, refers to the adoption of new pattern uniforms and kit to be more suitable to the type of war the French army was waging on the Western Front. The introduction of the new uniforms and kit was largely pertaining to doctrinal change, from a war of movement to one of position. It was believed that the drab, light blue colour of the new uniforms effectively blended in with the chalky terrains of the Somme, Champagne, and Artois, and also cooperated fantastically with the sky during assaults, hence the coinage of the term "horizon blue". Thus, this updated appearance was a doctrinal necessity. The analysis of the new uniform and kit challenges the debate about technological change as opposed to sustaining it. By showing how cultural traditions delayed adaptation to the evolving nature of warfare, the adoption of the new uniform and kit contradicts deterministic conceptions of technological evolution. However, the premise that technological surroundings eventually constrain and influence institutional choices is validated by its eventual implementation under pressure from the battlefield. As a result, this particular case supports a socially embedded model of technological evolution as opposed to a strictly linear one.

Regarding the following books looked at in this historiographical section which revolve around French uniforms and kit, it must be noted that they are not analytical forms of media. The authors' opinions are not expressed in them, as these books present a narrative format of the development of the French uniforms as opposed to analysing them and their effectiveness/ineffectiveness. The information presented in these books have been gathered from archival research and has been presented to readers with the intention of educating them on the development of the uniforms and kit, as well as providing detailed visual references so that

enthusiasts may better understand the subject matter. Therefore, the remainder of this section will not present any analyses within the books presented - rather, the analyses of each subject matter in this thesis will be done by the author in later chapters, based on the information provided in these books.

The modernisation efforts of the French military kit is discussed in depth in the two volumes of *L'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale* by Laurent Mirouze and Stéphane Dekerle.[48] In their two published volumes, Mirouze and Dekerle cover everything there is to know about the French uniforms in a very focused niche, and range amongst some of the best secondary sources available. Working in close cooperation with several of the best museums in France including the *Musée de l'Armée* (Paris), well-established collectors, as well as French archives, notably the *Service Historique de la Défense* (Vincennes), Mirouze and Dekerle amassed an astonishing ensemble of original pre-war and Great War era French military uniforms and equipment from a multitude of sources whilst presenting about them, their histories, and their background information in the most intricate detail. These books will be heavily referenced in this thesis.

Despite this thesis covering headwear, the majority of secondary sources being used as references for French army headwear do not deal with the theme of military headdress of the Great War specifically (the two excellent volumes by Mirouze and Dekerle contain everything from headdress to uniforms, weaponry, and personal items). One of the most popular sources when it comes to studying French military headdress in the most niche detail is Joseph Margerand's *Les Coiffures de l'Armée Française*, with the original first edition printed copies being an antiquity in itself, fetching high prices ranging from several hundred to over a thousand euros.[49] Since its first publication in the early 1900's (pre-war period), the text was re-edited and republished by Joseph's grandson Patrick Margerand and his colleague Yves Martin in 2003. It will be referenced in this thesis when discussing headdress of the pre-war period. Although Margerand's book does not specifically cover the First World War period (it covers the period of 1791 to 1900) as it was published before the conflict, it is still important to understand the aesthetic of the pre-war designs for contextual reasons.

Volume one of Frédéric Coune's *Képi: Une coiffure française*, deals with French military headdress in cloth ranging from 1830-1939.[50] His book covers a great deal on the pre-war as well as wartime patterns of the iconic cloth headdress worn during the Great War, but does not cover the wartime developments of other forms of military headdress such as the steel helmet. However, Coune's publication in issue 26 of the *Uniformes* series of magazines deals solely with the French steel helmets. Coune's niche focus on the képi in *Képi: Une coiffure française*, leans

[48] Laurent Mirouze and Stéphane Dekerle, *L'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Uniformes, Équipements, Armements, Tome 1* (Ingolstadt: Verlag Militaria, 2007).
[49] Joseph Margerand, *Les Coiffures de l'Armée Française*, ed. by Patrick Margerand and Yves Martin (Le Livre Chez Vous, 2002).
[50] Frédéric Coune, *Képi, une coiffure française: 1830-1939: Tome I* (Histoire Collec, 2022).

into the symbolism of the French soldier of the early war period. While the képi had revolutionised the appearance of the French soldier throughout history, the steel helmet was the symbolism of the *Poilu* during the Great War.

III. The Period of Trials and Potential Reform
1903 - 1915

The Pre-war Period: Militarism, Nationalism, & Traditionalism in the Face of Necessary Modernisation

William Philpott and Nicholas Boff bring up an interesting point in *Transforming War, 1914 - 1918* with regards to the extent in which the First World War was a conflict of learning. This idea, interestingly enough, is as relevant as ever in the field of military uniforms and equipment, as the adaptation of the uniforms and the modernisation process went head-to-head with militarism, nationalism, and traditionalism.

> One of the questions that remains to be answered is the extent to which First World War armies were 'learning organizations' avant la lettre, 'skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and at modifying (their) behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights'? When we actually look at what was transformed, and how rapidly, it suggests that such a model was appropriate. In only three campaign cycles modern warfare was conceptualised, adopted and applied: in 1915 basic 'all-arms' tactical concepts were tested; by 1916 materially-based 'scientific' operational methods were conceived; and in 1917 these were inculcated into the armies which were trained and equipped to fight modern combined-arms battles.[51]

Though not a direct analogy, it can be connected to the overarching theme of this thesis. How did the government and the army learn to adapt? Philpott and Boff outlined the phases and stages of learning with regards to the adaptation of the army and its modernisation processes, and the same can be applied to this thesis. In 1914, new uniform patterns were tested as a result of the clothing crisis and compromise between the traditionalists and modernists. By 1915 these new uniforms were fielded, and by 1916 the army was homogeneous in appearance after the successes seen in the previous two phases.

This section will go through the different phases of the transition from the reliance on traditionalism to the eventual modernisation process. However, in order to understand how the stylistic choices were deemed as a priority with regards to the French uniform and kit in the pre-war period up to the first year of the Great War, one must delve into the militaristic attitudes accompanied by nationalism and extreme traditionalism. France's early-war military kit, as well as their doctrine, were heavily reliant on the pre-war concept of vigour, aggressiveness, and a strong sense of *esprit de corps*, as previously discussed in the historiography. The pre-war period was a phase of pervasive militarism, nationalism, and traditionalism in the face of a necessary modernisation. Before this thesis proceeds, a distinction between the traditionalists and the modernists has to be laid out.

The traditionalists encompass those who bask in the past glory of France, demanding that modern France be comparable in its presentation on the global scale to that of the days of Napoleon. Republican ideals dominated their mindset, which therefore heavily influenced the

[51] Philpott and Boff, 'Introduction: Transforming War, 1914–1918', p.16.

army which was heavily tied to said Republican values. In his book *March to the Marne*, Douglas Porch quotes a letter from Léon Gambetta (a founding father of the Third Republic) to his father on 19 February 1871: "At this moment, I have only one preoccupation: after our fruitless efforts to drive out the foreigner, to try to save at least our republican institutions".[52]

During the age of the Third Republic, the army was largely political, and therefore local councils could still assert political patronage. This was in fact contradictory to the ideals of the modernists and progressives, who, after having witnessed the countless coups and scandals, pushed for a depoliticised professional army loyal to the French state as opposed to local patrons or factions. Philpott and Boff identified this as a key feature of the early Third Republic, as "the French army (certainly) had its factions and dysfunctions. This was partly a consequence of the politics of the Third Republic, veering as they did back and forth between republican anti-militarism and patriotic citizen service, especially in the pre-Great War era".[53] This demonstrated a form of governmental disability that negatively impacted the status of the Republican government, which was conflicted between traditionalists and modernists.

The modernists had looked to dismantle the power influence of the older elites and replace it with a secular, rational, and merit-based republican state, which is evident in some of the early statements of some government representatives, who "indicated that it was content to restore the army to its traditional apolitical role".[54] This viewpoint is understandable when looking into the history of France throughout the past century, as the country had been largely politically unstable, seeing many changes in government as a result of coups and scandals with states still dominated by the traditional mindset of a politicised army (with Catholicism being a centerpiece of society with the support of local authorities and social hierarchies). In short, the modernists valued secularism, merit-based social structures, and centralised republican authorities over traditional customs, religion, and authoritarian authority. This contest became largely prevalent in the years after the War of 1870-1871.

After the defeat of the Second Empire in 1871, the government was completely overhauled. The implementations of militaristic reorganisations and reforms by both the traditionalists and modernists had allowed a constant pervasive sense of militarism in France. French national pride saw heavy damage following the loss of the Franco-Prussian war, however due to assertiveness and a complete military reorganisation, there was a significant rise in nationalism for the average citizen. Such factors could be seen during the outbreak of the First World War, when France as a whole nation was determined to restore the country to its former glory, though it took a very limited time frame until the reality of war kicked in and showed its true horrors.

In 1871, amidst national gloom and fears of decline, the French Republic implemented a more pronounced nationalist and militaristic agenda, persistent on the idea of revenge:

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[52] Porch, *The March to the Marne*, p.1.

[53] Philpott and Boff, 'Introduction: Transforming War, 1914–1918', p.15.

[54] Porch, *The March to the Marne*, p.64.

> After 1870, the country was bombarded as never before with patriotic exhortation, in part in reaction to defeat, in part in an attempt by the new republic to create a legitimating secular ideology, in part as a means for the enemies of the republic to modernise and widen their own political appeal as traditional loyalties waned. The effectiveness of this barrage - in so far as it was effective (a question considered below by Pierre Sorlin and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau) - was made possible by the process of social and cultural integration which, in Eugen Weber's phrase, was making peasants into Frenchmen.[55]

Rebuilding the country became one of the Republic's top priorities for both sides of the political spectrum, and it fully promoted a new kind of military patriotism that was greatly influenced by the widespread animosity of its invading neighbors. The subsequent republican governments redesigned the military, adopted a nationalist pedagogy, and supported the growth of a cult of memory in order to include a new, successful militarised legacy.[56] The armed forces, educational initiatives, and military schools aided in France's recovery. Therefore, in an effort to restore nationalism, French militarism and nationalist programs saw the need to create a more effective educational system such as the War Academy, with the goal of successfully organising and controlling the youth through military, physical, civil, and moral training of the younger generation that would see mandatory national service.[57]

Meanwhile, the main goal of regaining its lost lands of Alsace and Lorraine proved to be symbolic of unity, progress, and improvement. The typical republican vision and mindset of national restoration was heavily focused on a military aspect and its ever-increasing thirst for revenge due to their humiliation in 1870-1871. Because they believed they were the strongest nation in Europe, the French would not tolerate any more hostility from their neighbor, which was a result of this militaristic restoration. Because of this idea, France was able to produce a new generation of "citizen soldiers", or regular working-class individuals who had undergone mandatory national service and were prepared to sacrifice their lives for the country they loved. Émile Littré, a republican philosopher, stated:

> We must bring up (our children) in suspicion and hostility; we must teach them that military drill is their primary task; we must drum into them that they must be ready to kill and be killed.[58]

In order to demonstrate the significant presence of militarism and to transmit nationalistic beliefs to the younger generations, the middle school and civic education curricula and programs affirmed the dominance of military-controlled ideology. The general youth's desire for vengeance and patriotism was undoubtedly satisfied by these informational channels. However, the general reports of republican nationalistic policies showed that the improvement of French nationalism was not linear, and the involvement of local political associations undoubtedly contributed to the

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[55] Robert Tombs, "Preface," in *Nationhood and Nationalism in France*, ed. By Robert Tombs (London: HarperColllinsAcademic, 1991), p.xii.

[56] Robert Tombs, *France 1814-1914* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), p.79.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Tombs, *France, 1814–1914*, p.81.

rise of nationalism.[59] In contrast to the German Empire, which sought to increase its sphere of influence particularly in colonies and to implement new foreign policies, the French nation's nationalistic tendencies tended to be more inward-looking and domestic in nature. Overall, the nation's reconstruction and fortification, as well as its security, had a significant impact on the republican nationalistic and militaristic ideas ingrained in French culture and society in the years following 1871. Raoul Girardet, states in his book *Le Nationalisme Français*, that "nationalism refers to a system of thought based on the affirmation of primacy in the political order, the defense of national values, and national interests."[60]

Photo (2): Alfred Bourgeois, a soldier of the *Garde Mobile* photographed during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. **(YO)**

However, the issue with this reorganisation of French military ideology was that these changes were implemented purely with the lessons learned from the war of 1870-1871. Unlike the Japanese who had fought a recent victorious war against the Russians and the British against the Boers, the French lessons were drawn from a conflict over forty years before the outbreak of the Great War (furthermore, France had largely focused in colonial campaigns, which consisted largely of unconventional methods of warfare, incomparable to fighting against a grand European superpower). Therefore, these alterations were carried over into the French army's subconscious status during the early war period as an army who is "prepared to fight the last war." Hence, the French strategic mindset in the pre-war period leading up to the First World War was largely dominated by traditionalism; there was a large emphasis on the notion of *offensive à outrance* and moral superiority, as stated in Robert Doughty's book, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy & Operations in the Great War*, which details the French army commission's statement in the October 1913 regulations:

> The French Army, returning to its traditions, accepts no law in the conduct of operations other than the offensive… Only the offensive yields positive results… Battles are above all moral contests… Defeat is inevitable when hope for victory ceases. Success will come, not to the one who has suffered the least losses, but to the one whose will is the steadiest and whose morale is the most highly tempered.[61]

[59] Tombs, *Nationhood and Nationalism in France*, p.xii.
[60] Raoul Girardet, *Le Nationalisme Français, 1871-1914*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983), p.8.
[61] Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory*, p.27.

Thus, the French army had integrated all of these factors into the pre-war Plan XVII, which was to be put into effect upon a German invasion. Similar to the Germans, the majority of the French army were peasants; robust and more resilient than anyone had thought. They also possessed a Gallic ferocity that was heightened by their favour in the offensive. In *The French Army and Politics, 1870 - 1970*, Alistair Horne identifies this concept as a key point of French military doctrine following the Franco-Prussian War, where there was an overwhelming reliance on *élan* and moral force.[62] What the enemy planned to do was irrelevant.[63] The French had looked at every possible way to avoid entrapment. Thus, with the lessons from that disastrous campaign (especially to avoid being encircled within fortifications), the army had looked to adopt a more aggressive doctrine, rendering the enemy incapable of inflicting such a decisive defeat on it again. It was deemed that the offensive was only possible with a strong *esprit de corps*. An *esprit de corps* was reflected in the fighting spirit of the soldier and his irresistible *élan*, accompanied by him draped in the colours of France - the French soldier was still wearing the uniform style of fifty years prior.

This outdated French kit was merely a companion to their even more ancient doctrine. During the first months of the war, the army was still being supplied with an abundance of kit from the pre-war period, representative of the colours of France. This thesis will be delving into the pre-war period as well, but in a way that contextualises it in the grand scheme of things with regards to the utilisation of pre-war kit during the First World War.

The underlying reason for the army's persistence of maintaining the pre-war patterns of military uniforms during the first few months of the war had largely to do with a sense of representing the *esprit de corps* of the French Republic. However, this view of nationalistic pride had not always dominated the mindset of the representatives of the French government, with the introduction of the trial uniforms which experimented with a variety of hues and fabrics in order to search for a more up-to-date pattern of uniform, suitable to the challenges of modern warfare. Modernisation seemed necessary after all, as the British, who had previously donned the characteristic red uniforms during the Zulu War, had discarded them for the more practical khaki colour in 1902, as highlighted in *Le Petit Journal*:

> During the last war in China, the Russians and Germans had singularly simplified the uniforms, following the example of the English who, after having seen their red grenadiers decimated by the admirable marksmen that were the Boers, had ended up borrowing from their adversaries the appearance of their usual work and hunting clothes, their boots and their felt hats.[64]

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[62] Horne, *The French army and Politics,* p.34.

[63] On 18 August 1914, the day following the capitulation of the fort at Liège, General de Castelnau, leading the French vanguard of the 2nd army, addressed his troops, "the enemy is retreating on our front. He must be pursued with the utmost vigour and rapidity. I expect corps commanders to instill into their troops the necessary dash." Nevertheless, the French army collided with Prince Rupprecht's forces at full velocity, revealing some harsh realities in this initial significant confrontation of the war.

[64] *Le Petit Journal*, 1 March 1903.

The Germans too, had replaced their famous Prussian blue with a more drab and neutral colour termed *feldgrau*, as per a 1909 report from Maurice Pellé, who at the time, was the French military attaché in Berlin.[65] With all of these changes from several world military powers, it did seem necessary that France should make a move towards the transitional stage and seriously consider equipping their men with more up-to-date kit, which meant the abolition of the navy blue coats and the famous red trousers, a symbol of the French soldier during the Crimean War and the War of 1870-1871. However, former Minister of War Eugène Étienne vehemently opposed such modernisation by declaring, "le pantalon rouge, c'est la France!" Militaristic and political traditionalists such as Étienne viewed such a change in the overall aesthetic appearance of the French soldier to be a suppression of French nationalistic pride and identity. Michel Goya understands this point of view by arguing that the attachment of the navy blue coats and red trousers was symbolic to "an unconscious desire to avenge 1870 whilst wearing uniforms similar to those of that catastrophic year, to link the future victory with the past, as if the defeat had been just the first phase of one and the same action."[66] This idea is also backed up by a military serviceman, Lieutenant Laure, who reckoned in 1912 that the "impressionability of our national temperament still prevents us from having recovered from the terrible shocks experienced more than forty years ago," referring to the disastrous war of 1870-1871.[67] This idea of revanchism and the link to the past was also noted in Alistair Horne's *The French Army and Politics, 1870 - 1970*, where he argues that after the defeat of 1870, "a new mood of dedication ran through the whole army, determined to expunge the blots on its reputation; while the loss of Alsace-Lorraine gave it a new sense of purpose, *la Revanche*".[68]

By 1911, with tensions in Europe on the rise due to an amalgamation of political differences and alliances, war seemed inevitable. France had not seen a major war in over forty years. Meanwhile, Britain had seen fighting at Transvaal during the Boer campaigns of 1899-1902, and the Russians, although defeated by the Japanese in 1905, had taken away very recent lessons in the conduct of modern warfare. It seemed ironic that France had previously been a pioneer of military modernisation in almost every regard, and were now to be the players of catching up, especially shown in 1914. Douglas Porch argues in his work, *The French Army in the First World War*, that:

> There were several reasons for this technological retardation, but a doctrine which exalted the *arme blanche* above the bullet was certainly less influential than many historians have suggested. Financial stringency, lack of firm direction at the top of the army, ministerial instability, confusion over tactical doctrine, the long debate over the merits of various artillery pieces in the years before the war, debates which were complicated by deep personality conflicts, and the bureaucratic nature

[65] *SHD*, 7 N 1109, «*Tenue de campagne*» 13 December 1909.
[66] Michel Goya, *Flesh and Steel During the Great War: The Transformation of the French Army and the Invention of Modern Warfare* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2018), p.18.
[67] Lieutenant Émile Laure, *l'Offensive Française* (Paris: Lavauzelle, 1912), p.25.
[68] Horne, *The French army and Politics,* p.14.

> of the selection process for even the most minor items of equipment, all contributed to the relative backwardness of the army in 1914.[69]

It is also a common belief that the French government's stubbornness with maintaining the vibrant pre-war uniforms directly led to the mass slaughter of the army in the first few months of the war. Prior to the army's baptism by fire, Adolphe Messimy, Minister of War, argued in 1911 that the "stupid blind attachment to the most visible of colours will have cruel consequences."[70]

Douglas Porch does agree with this sentiment, stating that "the red and blue uniforms of the French army had an unfortunate tendency to attract the attention of enemy riflemen."[71] It is interesting to note, however, that Jonathan Krause, who specialises in studying the French army of 1915 declares that the evidence that suggests the vibrant red trousers were conspicuous in the field and directly resulted in the tremendous loss of life in the early months of the war (an argument put forward by Messimy and Porch) is lacking - there is no evidence that proves that the red trousers gave away French positions, and it was more than likely due to the perfectly-shined and polished metal of the soldiers' equipment that glinted under the sunlight of the scorching hot summer of 1914.[72] Furthermore, to blame the mass casualties on the uniforms rather than the doctrine of the army in 1914 is nonsensical - colours of the uniforms in relation to sustaining losses is irrelevant considering the French army's reliance on charging on open terrain without sufficient artillery support. Jonathan Krause highlights this in his work, *Balletic to Ballistics*:

> 1914 would prove to be a trying year for the French army. In its five months of war 1914 would claim enough French casualties (301,000 dead, many more missing or wounded) to be the second-bloodiest year of the war for the French. To a large extent this was owing to the fact that the entire French army was engaged in regular battle. Poor French performance in battle, however, did not help. The artillery was frequently left behind by the infantry who would impetuously advance into battle without waiting for artillery support.[73]

Despite this, common sense might still suggest that vibrant red trousers in the fields of Northern France would not be desirable especially when compared to the possible adoption of more neutral hues. An eventual transition to a more modernised uniform still seemed a necessity for the high command, albeit there being no evidence that suggests the pre-war pattern uniforms led to the demise of so many Frenchmen in the early days of the conflict, as stated.

Furthermore, a question of the army's attachment to the red colours had more to do than just identity, nationalism, and revanchism. The eventual establishment of a motive for a mass

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[69] Douglas Porch, 'The French Army in the First World War', in A. Millett & W. Murray (Eds.), *Military Effectiveness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.212.
[70] Quoted in Buckingham, *Verdun 1916*, p.44.
[71] Porch, *The French Army in the First World War*, p.212.
[72] Jonathan Krause, 'The Worst Year: The French Army in 1915' (Birmingham, 2015).
[73] Krause, 'From Balletics to Ballistics', p.11.

modernisation program was not related to the losses sustained in the early months of the war, but in reality was more linked to practicality of production. The French army's adoption of the madder red trousers in the new 1825 regulation had largely to do with business opportunities; the army's support for madder red promoted nationalism, but it was also a solid marketing scheme for the French textile industry's new red dye. This saved the army 500,000 francs as opposed to if they were to adopt dark blue, which was the only other strong contender. The French army's persistence on resisting the introduction of more drab hues, particularly horizon blue in 1914, was largely due to the desire to liquidate stocks of the old pattern of red uniform components, particularly the trousers and képis, which had eventually replaced the shako as the primary headwear.

Photo (3): A portrait of a light cavalryman of the 1st Regiment of *Chasseurs à Cheval* wearing a Shako. **(YO)**

In the modern era leading up to the Great War, there had been a move to replace the old uniforms because it seemed that war was inevitable and camouflage would be more effective for modern combat. However, the High Command insisted that in Europe the French soldier must face his enemy dressed in red, white and blue, even though they had already introduced a khaki mixture uniform in tropical stations. As a compromise, the army was persuaded to use a cloth with red, white and blue fibres mixed, which would have been a drab bluish-indigo colour, and not poor camouflage. However, the manufacturers in Elbeuf, where the cloth for the Napoleonic Imperial Guard uniforms had been made, pointed out that the Alizarin (synthetic madder) came from the BASF in Germany, and thus they could not acquire more supply. Faced with this issue, the High Command agreed to go with the blue and white mixture which resulted in the creation of horizon blue. With the army's adoption of this new colour of light blue, France had to rely on cloth imports from their ally Great Britain (some being British Blue-Grey Greatcoat material which became obsolete with the introduction of Khaki for British Greatcoats) as well as Spain. However, the adoption of the new colour was not without controversy, which will be explored in more detail in the following subsection, *The Clothing Crisis of 1914/15 & the Introduction of the Horizon Blue Uniform*.

The Period of Trials of the Newly Proposed Uniforms

This thesis, titled, *Képi Rouge to Bleu Horizon*, discusses the pre-war influence on French military uniform and the eventual modernisation efforts during the pre-war period and early stages of the Great War to develop a more suitable representation of the fighting French soldier. It is a significant point in the history of French uniformity, as it demonstrates the politicians' desire to maintain the traditionalistic aspects of the uniform, with no desire to compromise with the modernists that viewed the outdated kit as a hindrance to the French fighting man. This

section will also discuss the concept of French army uniformity in general and the modernisation program as a whole, but these are factors that are also integrated into military headdress. Headdress is a component of uniformity, and in order to fully comprehend the stylistic and practical choices for it, it has to be contextualised within the main framework of French army uniformity.

The early twentieth century saw the French army uniform evolve and develop through a series of modernisation programs. This was due to the prospect that from 1911 onwards, major European powers foresaw the inevitability of a major war breaking out at any moment - by a way of appropriate preparedness, an amalgamation of solidified alliances, modernising armament/equipment programs, and extensive military service were implemented.

The French General Staff believed that they had everything under control despite not having fought a major war on the continent since the disastrous campaign against Prussia and the North German Confederation in 1870-1871. The upper echelon had convinced themselves that they had taken away the appropriate lessons from the war and were further fed with the knowledge gathered from the conflicts fought by other European powers, such as Britain's campaign against the Boers from 1899 - 1902, as well as the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 - 1905. It can be argued, however, that the Second Boer War did not provide sufficient knowledge in fighting a conventional war on the European continent. Though it provided lessons on fighting a colonial conflict which was very much in the interest of France given their solidified presence in North and West Africa, Adrian Wettstein asserts that the fighting at Transvaal "was not comparable to a European war, especially one between France and Germany, because of differences in terrain, infrastructure and professionalism."[74]

Furthermore, the Balkan War of 1912 - 1913 was too recent and close to the inevitable outbreak of the Great War to have had any real impact on French military thinking and reform, because there was simply not a reasonable timeframe to scrutinise the conflict in depth which therefore meant that there was an insufficiency in time to make the necessary modifications to French doctrine and materiel. If anything, it can be argued that unsurprisingly, the Franco-Prussian War itself was the main factor of influence and motivation to French military reform. The real transition in the time period before the Great War was the evolution of the mindset of the General Staff into being supporters of the cult of the offensive as opposed to the cautious defence implemented by the French army during the War of 1870-1871, which cost them dearly. In the early nineteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte campaigned against the idea of cautious defence, and he believed that an army which stays in its fort has already lost, a feature which was made obvious by the 1870 Battle of Sedan in which his own nephew, Napoleon III, in bitter irony, was captured.

French military theorists believed that cautious defence had a severe impact on morale, a feature which the French army believed to be one of the decisive factors in the outcome of battle.

[74] Adrian Wettstein, 'The French military mind and the wars before the war', in *The Wars before the Great War: Conflict and International Politics before the Outbreak of the First World War*, ed. by Dominik Geppert, William Mulligan, Andreas Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.180.

Morale in the Franco-Prussian War was abysmal, largely due to a lack of cohesion and a prevalence of overly-cautious defence. Therefore, following 1871, the General Staff had promoted that an adoption of the *offensive à outrance* in turn would arouse the fighting spirit of the French soldier. Wettstein's work discusses how Ardant du Picq, an army officer and military theorist, outlined the importance of the psychology of troops in combat in the second edition of his work *Battle Studies*, and therefore stressed the significance of cohesion and morale, which attracted an array of military writers who therefore favoured the offensive simply on the basis of morale.[75] Historian Simon House however, accuses this outdated thinking of being flawed (though at the time it was perceived as a modern way of thinking), criticising it as being erroneous and a disastrous doctrine that led to countless deaths.[76]

With morale being one of the major factors of the success of an army, traditional military minds felt that it was codependent with the uniforms worn by troops. However, the army was conflicted with pursuing a modernisation and reformation program, as they felt that it was a competition between nationalism/morale and practicality. This was a difficult case as it was evident that one of these points had to be sacrificed. The belief that morale was boosted by the uniforms they wore and that superior *élan* was the decisive factor in combat led to the stubbornness of traditionalists to hold onto that nationalism which they highly preached. However, surrounded by external international pressures from other modernising militaries, the army could not remain tranquil - Mirouze and Dekerle's book narrates the chain of events which pressed the French army to eventually attempt to modernise with regards to their kit, just as these other European militaries did:

> (Germany and Great Britain) concluded the importance of the machine gun and the necessity to adapt their uniforms. From South Africa the British adopted a khaki-coloured uniform for their field dress as of 1902. The same year the German army experimented with a new grey-green (*feldgrau*) uniform with which it equipped its Expeditionary Corps to China in 1901 before fitting out the whole army with it in 1907-1910, with the exception of the light infantry (Jäger) and machine gunners, who wore a greener colour (grey-green). Other countries reformed their uniforms, the United States adopting khaki in 1903 and Norway grey-green. In 1905 and 1907 respectively, Russia and Japan opted for neutral colours, to be followed by Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary in 1908 and Italy in 1909.[77]

The French High Command had realised that the uniform had remained virtually unchanged since the War of 1870-1871, and Colonel Jules Lewal (Minister of War in 1885) had concluded in 1871 that bluish/iron-grey was still the most appropriate uniform colour for the French army.[78] At the time, concealment and camouflage was not a pressing issue, as black powder from small-arms concealed large sections of the battlefield, oftentimes making the

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[75] Ibid., p.180.

[76] House, *Lost Opportunity,* p.8.

[77] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 1*, pp.12-13.
'La mode militaire: le pantalon.', *Excelsior*, 2 December 1914.

[78] Colonel Jules Louis Lewal, *La Réforme de l'Armée* (Paris: Dumaine, 1871), p.308.

enemy visually difficult to locate regardless of the colour of the uniforms. However, with the French invention of smokeless powder in 1884 and the introduction of the Lebel rifle in 1886, it only seemed inevitable that other countries followed suit.

The first military manoeuvres in the 1890's highlighted the apparent issues of uniform vibrancy and conspicuousness, which garnered a lot of attention, and the 1898 firing trials at Vincennes confirmed that the most discrete hues in the field were grey and dead-leaf brown.[79] This did not necessarily mean that the army would make an instant shift to the more obvious and practical solution despite being faced with its necessity, as such a change is more political than one would expect. The army had still been prolonging the usage of blue and red, likely to liquidate the stocks of the old patterns, and a combined agreement from participants of a study group regarding the creation of a new uniform pattern (organised by General & Minister of War Louis André and headed by General Edmond Gillain) vouched for a dark blue hue which proved fairly neutral.[80] This 1903 trial pattern was never formally adopted, largely due to an absence of political will despite being published in good light in the *L'Illustration*, which referred to the trial uniforms as possessing a pleasing appearance.[81]

The army had feared that the public perception of such a transition would be seen as too radical and especially the headgear as too controversial, as they possessed a strong resemblance to the field caps of the Austro-Hungarian army and the slouch hats identical to that of the ANZACs. The press and public opinion had largely influenced the decision of the army (this was still within the timeframe of the Dreyfus affair, where they had a large impact on the outcome of events), since the 1903 trials were heavily covered by the media. It is important to note that these uniforms, like the two other trials after 1903, were never officially adopted by the army which therefore means that there is significantly more documentation of them in public press and journals as opposed to official military documents. The paper *Le Petit Journal* covered the first trial uniforms in their publication from 1 March 1903. It detailed that the new era where camouflage is of utmost importance to the survivability of the army during an attack:

> The question of uniform is of very real interest from a strictly military point of view. The time has unfortunately passed for bright, vibrant uniforms and superb plumes. They are no longer of our time; the new conditions in which war is now waged have destroyed them. It has become necessary to generalise the use of equipment geared to the idea of war. Let us never lose sight, in fact, that modern war has become a hunt where surprise plays the main role: the one of the combatants who is the first to see through is by that very fact the vanquished. Getting close to the enemy without being seen is essential.[82]

In a very interesting study, which garnered a lot of negative attention in 1902, General de Négrier, one of the most active and modern members of the Superior War Council, vigorously insisted on the transformations as a result of modern-style weapons with high trajectory,

[79] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 1*, p.13.
[80] Ibid.
[81] *L'Illustration*, 14 July 1903.
[82] *Le Petit Journal*, 1 March 1903.

enormous range, and smokeless powder. The red pants and breeches, as well as the képi, was deemed inconvenient and too conspicuous, and would therefore be eliminated. De Négrier formulated the principle of invisibility and blending in with terrain (for the defensive as well as for the offensive), as the fundamental rule to which any serious army which is solidly trained and who wishes to prevail must conform towards. In reference to the old axiom "fire attracts fire", it is thus appropriated to "visibility attracts fire": a flashy headdress such as a shako with colourful plumes would only serve to make its wearer stand out more than one with a less conspicuous kit.[83]

This new experimental kit of the 1903 period had largely looked to foreign influence for not only its style, but practicality. The infantryman would possess a "Boer" style hat, raised on the side by the national cockade, breeches and jacket in a drab, indigo blue of the same shade and buttons in black corozo. There were to be no more shiny ornamental features, metal buttons, belt plates (instead, a browned clasp), as per the picturesque expression of Colonel de La Panouse.[84] The képi was to be replaced by a brown felt hat with large raised brims, which effectively sheltered the eyes and back of the head from sun and rain and facilitated effective marksmanship while prone. It was deemed essential and much like the British "Tam o' Shanter". Additionally, there was an increasing trend to eliminate the heavy cartridge pouches worn on the belt and toward the shoulder strap pattern, which was already widely used for both Infantry and mounted forces in England. In the pattern which was being sought to be replaced, the cartridges had a tendency of bouncing out of the open pouches at the moment of firing and were thus lost when firing in a prone position and during rapid movements.[85] According to General de Négrier, the outdated kit was designed only pertaining to both standing and kneeling positions during warfare and did not satisfy the requirement for crawling, prone firing, full-speed sprinting, leaping, and rapidly moving from one shelter to another due to its cumbersome design which proved a liability to its wearer.[86]

Photo (4): This photo from 1903 presents a soldier of the 131st Infantry Regiment (Orléans-Pithiviers) wearing the greyish-blue képi of the 1903 uniform trials. **(YO)**

The members of the commission initially did see great advantages in the adoption of this ambitious new project; but it was a concern that those heading this movement had completely forgotten about the French importance of *esprit de corps*. From a moral point of view, the diversity of uniforms had the immense advantage of creating emulation between the different branches of the military. The *Zouaves*, *Chasseurs*, *Dragons* and *Hussards* had a "glorious" history among all, and to erase this symbolic past

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

with a stroke of a pen was perceived to be potentially a serious mistake.[87] Furthermore, the absence of any distinctive colors between the belligerent armies would lead to difficulties in distinguishing between the two factions, leading to confusion and misidentification on the battlefield that could lead to tragic circumstances.[88]

Photo (5): This heavy cavalryman of the 6th Dragoon Regiment in the pre-war period proudly wears his beautiful 1872/74 helmet. **(YO)**

With the first trials of the modernisations of uniforms in 1903 being a failure, General André had persisted on the continuation of his studies in search of a neutral uniform tone more suitable for modern warfare - however, he had maintained his persistency with keeping bluish hues despite searching for a more neutral colour, but, the new idea involved beige being thrown into the mix to replace the grey of the first trial. The first prototypes involving this new neutral colour were submitted in 1905, and André was later replaced by Maurice Berteaux, who tested these new prototypes.[89] This new pattern took on an amalgamation and a variety of internal influences, including styles already present in the French army, such as the *Chasseurs Alpins*, while the headdress was largely influenced by external international factors, such as that of the Spanish army. Despite this new trial, the momentum eventually died down when Berteaux was replaced by Eugène Étienne in 1905 and then Marie-Georges Picquart (who was heavily involved in defending Alfred Dreyfus during the Dreyfus affair) in 1906. These new ministers had shifted their attention elsewhere when it came to the ideal uniformity of the soldier, with a more persistent attention towards the improvement of hygiene in the already existing uniform patterns. The modernisation of the aesthetic and practicality of the uniform seemed to suffer constant inconsistencies with the different desires of each new individual who was heading the programs. Therefore, the second trial eventually died a natural death - it did not garner the support it needed in order for a military-wide reform.

The third and most popular trial came in the form of a completely different approach, and discarded the utilisation of any blue hues. This ambitious new project which was lanced forward in October 1910 as per the commission of General Jean Brun (Minister of War from 1909 until 1911) involved Maurice Berteaux, his successor following his death (and who would then be running a second stint), and was chaired by General Dubail, who had already previously demonstrated deep interest in the appearance of the military uniform.[90] Adolphe Messimy, Minister of War from June 1911 onwards, received the instructions from his predecessor and appealed for funding to the Chamber of Deputies for this ambitious project, which was granted,

[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 1*, p.14.
[90] Ibid.

and at this point, it seemed consistently agreed among all participants that the development of a new uniform was necessary.

This new project was undertaken in great haste, especially by Berteaux, who focused his efforts on modernising the French army's service uniform, which for most regiments featured blue coats and red trousers in addition to various customs like cuirasses for heavy cavalry and plumed, shiny helmets as headgear.[91] He was truly convinced that such ostentatious attire was inappropriate for contemporary warfare, and therefore Berteaux advocated for the adoption of a grey-green substitute known as *la tenue réséda* (also known as mignonette green), which first saw use during military manoeuvres in 1911.[92] This project involved around 2,500 men, roughly the size of a regiment, but was carried out by several branches, including the 106th Infantry Regiment and the 5th Regiment of *Chasseurs à Cheval* (light cavalry) of Chalons-sur-Marne, and was further supported by the Engineer and Artillery units of VI Corps, which was commanded by General Dubail.[93] The period of the introduction of the réséda uniform has never been officially mentioned in any uniform regulations published by the War Ministry, as the pattern was never formally introduced in the French army. Therefore, the majority of coverage has been done so in the media of the time period, as it was a largely controversial topic.

Photo (6): This photo shows a detachment of the 106th Infantry Regiment of Chalons- sur-Marne equipped with the 1911 first pattern trial helmets and uniforms in réséda. **(YO)**

The réséda uniform interestingly received attention internationally, particularly in the United States, though in a much lighter tone considering the lack of nationalistic attachment and association with the French identity. Furthermore, they had already been accustomed with the American military's adoption of an already more practical uniform, and therefore saw no issue with the overall aesthetic of a neutral colour. The following particular excerpt hails from the *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle Orléans*:

> Spectators about the Gare de l'Est the other day had their first glimpse of French soldiers dressed in the new uniform, when a number of privates came down from their "caserne" to exhibit themselves. They had obtained a leave of absence of 25 hours in order to parade about the streets

[91] 'M. Berteaux's Career' *The Times*, 22 May 1911.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Mirouze, Dekerle, *L'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 1*, p.14.

> and advertise the innovation in military fashions. The uniform is known as "l'uniforme réséda", the colour being something between khaki and sage green. The purpose of the colour is to blend the hue of a regiment with that of the country in which they are marching or fighting, thus adding a new French arm to strategy and endeavour and if possible to reduce the number of wounded and killed by rendering the soldiers invisible to scouts. The dull yellowish rose and green of the mignonette have wrought the colour of the new dress. When the soldiers drill upon a green or yellowish place in the full light of the sun, the illusion of invisibility is said to be marvellous. When the sun is behind them the illusion disappears. A similar innovation worked well in the case of armies other than those of France. During the war in the Transvaal, the English discarded their ornate dress and put on khaki, which colour blended with the sandy country. This assured them a nearly complete invisibility at times. The purpose of the réséda uniform is to blend well with both yellowish and green landscapes.[94]

However, as ambitious as this project was, it was received in very poor taste by the press who were dominated by government alignment and were therefore still very traditional. An example of this could be seen in 1911, when the trials of the new "mignonette" colour were not convincing, and proved wildly unpopular. The press was outraged at the abandonment of the traditional *garance* and *gris de fer bleuté*, with the *L'Illustration* pushing the caricature, "it would be necessary to imagine a 'chameleon' outfit for the soldiers in an absurd attempt to harmonise the uniforms with the changing and varied aspects of nature."[95] Berteaux's political rivals also rejected this idea of the adoption of réséda, claiming the new uniform was too similar to the field grey military dress that the Imperial German army had just adopted and that it was also unsightly.[96] Étienne Clémentel, auditor of the war budget, who vehemently opposed the adoption of the new trial uniforms, publicly criticised them in his annual report which was published in the *L'Illustration*:

> By seeking to make our current uniforms less visible and less garish, we have therefore overshot our mark. To eliminate everything that is colour, everything that gives the soldier his cheerful, lively appearance, to look for dull and faded nuances, is to go against both French taste and against the demands of the military function... The radical transformation of our alert little troopers in heavy résédas seems to us a mutilation… The red trousers are a national affair![97]

Unfortunately for the military modernists, Berteaux's untimely death in a freak accident at an air show on 21 May 1911 meant a lack of support and spearhead for the modernising operations.[98] Traditionalists therefore saw the opportunity to present their counter arguments to oppose the modernisation project, with virulent oppositionists such as Édouard Detaille and Georges Scott, official military painters, who argued that the réséda uniforms resembled too closely to that of their natural enemy, the Germans. However, Adolphe Messimy, the new War Minister appointed at the end of June, sharing the same ideals of that of the late Berteaux,

[94] *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, 21 December 1911.
[95] *L'Illustration*, 9 December 1911.
[96] 'M. Berteaux's Career' *The Times*, 22 May 1911.
[97] *L'Illustration*, 9 December 1911.
[98] 'Dashes Into Group Of French Cabinet Officers', *New Oxford Item*, 25 May 1911.

persisted with the continuation of the project, and the military manoeuvres of autumn 1911 with the newly-produced trial uniforms gave him the opportunity to conduct large-scale trials. However, he was eventually extremely pressured as a result of contesting internal affairs and had to accommodate to the detractors of the reform who were also parliamentarians that provided the funds for the project:

> I had counted without the press and above all without the committees of the Chamber. Both one and the others agreed to demand the 'patriotic' retention of the red trousers and to oppose adopting the new uniform. I then decided that among the neutral colours we should look for one more pleasing than the réséda and a uniform more becoming than that used on manoeuvres.[99]

He also noted in his memoirs about a vivid encounter with the then Minister of War Eugène Étienne, who vehemently refused any idea of the adoption of a new military identity:

> I still have in my ear the cry of indignation of the brave Étienne, Minister of War, who came before the army commission to justify requests for credit and responding to us in a convinced tone, 'Get rid of the red pants? No! The red pants are France!'[100]

Still, the trials of the réséda uniforms spilled over in 1912, but this time they interestingly featured the red trousers as a result of Messimy's compromise, therefore neutralising any form of practical camouflage effect. Messimy had yielded to the persistent desires of the detractors of the reform and gave in to maintaining the red trousers. His quote in 1911 about the red trousers reflected upon his campaign against the traditionalists. It can therefore be argued that the eventual abandonment of the réséda trial projects was largely due to the passing of Berteaux as well as the intense internal pressure from the press, public perception, as well as overwhelming nationalistic and traditional values.

General Dubail was then selected to head the commission involved with the new uniform trials, this time accompanied by two nationalist staunch oppositions of the réséda patterns, Georges Scott and Édouard Detaille, who had felt that the new drab colours were a stain on the honour and pride of the French flag.[101] This is particularly obvious from Scott's quote where he publicly criticised the réséda uniforms:

> The fact is that while this uniform has some advantages as a field dress, it is really unbecoming as far as the so-called full dress uniform is concerned. The tiny helmet, which crushes the man who wears it, its unattractive shape, its isolated painted tin cockade on the front of the helmet, seemed to me to have the most unfortunate effect. The long trousers, on the other hand, which weigh down

[99] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 1*, p.15.
[100] *L'Illustration*, 9 December 1911.
[101] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 1*, p.15.

> and are so unmilitary, give this ensemble a very regrettable appearance. Finally, the single-colored ensemble is sad enough to cry about.[102]

The commission, after having eliminated the opposition of the traditional colours and the réséda project entirely, entrusted the task of a new reform to Scott and Detaille. Scott headed the program of a new uniform design for the Infantry, which saw much success with its process and development and was put to trial. For Detaille's project, his creativity knew no bounds. With the idea for the uniforms drawn from history and ideas drawn from fiction, he expressed his favour towards the bright, vibrant colours that encapsulated the spirit of the First and Second Empires. The *L'Illustration* from 9 March 1912 introduces the new uniform proposed for the army by Detaille and Scott, by dismissing the previous trials of the réséda uniforms:

> The green réséda uniforms which were experimented during the manoeuvres of 1911 were discarded, and the Minister of War, Monsieur Messimy, requested the notable military painter Édouard Detaille and a young but already popular artist Georges Scott to study the modifications to carry forward in the point of view of commodity and military elegance, to the new uniforms.[103]

The two artists, as expected, had completely ditched all of the army's previous association with the réséda project and suggested evocative, loud uniforms, reminiscent to that of the Second Empire, which therefore meant that any previous attempt at modernising the military uniform was now dead and buried (albeit réséda still being used in military manoeuvres in September 1912 along with Detaille's uniforms, of which observers unsurprisingly noted the superiority in camouflage with the mignonette colour).

Photo (7): The "Édouard Detaille helmet", also referred to as the *Bourguignotte*.[104]

Thus, it was evident that any previous step towards modernisation, especially proposed by Berteaux, had completely been in vain. With Messimy heading the program which integrated the compromises he made towards the traditionalists despite initially vehemently opposing it, it became more clear that any possibility of modernisation was a lost cause, especially with Detaille and Scott in charge of the designs of the new uniforms. Scott had looked to respect "the old national traditions" with the creation of the new

[102] Georges Scott, 'L'uniforme Réséda aux manœuvres', *L'Illustration*, 9 September 1911, p.14.

[103] 'Nouvelles tenues pour l'armée', *L'Illustration*, 9 March 1912.

[104] 'La question de l'uniforme', *L'Illustration*, 10 March 1912.

uniforms, with practicality being the least of his concern - it was a mere afterthought to say the least.[105]

Photo (8): From *L'Illustration*, the vision of the new French uniforms. **(YO)**

Thus, Detaille had officially presented his inventions in a wide range of contemporary media from the time, most notably in the propaganda-filled newspaper the *L'Illustration*. These uniform programs were covered extensively by the press due to the strong association with the nationalistic and political messages being instilled with these efforts of preserving traditionalism. An article titled, *La Question de l'Uniforme*, published in the *L'Illustration* on 30 March 1912, covers the designs of Detaille's newly proposed uniforms in great detail, in accordance, and with a rouse of patriotic fervour:

> The question of uniform is not only discussed by special commissions. It is also of great interest to the public, civilian or military, all those who are soldiers, who have been, or who will be. Children have lost none of their atavistic taste for Épinal images and toy soldiers. Adolescents are joining, each year in greater numbers, military societies which already give them a uniform and a rifle. And the merits and disadvantages of the outfit of today or yesterday, compared with the expected qualities of the outfit of tomorrow, are the subject of conversations, documented by the experience of all those 'who have served their time'. The question of the uniform is a national question, like that of the flag. It is not up to anyone in our country to be disinterested in it.[106]

The article justifies Detaille's reasons for maintaining traditionalism in the new uniforms in this powerful opening segment before going into intricacies of the overall design and features of his latest inventions, describing the uniforms of the infantry as harmonious, exuberant, and superb, while the cavalry uniforms were classed as "the most beautiful, the most harmonious, the best proportioned that exists - it is essentially French."[107] Moreover, in the history of the uniform

[105] Ibid.
[106] 'La Question de l'uniforme', *L'Illustration*, 10 March 1912.
[107] Ibid.

since the First Empire, it has only undergone minor modifications, demonstrating the persistence of maintaining traditionalism, to be reflective of that of the pride of the Napoleonic era.[108]

It is interesting to note, however, as enthusiastic as the war cabinet and the press were towards the design of the new uniforms, it was eventually decided that French production capabilities would only further overextend itself with the decision to manufacture these newly proposed uniforms en masse. These designs had never made it to the mass-production stage, apart from some limited productions of the new uniforms and the headgear which had made it to the developmental stages of prototypes and thus saw very limited usage. Mirouze and Dekerle note in their book *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale (Tome 1)*, that Scott, albeit being tasked with designing a new cavalry uniform, did not see much success as there is no evidence of the project passing the stage of written drafts with there being no record of production apart from a physical piece of evidence in the form of a Hussar trumpeter helmet in the collection of the Museum of Napoleonic History at Fontainebleau.[109]

Eventually, the Ministry of War headed by Alexandre Millerand starting in January 1912 felt that these new prototype designs were unnecessary, and therefore decided to maintain the pre-existing uniform patterns but introduce improvements on them. The reason for the decision to keep the pre-existing uniforms was largely due to reasons of budget as well as the hope to liquidate existing stock before formally replacing the old patterns. As a compromise, with the commission headed by Dubail, the army was persuaded to use a cloth with the existing red, white and blue fibres mixed which would have resulted in a drab, bluish-indigo colour, and not poor camouflage. However, the reform had no time to be carried out as the official approval by the Superior War Council was only completed in June 1914, with the voting by the Chamber of Deputies being done the following month, just a few weeks before the order for general mobilisation upon the outbreak of the Great War.[110] Furthermore, the manufacturers in Elbeuf, where the cloth for the Napoleonic Imperial Guard uniforms had been made, pointed out that the Alizarin (synthetic madder) came from the BASF factory in Germany, and thus they could not acquire more supply to manufacture said cloth which was approved in July.[111] Thus, the decision to adopt blue trousers was made, which was the most practical solution, highlighting the compromise between traditionalists and modernists. The only issue with this was that it would take time.

On 2 December 1914, the newspaper *Excelsior* had justified the abandonment of the red trousers for blue ones, which was followed by the official published regulations by the Ministry of War in 1915, with the regulations having been finalised in December of the previous year.[112] It is interesting to note that prior to this, the government had insisted on retaining the red trousers should the need to face the Germans arise again. However, to justify the army's decision in 1914

[108] Ibid.
[109] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 1*, p.15.
[110] Ibid.
[111] 'Vieilles culottes', *Excelsior*, 2 December 1914.
[112] Ibid.

to abandon the traditional red trousers, *Excelsior* associates them with defeat, arguing that the colour was not present at Fontenoy and Austerlitz, but was present during the retreat of Charles X and the disastrous battle of Sedan (whilst purposefully ignoring their usage in the victory over Russia in Crimea):

> In the weft and warp of the blue cloth, the weaver, by running a few white threads and a few red ones, obtained a neutral shade. The red pants, the target pants, lived. (Now) we see a lot of blue trousers on the front. And the old one, the madder, already has a little provincial air... If peace had not been disturbed, we would still be witnessing the endless discussions of the commissions appointed by the Minister of War to study the transformation of the uniform. The cannon thundered: soldiers, civil servants, artists and tailors agreed; they sacrificed the red trousers and rejected the réséda uniform recommended by the late Berteaux. Many said: 'let's keep the red pants; he cloaked himself with glory!' Were the red pants at Fontenoy and Austerlitz? Point. It only appeared in 1828, two years before the events that forced Charles X into an eccentric retreat. But he was in Magenta. In Sedan too, alas![113]

Excelsior further justifies the transition to blue trousers in their accompanying article, titled *Vive le pantalon bleu!*

> For around forty years, unfortunately for Vaucluse owners, madder has been supplanted by alizarin, a chemical extracted from coal via phenol. Despite this progress, the military administration rigorously observed the instructions to respect the red trousers, its legend of glory, its national memories. The war broke tradition. For the English, the red uniform really evoked illustrious memories. However, they did not hesitate to remove this conspicuous colour - recently, they have even removed it completely from their uniforms. The time was not so long ago when London slang referred to the British soldiers as 'redcoats.' The spirit of Gavroche will give a nickname to the new French breeches. The red trousers are dead; long live the blue trousers! Could they wish for a more sensational debut?[114]

Why the color blue? It had previously been agreed on principle, according to the Minister's decision following the High Council of War meeting on 26 May 1914. Blue was deemed to be the only appropriate colour, given that all other shades, including neutral tints, had been used in foreign armies. A further question of the army's former attachment to traditional red colour had more to do than just identity, nationalism, and revanchism. The eventual establishment of a motive for a mass modernisation program was, in the end, not related to the common belief of conspicuousness, but in reality was more linked to practicality of production. The French army's adoption of the madder red trousers in the new 1828 regulation had largely to do with business opportunities; the army's support for madder red promoted nationalism, but it was also a solid marketing scheme for the French textile industry's new red dye.[115] This, in fact, saved the army 500,000 francs as opposed to if they were to adopt dark blue, which was the only other strong contender in this theme. The army's persistence on resisting the introduction of

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

more drab hues, particularly light blue in 1914, despite Édouard Detaille's many interpretations and designs of a new blue standard uniform, was largely due to the desire to liquidate stocks of the old pattern of red uniform components - particularly the trousers and képis (which had eventually replaced the shako as the primary headwear).

As investigated, in the modern era leading up to the Great War, there had been a movement to replace the old uniforms because it seemed that war was inevitable and camouflage would be more effective for modern combat. Despite the compromise being made for the adoption of a new, more appropriate uniform colour of light blue, it was decided that the army would first liquidate stocks of the old pattern uniform before any decision to adopt the new blue pattern, thus going back to its roots of the navy blue and red, which saw service up until 1915.

The Clothing Crisis of 1914/15 & the Introduction of the Horizon Blue Uniform

Photo (9): Reservists of the 10th Company of the 29th Territorial Infantry Regiment (Dreux) fully equipped in the famous pre-war uniforms. **(YO)**

Carrying on from the previous section's examinations of the pre-war trials of the newly proposed uniforms and the war ministry's eventual decision to maintain the uniform pattern that had preceded them, it is important to note that such a decision was not long-lived. This is due to the fact that the French army underwent a clothing crisis that was highly apparent in the winter of 1914/15, which can be attributed to the disastrously high casualties sustained in the first month of the war, which meant that the in-service uniforms and reserve supplies were being rapidly exhausted.

Robert Doughty states in his book, *Pyrrhic Victory*, that "the infantry regulations of April 1914 asserted that the 'supreme weapon' of the infantry was the bayonet (a doctrine that led to disastrous casualties). After the infantrymen fixed bayonets, they would advance - wearing a blue coat, red trousers, and a blue cap with red top - with their officers leading in the front and with drums and bugles sounding the charge". The doctrine that these men heeded and charged into battle with, led to them being destroyed by the inferno of German artillery barrage and machine gun fire and thus led to a significant liquidation of uniform stock.[116]

Thus, the commissariat department was having difficulty with establishing a solution when it came to outfitting the conscripts from the class of 1915, who were intended to beef up the regiments that were melted in the furnaces of the Frontiers and the Marne. This forced the army to modernise. With all this in mind, it must be noted that this section will not cover the development of the khaki uniforms of the colonial army or the Army of Africa for the sake of a

[116] Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory*, p.28.

more concise scope and scale. This thesis had previously not explored the intricacies of the vibrant pre-war uniforms of the colonials and the African troops, and since the beginning, has been focused more on the metropolitan aspect of uniformity.[117] For references to the khaki uniforms, it is recommended to readers to consult pages 216 - 283 in Laurent Mirouze and Stéphane Dekerle's book, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Uniformes, Équipments, Armements (Tome 2)* where the khaki uniforms are covered extensively, accompanied by authentic artefacts as well as period photography. Furthermore, this section will also not go into the uniforms of individual branches, but rather the development and issuing of the newly adopted horizon blue uniform as a whole. It will also avoid extremely in-depth details regarding the specific features and models of horizon blue uniforms and patterns. This section is just meant to show the transition from the pre-war period into the development and issue stage of the horizon blue uniform. This is also done to have a more concise but overall broader view of the horizon blue uniform. Such focused intricacies can only be explored in a proper book dedicated to the subject - there is just too much material to be included in a limited length thesis.

After the Battle of the Marne, the army administration had understood that a long, drawn-out stalemate in the Western Front seemed likely, and the army simply could not rely on their pre-existing stock of uniforms to equip the army (as well as the incoming conscripts from the class of 1916). Thus, it became a necessity for the army administration to introduce a programme of manufacturing simplified military uniforms, which had to be produced with the utmost urgency due to the impending depletion of the current existing supplies of the old uniforms - the clothing crisis had reached its climax by the 1914/15 period.[118] This program was still met with instances of pockets of resistance, much like during the pre-war period examined earlier. Militaristic and political traditionalists had still viewed such a change in the overall aesthetic appearance of the French soldier to be a suppression of French nationalistic pride and identity.

Left photo (10): A French reservist of the 66th Territorial Infantry Regiment (Le Blanc) still wearing the famous red trousers in May 1915. **(YO)**

Right photo (11): Territorials of the 1st Regiment (Lille) on 24 November 1914 with red trousers. **(YO)**

[117] The idea of uniformity revolves around the consistency of the uniform appearance, and is not a reference to the concept of new uniform adaptation.

[118] Mirouze, Laurent, and Stéphane Dekerle, *L'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Uniformes, Équipements, Armements, Tome 2* (Ingolstadt: Verlag Militaria, 2008), p.114.

However, due to the clothing crisis and the rapid depletion of stocks of the old uniform pattern, on 25 November 1914, a compromise was therefore met to appease both the military modernists and traditionalists. Horizon blue (a term which was recorded and popularised by the popular weekly *L'Illustration*) became the new official colour of the French army following its introduction in late 1914.[119] Large-scale imports of clothing from overseas made it possible to satisfy the most urgent needs without worrying about the garments' overall aesthetic appeal.[120]

Although light blue (commonly referred to as horizon blue) only became the new official colour of the French army in the spring of 1915, efforts to replace the pre-existing madder-red components of uniforms were already well underway even in the pre-war period, but only really picked up in momentum in the early months of the war (the first large efforts only began in July 1914), following the order of nearly ten million metres of grey-blue cloth from Great Britain, Spain, as well as the United States.[121] This decision, although made on the eve of war, was largely improvised, as there were no serious pre-war plans to rely on foreign cloth for mass uniform production, but the army saw the need to equip its troops with more appropriate measures.[122] Britain, which was France's largest importer of blue textiles, produced shades of blue which were initially deemed too dark, and were categorised by the army administration as bluish-grey English cloth.[123] In reality, this shade of cloth was not the only variant sent to France, and a variety of hues from light blue to dark blue were produced and issued. Hence, a large quantity of the bluish-grey English cloth replaced the madder-red textiles. However, this adaptation and change was not final, and the army administration still made the decision to adopt a lighter hue of blue as the primary colour for the army uniforms.

French production of this new light blue cloth officially began in autumn 1914. The term for it, "light blue cloth", was officially coined in a letter from 25 November 1914 by Lt.Colonel Destremau, *Chef du 1e Bureau*).[124] The new colour was previously called grey-blue, but the decision to omit the word "grey" despite the subtle, light greyish appearance in the new cloth was done so in order to not get confused with the previously used bluish iron-grey cloth, the pre-war dark, bluish-grey colour.[125]

This new light blue blend was achieved by a mixture of three types of wool: 35% unbleached, 50% light blue, and 15% dark blue (in order to economise on the lack of indigo dye to the shortage of synthetic alizarin). This had led to the creation of horizon blue. The introduction of this cloth was a success - by March 1915, the clothing crisis had settled down,

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[119] *L'Illustration* referred to the new uniform as "a new grey-blue overcoat, called horizon colour."
Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2,* p.115.
[120] Ibid., p.114.
[121] Ibid., p.18.
[122] Reliance on imported cloth became even more necessary when the industrial Northeast fell into German hands,
[123] Ibid.
[124] *Vincennes, Service Historique de la Défense*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Au sujet des appellations du nouveau drap gris bleu*» 25 November 1914.
[125] Ibid.

and 50,000 metres of light blue cloth had been manufactured. 600,000 men were outfitted with this new cloth between the months of December 1914 and February 1915, as per a report of the War Ministry from 7 March 1915.[126]

Mirouze and Dekerle note in their book that "after three months of campaigning, the French army presented a heterogeneous appearance in which the uniforms of mobilisation were mingled with simplified items of different-coloured cloth. It was necessary to wait until the end of 1915 before a certain uniformity of appearance emerged."[127] As referred to on page 42 via footnote (n.97), this concept of uniformity revolves around the overall consistency of the appearance of the French fighting man as opposed to the overarching concept of uniform adaptation when it comes to the modernising process. In the pre-war period, there was a pervasive policy with regards to uniform differentiations as according to the branches of service - there was an overall lack of uniformity when the entirety of the French army is brought into the equation. This was a result of varying uniform patterns, colours, and numerous types of headwear, ranging from the traditional North African influences of the Zouaves and Tirailleurs to the flashy armour of the heavy cavalry, and from the bright red trousers of the infantry to the full dark blue of the colonial infantry. It can be argued that the army's default after 1914 was related to both necessary uniform adaptation and uniformity.

This concept charged headfirst into the field of necessary uniform adaptation when the Great War broke out. This idea was, at the time, a relatively new concept. Uniforms were typically constructed and adopted on the basis of aesthetic appearance, not practicality and a solution to the changing nature of warfare. Aesthetic uniform appearance was something that the French army took tremendous pride in, dating back to the time of Louis XIV, and peaking during the age of the First French Empire. When faced with the urgency to adapt as a result of the heavy casualties sustained and the liquidation of pre-existing stock of uniforms in 1914, it prompted the War Ministry to re-evaluate its priorities. As a result, uniform adaptations were made with regards to the changing nature of warfare, budgetary concerns, and ease of manufacturing.

The concept of uniformity also fits into this theme of adaptation, as an overall heterogeneous appearance proved simpler to adopt as opposed to the large variety of branch-specific uniforms seen in the pre-war period. Uniform adaptations to the changing nature of warfare forced the French army to embrace the concept of uniformity, resulting in the majority of French troops possessing similar outfits when it came to the cut and design, with only some minor differentiations. This was largely due to budgetary concerns as well as the goal for modernisation. Urgency in the need for more uniforms led to the War Ministry needing to cut corners. This therefore fits both themes of uniformity and necessary uniform adaptations, where the army strived towards possessing a heterogeneous appearance resembling that of a professional army, as well as an apparent need for modernisation and simplifications to cut

[126] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2,* p.18.
[127] Ibid.

corners in order to adapt to the changing nature of warfare with easier and faster manufacturing processes.

It can also be argued that the policy drive in 1915 was a blend of both aesthetics and practicality. Horizon blue was a colour that could be manufactured en masse, which also retained the blue that symbolised the French army, but also simultaneously blended in with the chalky terrains of the Somme, Champagne, and Artois. It also effectively differentiated the French army from its allies and adversaries, forging a new national identity which came into existence in 1915. This clearly demonstrates the year of 1915 being the transitional era for the French army with regards to uniforms and equipment. The adoption of the new light blue uniform led to a nationwide mobilisation for the fabrications of this new effect. Initially, the pre-war pattern of the 1877 greatcoat was modified to enable it to be manufactured with the new light blue cloth resulting in the 1877/14.

The 1877/14 was made of this new light blue wool and had two rows of six buttons on each breast, almost exactly like the Model 1877. The Model 1877's buttons, collar patches, martingale, belt loop, shoulder straps, and shoulder loops were identical. Half-*chevalière*, or fall-down collars were also used, but standing collars were required as per army regulations. The cuffs of the 1877/14 were buttonless. Since the initial supplies of the new light blue fabric arrived in August, the uniform manufacturers created uniforms that essentially maintained the pre-war uniform cut. A considerable number of the Model 1877/14 greatcoats were made with the new wool during this brief period. The fabrication of the 1877/14 continued until the description of the new uniform (Model 1914) was distributed at the end of September. As soon as the army published the description of the considerably simpler Model 1914, it became evident that production of this new pattern would be less expensive and time-consuming. As a result, manufacturers rapidly shifted to producing the regulation model after just one month of manufacturing the 1877/14. Up until the fall of 1914, the 1877/14 pattern was only distributed in small quantities until the entire stock was liquidated.

Photo (12): A photo of French soldiers from the class of 1914 of the 131st Infantry Regiment (Orléans- Pithiviers) demonstrating the variety of French army uniforms worn in the early-war period. **(YO)**

Photo (13): This soldier wears the 2nd Type Model 1914 "Poiret" greatcoat. **(YO)**

After the descriptive notice detailing the new regulation greatcoat was released, tailors and textile industries were commissioned by the government to manufacture the new uniform of a simplified pattern, which reduced painstaking effort in the creation of particularly detailed uniform components of the various patterns. The task of creating the new simplified uniform was bestowed upon the renown fashion designer Paul Poiret, who had introduced the method of manufacturing the new greatcoat, which was economical and rapid to produce due to its simplicity and the fact that it could be manufactured from a single strip of cloth.[128] Throughout autumn 1915 until winter 1915, Poiret's firm had manufactured four different types of the "Poiret" patterns with each new pattern involving modifications. A brief rundown of the features of each pattern are as follows:

Greatcoat Model	Basic Features	Period of Distribution
1914 1st Type	Light blue, single-breasted, fall-down collar, 2 ext. breast pockets, no rear pockets, 1 interior (right) breast pocket.	September 1914 - winter 1914/15
1914 2nd Type	Light blue, single-breasted, fall-down collar, 2 ext. breast pockets, no rear pockets, 1 interior (right) breast pocket.	November 1914 - winter 1914/15
1914 3rd Type	Light blue, single-breasted, fall-down collar, martingale, 2 ext. breast pockets, 2 rear vertical pockets, 2 interior breast pockets.	December 1914 - August 1915
1914 4th Type	Light blue, single-breasted, fall-down collar, martingale, 2 ext. breast pockets, 2 ext. waist pockets, 2 rear vertical pockets, 2 interior breast pockets.	May 1915 - summer 1917

Photo (14): French soldiers of the 74th Infantry Regiment (Rouen) wearing Model 1914 greatcoat modified in summer 1915 with the addition of extra hip pockets. **(YO)**

With the French army still transitioning on from the uniforms of the pre-war era, it was apparent that the entire army could not possess a homogenous appearance in its entirety. However,

[128] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2,* p.20.

the army still needed to supply their troops with new light blue trousers to match the new greatcoats. The new described Model 1914 breeches, as per the notices in the autumn and winter of 1915, would be made using light blue cloth and could only be manufactured en masse as early as January 1915. As a result, while waiting for the arrival of the new breeches to the supply depots, several types of civilian-style trousers in corduroy, wool, and satin were permitted in tones of blue, brown, and beige. By the end of February, the army had supplied 770,000 pants and breeches made of civilian textiles or satin, with an additional 430,000 in stock. When certain units made the independent decision to purchase civilian corduroy pants, confusion grew. A startling number of French soldiers were taken prisoner, and the Germans suspected them of being spies since their breeches were made of non-regulation uniform materials. As a result, several prisoners of war were summarily executed for espionage or being labelled as guerilla fighters and civilian combatants. This was noticed in *l'Aide Major Général* Hellot's report to the War Ministry on 30 October 1915:

> After the attacks of Perthes and Massiges at the Argonne, many captured French soldiers were found without their greatcoats and with trousers of different cloth colours. They were shot as 'civilian combatants.' I had already been informed that the Germans had shot men found wearing velvet trousers or non-regulation clothing. It would be of prime importance, in order to prevent the enemy from having any pretext for such violations of the laws of war, that our troops be provided with the new uniform as soon as possible. I therefore ask you to be so kind as to hasten its production (both trousers and greatcoats).[129]

Photo (15): Two soldiers of the 43rd Infantry Regiment (Lille) wearing non-regulation trousers in corduroy. **(YO)**

In order to counter against the execution of French prisoners caught wearing non-regulation clothing, Hellot appealed:

> Any man who has trousers made of velvet or cloth of a non-regulation colour must wear blue canvas trousers over them. As for civilian trousers, they must be reserved exclusively for the troops of the reserve line and worn equally with blue canvas trousers. For my part, I urge the Minister to activate the production of the new outfit.[130]

In order to give the breeches a more military appearance and to prevent soldiers from being executed as civilian combatants, a ministerial directive was eventually issued on 21 April, requiring the addition of fabric piping in

[129] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1 (36), Notice detailing the executions of French POWs caught wearing corduroy or non-regulation clothing, 30 March 1915.
[130] *SHD*, 16 N 19 (14), Notice regarding the usage of non-regulation clothing, 30 March 1915.

daffodil yellow for Infantry, scarlet for the Artillery, dark blue for Cavalry, and black for Engineers, etc. (for additional reference, see the supplementary table to the descriptive notice of 9 December 1914 (modified 28 January 1915, and 17 and 28 May 1915), on pages 118 - 119 of Mirouze and Dekerle's book, *L'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale, Tome 2*).

Eventually, the new light blue breeches described on 11 November 1914 were issued, and the description of it as being the new standard trousers was officially published in the descriptive notice of 9 December.[131] This new pattern, the Model 1914, was intended to replace any of the inconsistencies in the clothing department regarding trouser material, and to encourage uniformity with the new light blue colour of the metropolitan army. Although the Model 1914 breeches were described to be in light blue, there was no restriction on the usage of other blue hues or even neutral colors to liquidate stocks of the old cloth - the French army only presented some sense of uniformity by the end of 1915, being almost entirely equipped with horizon blue.

Left photo (16): This NCO wears Model 1914 breeches in light blue cloth without knee pad reinforcements. **(YO)**

Right photo (17): Charles Brun, a young soldier of the 53rd Infantry Regiment (Perpignan), wears the Model 1914 breeches in light blue cloth with knee pad reinforcements. **(YO)**

Another uniformed component to make the transition into light blue was the introduction of puttees, based on the 1910 pattern. The decision was made on 24 October 1914 to replace the previously worn leather gaiters with puttees which were initially dark blue because only *Chasseurs Alpins*, *Zouaves*, and *Tirailleurs* had worn them. However, in December 1914, it was decided that all puttees should be made in neutral or light blue, though dark blue puttees remained popular until the summer of 1915.

Photo (18): These cyclist troops of the 15th Infantry Regiment (Albi) wear putties in dark blue cloth. **(YO)**

[131] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes*» 9 December 1914.

The *vareuses* of the army, (jackets/tunics), also saw the transition into horizon blue, as per the notice of December 1914. Referred to as the 1914 universal jacket/tunic due to their mass distribution to almost all branches of the French military, they were of light blue wool, single breasted, and they heavily took on the influence of the pre-war 1879 jacket, sharing similarities in the overall cut and structure apart from the buttons, which were of five pieces on the 1914 pattern and demonstrated the insignia of the corresponding branch (like the 1879 model). On the photo to the left, you can see the men on the left and right wearing the Model 1914 universal tunic. The man in the centre wears a tunic of commercial manufacture.

When the 1914 jacket was approved in December 1914, all colors of cloth were used, since the new light blue fabric was prioritised for the fabrication of the new simplified greatcoats. It wouldn't be until April 1915 before an order was issued mandating that only light blue cloth be used for the manufacturing of the new tunics. The Model 1914 began to appear more regularly as distribution expanded in early 1915, and it was typically worn under the greatcoat as part of the field order. NCOs and officers on the other hand had the option to privately purchase tailored tunics, with the NCO patterns being in a range of styles, but for officers they were most notably in the Model 1913 style (with stand up or saxon collars, with the same style for NCOs), preferably in light blue cloth. In reality, a variety of different shades was also used to liquidate stocks of the imported cloth.

Photo (19): The officer closest to the camera is clearly wearing a Model 1913 tunic. **(YO)**

The transition of the *Chasseurs* Battalions to the new colour for the metropolitan army was not without controversy - the proponents of the status quo and those who supported switching to the French army's universal uniform, which was light blue (also still known as horizon-blue), was in correspondence within the months of September to December 1914. The commander of the 28th Infantry Division at Grenoble, General Purtz, decisively stepped in to emphasise the value of *esprit de corps* and the effect that the *Chasseur* costume had on the morale of the enemy - after all, it was the Germans who had birthed the term "the black devils" to describe the *Chasseurs* due to the very dark colour of their uniforms.[132] The *Chasseurs* had adopted this nickname and opted to switch out "black" for "blue", in accordance with their new bluish iron-grey uniforms which had recently been afforded to them as per the notice of 9 December 1914.[133] As such, during the first year of the war, the *Chasseurs à Pied*, like the Infantry, adopted the Model 1914 overcoat, then

[132] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2,* p.284.
[133] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes*» 9 December 1914.

the Model 1915 style, while the *Chasseurs Alpins* had latched onto their pre-war cut of the 1891 dolman tunic (identifiable through the shoulder pads which were eventually extinguished with the 1916 model) which also saw wartime fabrications in different coloured cloth, from imported English bluish-grey cloth, purple-grey, to horizon blue at the end of 1915.

VOUS QUI LES AVEZ CONNUS ET AIMÉS
Souvenez-vous dans vos Prières
des deux frères jumeaux
Jean et Jules DUNAND
nés à St-Jean-de-Belleville le 7 Décembre 1895
du 31me Chasseurs alpins
tombés glorieusement à l'ennemi le même jour
au Nord du plateau de N.-D. de Lorette
le 17 Juin 1915

O Seigneur, soutenez nos cœurs abattus, ranimez-les par les pensées consolantes de la foi afin que nous ne nous attristions pas comme ceux qui sont sans espérance.
(St-Paul).

Recevez dans votre royaume ceux que nous pleurons, faites-leur miséricorde, donnez-leur la paix. Faites qu'un jour nous soyons réunis à eux pour toujours.
(P. Lacordaire).

Miséricordieux Jésus donnez-leur le repos éternel !
7 ans et 7 quarantaines.

Au Monde Religieux, 2, Rue Bellecour, Lyon.

Left Photo (20): Jean and Jules Dunand, twins from the author's extended family who served in the 14th Battalion of *Chasseurs Alpins* (Grenoble), wear dark blue Model 1891 dolmans, identifiable through the shoulder pads. **(YO)**

Right photo (21): Light infantrymen of the 61st Battalion of *Chasseurs à Pied* (Langres) pose for a group photo wearing a variety of uniforms. **(YO)**

However, it was surprisingly discovered that the bluish-grey colour was inadequate for camouflage in the regions of the Vosges a few months after the colour was introduced. Trials were then conducted on uniforms of several hues of blue and khaki, under the direction of *Intendant* Laurent. Without conclusive results, these trials ended in October, and on 12 November 1915, it was decided to provide the *Chasseurs Alpins* and the *Chasseurs à Pied* with light or dark blue attire, whether it was already manufactured or could be made upon demand of the clothing factories.[134] Following this decision, the *Chasseurs à Pied* were issued greatcoats in light blue, while they retained the bluish-iron grey jackets and breeches. The modifications concerning the *Chasseurs Alpins* largely favoured horizon blue, with the addition of a cape in the light blue cloth, but in reality regulations were often ignored and clothing was largely mixed, as seen in period photographs.[135]

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[134] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2,* pp.284-285.

[135] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Rectificatif à la notice descriptive des nouveaux uniformes adoptés pour les Chasseurs à Pied*» 26 December 1915.

Their newly issued uniforms in light blue were of the same cut as that of the pre-war period, evident through the notice *Rectificatif à la notice descriptive des nouveaux uniformes adoptés pour les Chasseurs à Pied*, issued on 26 December 1915, which detailed the newly-adopted Chasseur uniform.[136] The development of the dolman jacket for the *Chasseurs* in light blue cloth was also no doubt based on the Model 1914 universal jacket, with the addition of the *chevalière* collar, much like the jackets worn prior to the war. This was because the High Command saw no necessity to change the design of the uniform as it was already practical and iconic to the *Chasseurs*. Despite light blue having been issued to these battalions of Light and Alpine Infantry, manufacturers continued to make new *Chasseurs* uniforms in bluish iron-grey, as evident through the 1916 models, which very closely resembled the pre-war Model 1891 and wartime Model 1891/14 in cut, except for the abolition of shoulder pads on the 1914-modified version.

Photo (22): This young soldier of the 22nd Battalion of *Chasseurs Alpins* (Albertville) is fully equipped with the horizon blue uniform. **(YO)**

The Colonial Infantry was also a branch of the army that was given the new light blue uniforms in accordance with the notice of 9 December 1914. Their newly adopted jackets were based on the pre-existing style of the 1873 pattern, but were adapted to the new light blue material instead of the old dark blue duffel. This led to the creation of the 1873/14 pattern. Albeit the notice having been released in December, the Colonial Infantry only really received stocks of the new light blue uniforms in the spring of 1915, specifically the months of March and April, evident through the document from 6 March 1915, *Délivrance de la tenue en drap bleu clair aux corps coloniaux du front*, addressed to the General Staff. This was the period when light blue was being issued en masse to the entire metropolitan army.[137] The 1873/14 is highly identifiable through its double-breasted pattern, being the only model of jacket in the double-breasted form that was made in light blue cloth. The buttons are typically embossed with the anchor of the colonial army.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2*, p.148.
SHD, 16 N 2661-1, (129), «*Délivrance de la tenue en drap bleu clair aux corps coloniaux du front*» 6 March 1916.

Left photo (23): François Louis Noël Olivères **(**author's Great Grandfather), a soldier of the 6th Colonial Infantry Regiment (Brest), pictured here in 1917, wears the Model 1873/14 *Marsouin's* jacket in horizon blue cloth. **(YO)**

Right photo (24): *Marsouins* of the 36th Colonial Infantry Regiment (Lyon) at Framerville-Rainecourt, Somme, 29 April 1916. Wearing the Model 1873/14 jacket in horizon blue cloth. **(YO)**

Later, it was decided that a new pattern of greatcoat would be adopted for the metropolitan army. The general staff was enthused about the prospect of switching back to the crossing design of the 1877 style or keeping the straight, single breasted buttoning style of the simpler 1914 overcoats. The different colours and textile quality of the 1914 greatcoats, especially after months of exposure and use, created a lack of homogeneity among the French ranks. Numerous critiques quickly surfaced, even after the simpler, single-breasted versions were initially embraced. Two potential issues were discussed: clothing wear and tear and suitable protection against cold weather. The double-breasted option, like that of the 1877 variant, was chosen in both instances because it was thought to be more suitable.[138]

The redesigned greatcoat was formally adopted in August 1915. Thus, with a few exceptions, the general design of the Model 1915 was identical to that of the Model 1877, particularly with regard to the double-breasted button style. It did, however, keep the *chevalière* collar style of the 1914 pattern. It was thought at the time that the Model 1915 was finally a greatcoat that the army could use for as long as necessary, but the army had to first liquidate its stock of the simplified Model 1914 greatcoats before allowing the Model 1915s to be distributed. Therefore, the new pattern of uniforms were not distributed in large numbers until the summer of

[138] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2*, p.182.

1916, where they made substantial appearances for the troops at Verdun and at the Somme. However, the simplified Model 1914s continued to be supplied and worn well into 1917. Although it appears that most infantrymen were using the Model 1915 by the summer of 1917, it would not be until the end of that year that just the 1915 greatcoat model was being used.

Photo (25): These young soldiers of an unidentified infantry regiment model their new light blue 1915 pattern greatcoats, probably of the first issues. **(YO)**

In this section, it is evident to see that the French army between the years of 1903 and 1915 saw considerable developments in the outfitting of their forces. What were years of proposed transition and modernisation in the pre-war period, met with political disagreements and scandals, eventually transitioned into one of acceptance in the wartime period, especially when met with the issue the War Ministry faced: the uniform crisis of 1914/15. It can be argued that the eventual transition of the army's uniforms in this period was not necessarily due to the impact and legacy that Berteaux had on the modernisation programs of the uniform, as his efforts died with him, but rather the realisation upon the full-scale, total war that threatened the security of France, as explained in *France and the Great War 1914-1918*:

> In the rest of France, expelling the invaders and making the nation whole came to justify unprecedented and open-ended national mobilisation. As the war totalised, the French confronted the shift from "the imaginary war", dreamed of and feared before August 1914, to the real war, here and now. They had to face up to an extended confrontation and to the immense war effort that it engendered.[139]

With the entire industrial regions of Northern France occupied, it was then up to the efforts of full mobilisation of textile industries to equip their fighters to defend French soil without the reliance of the pre-war imported dyes from their current enemy. The rapid adaptation to address this crisis which plagued the army was impressive to say the least.

[139] Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918*, p.42.

The army in the pre-war period, still traditional and persistent on the presentation of the soldiers being of utmost importance due to their belief in the *esprit de corps* (as seen in the outcome of the pre-war periods that saw several trials and proposed), was eventually appeased by the new uniform project, largely due to the utilisation of blue which was still a representation of France. The transition from the red trousers to horizon blue, was, in all aspects, favourable, especially when given the circumstances and limitations that affected the French textile industries.

Thus, to achieve complete homogeneity, these mobilised tailors and emporiums still had to also address the issue of headwear - with the liquidation of the old stocks along with the losses sustained in the early parts of the campaign, the army could no longer rely on the pre-war patterns. Therefore, the next section, Chapter III looks at the origins of the képi, its transition, and the major developments into the wartime issues as well as their limitations, eventually leading onto a more effective form of head protection.

IV. The Képi
1884 - 1915

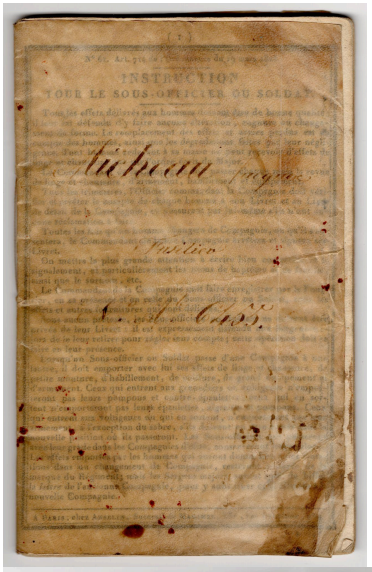
The Origins of the Képi

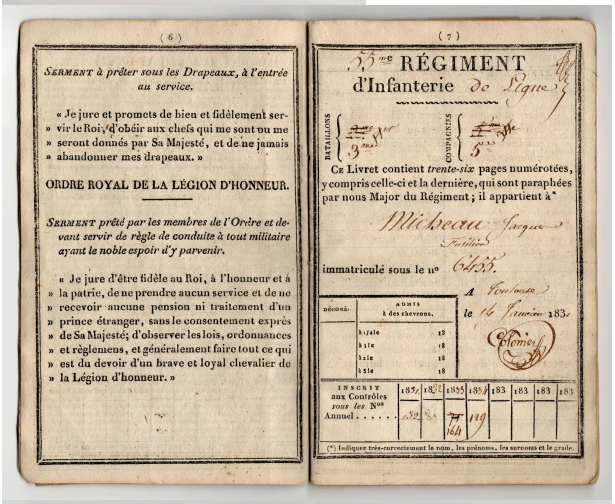
Since the beginning of the conquest of Algeria in 1830, it became clear that the leather shako was becoming obsolete due to the inconvenience of the weight it bore on its wearer. The *bicorne* was also unsuitable for modern combat, and the *bonnet de police*, though the lightest of the three forms of headdress, was not utile when it came to protecting its wearer from sunlight. From these observations and required adaptations in the field, the army introduced new forms of headdress, including the *Casquette d'Afrique* (also referred to as the cap of *père* Bugeaud).[140] This new cap was an improvement on the leather shako - no longer made of leather, its cardboard and cloth construction proved more convenient for its wearer due to its lighter weight. It was, however, still not perfect: its tall shape proved unsuitable for modern conflict, presenting some similar disadvantages to the previous leather shakos. As a result, regulated on 25 July 1833, these shakos were thus modified to result in a much lighter and shorter form of headdress called *képy*. It was ultimately given the name "*bonnet de police* with visor" which was derived in March 1843 until 20 April 1874, the date of the official adoption of the term "képi".[141]

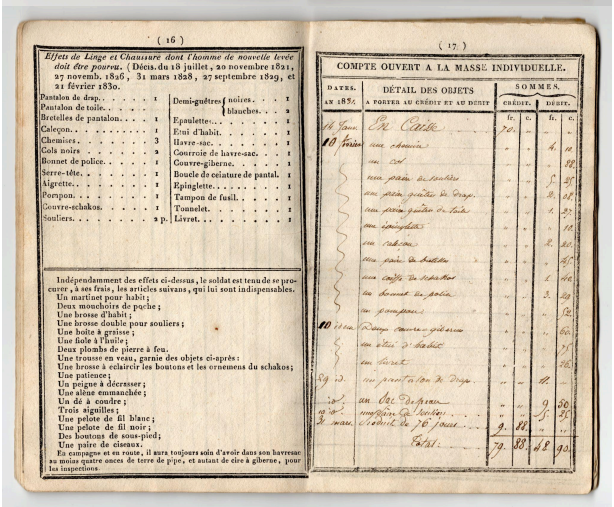
Photo (26): This photo shows the *casquette d'Afrique* worn by General Bugeaud, displayed at the *Musée de l'Armée* during the time of the Third Republic. **(YO)**

Despite the increase in popularity of the képi over the shako due to its official adoption by the army by the time of the Franco-Prussian War, it did not necessarily mean that the shako faced complete extinction when it came to its service within the French army - the soldiers of the *Garde Impériale* of the Second Empire, in iconic fashion, still wore the shako as late as the War of 1870-1871, and light cavalrymen as well as students of the military academy of Saint-Cyr during the Third Republic still possessed them. It was still evident,

[140] Coune, *Les Coiffures Militaires Francaises*, p.8.
[141] Ibid.







however, that due to the more apparent usefulness and convenience of the képi, the bulk of the usage of the shakos had to be replaced with the new cloth headdress.

Thus, the Ministry of War issued a ministerial decision related to the headdress of troops on 25 April 1884, published by the *5e Direction, Services Administratifs; Bureau de l'Habillement et du Campement*, which finalises the replacement of the shako in the branches of the "Infantry, Artillery, Engineers, Train and military supply units, companies of heavy cavalry (*Cuirassiers* & *Dragons*), sections of the secretaries of the general staff and recruitment, military clerks and workers in administration, military nurses, as well as for the executives and students of military schools, with the exception of the executives and students of the "special" military school."[142] Further descriptions of the regulations of 25 April 1884 describe that "the képi will be used in all circumstances where the shako is worn. Each man will receive two képis: one for the first outfit, the other for the second outfit. This provision will naturally not be applicable to the Cavalry, except for the heavy cavalry."[143] Although *Hussard* and *Chasseur à Cheval* units of the light cavalry were also issued képis, they still possessed their distinct shakos during the early era of the Third Republic up until their adoption of the steel helmet in the autumn of 1915. However, it became clear that by the time of the Franco-Prussian War, the képi was the dominant headdress of the French soldier, as opposed to the Crimean War and the Algerian Expedition, where the French fighting man is typically depicted with a shako.

Photos (27): A military service booklet from 1831 which belonged to a *fusilier* of the 5th Company of the 55th Line Infantry Regiment who fought in Algeria. The third picture (most bottom) states that he was issued "Une coiffe de Schako" (a shako headdress). **(YO)**

However, it can be argued that the first models of képis to have been used en masse would have been those worn in Crimea, with its tall shape taking much influence from the design and shape of the shakos. The size and cut were eventually modified for the Model 1867 which was used in the Franco-Prussian War, which eventually inspired the

[142] Ministère de la Guerre, *Journal militaire: contenant... les ordonnances... les nominations... l'annonce ou extrait des ouvrages* (Paris, 1884), p.457.
[143] Ibid.

1873 and 1884 models of the Third Republic. It was throughout these years that the identity of the French soldier of the early Third Republic was born. These different képi types were very similar in form and construction - in fact, to the untrained eye, one could have difficulty distinguishing them from one another. Between the Model 1873 and Model 1884, the most apparent differences between the two was the downward sloped crown of the képi as well as its shorter visor of the 1873 pattern when compared to the Model 1884. By the late nineteenth century, the vast majority of ground forces had been issued with the képi.

The Model 1884 Képi

Following the failed trials of a number of different uniform modifications which died a natural death as discussed in *The Period of Trials of the Newly Proposed Uniforms*, the army reverted back to the traditional appearance of the *gris de fer bleuté* and *garance* képis along with coats and trousers of the same colours. Following the suppression of the shako for most of the branches of the French army as well as the failed periods of uniform reforms, the Model 1884 continued to be issued to all units. The Model 1884 however, as previously explored, was not the first standard issue képi to see mass-distribution to soldiers of all branches. The first pattern introduced under the Third Republic, the Model 1873, was a modified version of the Model 1867 which was used during the War of 1870-1871. The Model 1873 saw the addition of a leather chinstrap for Other Ranks (false chinstraps in gilt still adorned NCO & officer's képis) as well as ventilation slots, but the overall shape and construction remained relatively the same apart from the leather peak which was rounded on the edges of the Model 1873 as opposed to the previously squared shape of the visors on the model used in the Franco-Prussian War.

In 1884, the newer model, the second pattern introduced under the Third Republic, was issued to all branches of the army. Its construction was not much different from the previous pattern, apart from a slight alteration in profile, eliminating the angled slant of the back and slouched forward section of the cloth fabric of the crown. In terms of fabrication, Article 73 of the *Description de l'Uniforme des Différents Corps de l'Armée, Première Partie,* published by the Ministry of War in 1885, outlines the specific components as well as the regulations of these new képi models. Sub-sections 1 to 14 cover all branches of enlisted men/other ranks as well as corporals, quartermasters, and musicians, while sub-sections 15 to 20 detail the képi regulations for non-commissioned officers, adjutants, junior assistants of the administration services, *sous-chefs* of music sections, master saddlers, and the *sous-chefs* of the technical sections of the military railway services. The construction of the 1884 képi in terms of regulations was not much different from the 1873 model. The Ministry of War clearly outlined the specificities in the following excerpt:

> The képi is composed of a headband, a turban, a crown, a chinstrap, a visor, and the unit number or an insignia (depending on branch of service), two ventilation slots (one for each side) a linen/canvas carcass, and an interior leather lining… the headband, turban and crown are made of cloth in the shade/colour of which varies according to the branch of service. The headband, which consists of a strip of cloth, is furnished on its front, with the number of the unit by cut-out

numerals in non-commissioned officer's cloth (with the colour as according to the branch of the army. Exceptions to this rule are the Foreign Legion and the musicians of the artillery schools, for whom the number of the corps on the front is replaced by a grenade in non-commissioned officer's cloth). These figures are then placed on a badge in soldier's cloth of the colour of the band, in such a way that the upper part of the figures comes into contact with the bottom of the piping braid… The turban is made up of four vertical pieces attached to the headband, separated by seams covered with a braid piping in which colour is indicated by the branch of service...[144]

Képi Modèle 1884:
In 1914, the French soldier marches off to war with a lot of pride and patriotism. "To Berlin!" he shouts. This *esprit de corps* is reflected in the uniform he wears. The 1884 model was the standard issue headdress for the French soldier in the first months of the Great War, but eventually got phased out due to the clothing crisis of 1914/15. This specimen of the Model 1884 képi belonged to a soldier of the 24th Infantry Regiment (Paris-Bernoy). The interior has been field-modified for better comfort with the addition of a black cloth lining to cover the linen frame. **(YO)**

With reference to the colours of the piping and the

[144] Ministère de la Guerre, *Description de l'Uniforme des Différents Corps de l'Armée: 1re Partie, Corps de Troupes De Toutes Armes* (Paris, 1885), pp.130-131.

overall body of the headdress differing according to the branch of service, it must be noted that this section will not discuss all the intricacies of the regulation colours down to the branch level. Readers are encouraged to consult Frédéric Coune's excellent book, *Képi: Une Coiffure Française, Tome 1, 1830 - 1939*, which extensively covers every little detail to be learned about these headdresses. This includes the different branches, colours, manufacturers, stamps, methods of distribution, etc. This thesis only provides a basic rundown of the construction and utilisation of the képi as a whole. Regarding the construction, the Ministry of War continues in the excerpt:

> ...The crown is round in shape, slightly recessed into the edges of the turban, which forms a downward projection of about 10mm. Piping is sewn around the crown, on the recessed portion. Sitting on the visor and attached to the turban, a chinstrap with slides is placed (to adjust the length of the strap), composed of two strips of blackened calfskin. This chinstrap, which can be removed at will, is attached to the képi using two small uniform buttons sewn to the right and left of the headband, and a buttonhole made at each end of the chinstrap. The visor is made of strong cowhide - it is cut from very pure leather, covered with the coating that usually precedes varnishing and another shineless glazed coating to prevent any adhesion of visors when képis are stacked one upon the other. The edge, as well as the underside of the visors are blackened. Its width, in the middle, is 457mm; its external measurement is proportional to the size, with an average of 360mm… There are three sizes of visors bearing the numbers 1, 2 or 3, according to the cut given to them, and each series corresponds with the head sizes in the following manner: visor no. 1, for head sizes of 54 centimetres and above, visor no. 2, for head sizes of 55 and 56 centimetres, and visor no. 3, for head sizes of 57 centimetres and below. The ventilation slots are on the left and right of the turban, about 15mm below its upper edge, and about 7mm in front of the side piping. The copper ventilation slots are pierced with seven holes and painted in the color of the crown. It passes through the crown, as well as the interior canvas (linen) frame, and is folded inwards with 6 teeth.[145]

Photo (28): This young *cavalier* of the 20th Regiment of *Chasseurs à Cheval* (Vendôme) poses in a studio with his képi of the 1884 pattern by his side instead of the shako. **(YO)**

> ...The interior frame is made of unbleached linen cloth composed of two pieces and joined by a stitch at the upper and rear part, and is placed between the cloth and the sheepskin over its entire height... the inner leather lining is made of black sheepskin… the sheepskin leather which lines the upper inside of the crown possesses a cut-out round shape, where a small piece of white fabric is intended to display the man's

[145] Ministère de la Guerre, *Description de l'Uniforme des Différents Corps de l'Armée* (1885), pp.131-132.

> registration number and the year of the képi's entry into service. Seen from the side, the képi has the shape of a truncated cone with an elliptical base. Its front edge has a vertical line: the rear edge is strongly inclined towards the front, at the assembly of the turban and the headband, a roundness to accommodate the base of the skull which must fit completely into it...[146]

This excerpt, from the *Description de l'Uniforme des Différents Corps de l'Armée*, provides an overview of what all the standard 1884 models' construction was like, which therefore includes all of the branches which the 1884s were issued to, apart from the Colonial Infantry. At this time, the Colonial Infantry used the 1884 as well, though with a slight difference in construction and appearance, specifically of the visor. The visors of the képis of the Colonial Infantry were in accordance with the regulations of the Navy Ministry - the underside of the visors were painted in green. Unfortunately, the exact reasoning for this in the archives could not be located.

Photo (29): The majority of these barbed wire-layers of the 38th Colonial Infantry Regiment (Toulon) wear the 1884 pattern képis in dark blue cloth with red numerals and piping. **(ML)**

It is also worth noting that while officers typically had the luxury of obtaining private purchase and commercially manufactured képis of varying patterns and designs (which can never be fully accounted for in studies due to the endless variety of privately-manufactured items from tailors nationwide), NCOs on the other hand typically wore the same pattern headdress as other ranks', but with some slight modifications, notably to the chinstrap and buttons which were typically of gilt, as according to the Ministry of War's published regulations from 1885.[147]

All of these variants of the 1884 saw service into the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, and due to the apparentness of the *garance* colour of képis used by the infantry, they were still typically seen as too conspicuous (despite there being no such evidence of this believed

[146] Ministère de la Guerre, *Description de l'Uniforme des Différents Corps de l'Armée* (1885), p.132.
[147] Ibid., pp.132-133.

conspicuousness resulting in higher casualty counts), and thus a solution to address this had to be derived, which was in accordance with the modernists who vouched for practicality. During the first weeks of the conflict and with the massive arrival of reservists and mobilised soldiers, the commissariat could not provide enough covers for képis, which had already been in service for the 1884 képi since 1902. It was therefore deemed of utmost urgency to fabricate képi covers of different material types as long as it was close to the "official" blue. The majority of soldiers however, were equipped with a pre-existing cloth cover, designated the 1902/12 which was of *gris de fer bleuté*, the same colour as the 1877 greatcoat.

Photo (30): French infantrymen in a frontline trench wearing 1902/12 cloth covers on their Model 1884 képis. **(YO)**

For officers, the regulations for entering the war also mentioned the use of blue covers or a blackened oilcloth cover on their képi. With this practice however, nothing distinguished them from their troops except for cuff rankings. An exception from the high command therefore allowed them to hollow out a window in the front of the cover revealing the regimental number and a portion of the rank braid. Unfortunately, this provision had the immediate consequence of making them prime targets for enemy marksmen, and it proved counterproductive, as it was deemed pointless to hide a képi with a red top if the gold braid was to be made even more visible due to the windowed cover. As a result, this measure was banned on 14 October 1914.[148]

As previously discussed in the section, *The Clothing Crisis of 1914/15 & the Introduction of the Horizon Blue Uniform*, it was of the utmost urgency to address the clothing crisis that plagued the French army due to the disastrously high casualties which led to a mass liquidation of the pre-war uniform patterns (with the Model 1884 képis included). Therefore, during the timeframe of the Battle of the Marne, the French War Ministry had looked to introduce képis in the newly adopted light blue cloth, which led to the development of the simplified képis.

[148] Coune, *Képi: une coiffure française,* p.129.

Photo (31): Soldiers of the 305th Infantry Regiment (Riom) wearing cloth képi covers of the 1902/12 pattern with sewn unit patches. The seated soldier in the middle row, holding the rifle, wears a cover in oilcloth. **(YO)**

Photo below (32): An officer of the 269th Reserve Infantry Regiment (Nancy) wears a cloth képi cover with a window to show his unit number and rank. **(YO)**

The Simplified Képi: the 1884/14 and the 1914 models

The directive of 9 September 1914 required the manufacture of all new caps with the recently adopted light blue cloth, but tailors continued to assemble képis according to the old standards, with the style of the multi-piece construction that made up the shape of the 1884 képi. By right, the manufacturers that were in charge of fabricating the headwear should have adhered to the new notice of September regarding the commencement of the development of the new simplified pattern, however this notice was ineffectual and defunct in practice. This was largely due to the desire to liquidate the existing stocks of the *gris de fer bleuté* as well as the imported cloth, which therefore led to the creation of the 1884/14, a pattern which was made typically in a few different colours: the existing *gris de fer bleuté*, English imported cloth, and the newly adopted light blue cloth. These képis were manufactured according to the pre-war regulations regarding construction, even down to the piping. However, as a time-saving (for manufacturing) and economisation measure, the piping was eventually dispensed with as according to the decision of 2 November 1914, and the 1884/14s saw fabrication without the piping.[149] This eventually led to the steady transition into manufacturing the simplified Model 1914s as per the notice of September 1914.

[149] Coune, *Képi: une coiffure française,* p.120.

Photo (33): Young soldiers wear uniforms in very light blue cloth, typical of Spanish imports. The tall soldier in the centre is wearing a light blue 1884/14 képi with dark blue piping which ignores the stipulations of 9 September 1914. Interestingly, the chinstrap is missing. From left to right, the first, second, and fourth soldiers wear Model 1914 képis with braided straps, demonstrating a sense of *esprit de corps*. **(YO)**

Right photo (34): Soldiers of the 215th Infantry Regiment (Albi) man their positions in the Vosges during the winter of 1914/15. Most of them wear the 1884/14 model képi in English bluish-grey cloth without the piping, while some others wear the Model 1914 1st type. **(YO)**

The notice of 9 September 1914 officially declared that a simplified model (without piping) of the issued képi in light blue was to be distributed to all soldiers of the metropolitan army (this officially took effect ten days later, on the 19th).[150] Unlike the 1884 model, there were to be no variations in colours or patterns as according to determining an army branch, apart from the *Chasseurs*. The *Chasseurs*, for their part, were subject to special measures: their képi was made of bluish iron-grey cloth with a daffodil yellow-coloured unit number on the front. The decision for the simplification was due to the fact that the pre-war 1884 pattern was determined to be too complicated

[150] *SHD*, 5 N 567, «*Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes*» 10 October 1915.

to manufacture during the urgency of wartime as it possessed too many details, which therefore slowed down the manufacturing process. It was thus decided that practicality over aesthetic would be the priority, and there was to be no more intricate detailing when it came to distinguishing branches according to the colours and design of the piping. Branches were now determined by unit stamps applied inside the képi, or the embossed chinstrap buttons which typically demonstrated the branch of service of the wearer.

Képi Modèle 1914 1st Type: The French soldiers of late 1914 - 1915 wore the Model 1914 1st Type Képi in horizon blue cloth as their primary headgear, a pattern which replaced the pre-war Model 1884. This specimen does not have the regimental number to the front of the képi, which is in accordance with the stipulations of the December 1914 notice banning the use of unit numbers on headwear for all branches except *Chasseurs* battalions. This particular képi, which had come out of family succession, belonged to a soldier of the 74th Infantry Regiment (Rouen). **(YO)**

Due to further improved practicality of production, the new model had a reduced linen and sheepskin interior, and the exterior portion of the crown and the turban formed only one band whose ends were conjoined by two seams placed at the front and back, without any piping. Before the practice was banned in December 1914, the regimental number was indicated on the front by a

cut-out number sewn on a coloured cloth base, each of a colour defined by the new regulations. This new model, the 1914 1st Type, which had been designed to replace the pre-war 1884 and the wartime 1884/14 patterns, thus became the standard wartime képis. These képis proved simple to produce. They were essentially a simplified version of the 1884, hence the designation of a "simplified" képi. It took the basic shape of the 1884 and the 1884/14 pattern but was typically lower in shape with ornamental components significantly reduced, while the interior remained the same.

Left photo (35): These stretcher bearers of the 14th Medical Section all wear Model 1914 1st Type Képis in horizon blue cloth. Notice the variation in colour of the ventilation slots. The ventilation slots on the képi of the man seated on the right are black (like the authentic specimen demonstrated on the previous page), while all the other képis worn by his comrades have ventilation slots in light blue. **(YO)**

Photo below (36): French reservists of the 4th Squad, 9th Company of the 56th Territorial Infantry Regiment (Belley) wearing Model 1914 1st Type Képis with unit patches to the front. **(YO)**

Left photo (37): French soldiers of the 358th Infantry Regiment (Bruyères-Corcieux) in a trench in the Argonne sector, c.1915. They all wear Model 1914 1st Type Képis. **(YO)**

Képi Modèle 1914 1st Type with Anti-Gas Goggles:
This first type specimen, which belonged to a soldier of the 8th Infantry Regiment (Saint-Omer), is of horizon blue cloth. With the introduction of poison gas onto the battlefield in the spring of 1915, the French soldier was therefore equipped with anti-gas lenses and a thick face-pad soaked in chemicals to combat this threat. The anti-gas lenses strapped to this képi are of the first models used as of May 1915. Though this képi is the same 1914 pattern as the previously shown first type example, there are some distinct differences due to manufacturer features: the visor of this specimen is flat, the overall profile of the képi is lower, and the ventilation slots are positioned higher than the ones on the previously shown first type képi. The soldier who wore this képi had lined the interior of the sweatband with newspaper to act as extra padding and/or insulation during cold weather. **(YO)**

Photo (38): Soldiers of the 158th Infantry Regiment (Bruyères-Corcieux) in their trenches, c.1915. Many of the infantrymen have anti-gas goggles strapped to their Model 1914 1st Type Képis. **(YO)**

On 9 December 1914, the second model of the "all-arms képi" was described. It was made of light blue cloth and was of the simplified style, much like the 1st Type. They were as simple to produce and cost 1.50 francs to manufacture.[151] As according to the *Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes* of 9 December 1914, the képi of all arms (apart from *Chasseurs*), was of:

...light blue cloth, of a simplified model described by the notice of 27 September 1914. The recess of the cap will be removed; the top will flow to the upper edges of the crown. The ventilation slots and buttons will be the same shade as the cloth (the buttons will feature the branch of service of the wearer). No piping, no badge, no numbers.[152]

Képi Modèle 1914 2nd Type:
This 2nd Type specimen, manufactured by the tailor L.Joly of Le Puy in light greyish-blue cloth, is typical of imported material. This colour is identical to the Model 1914 2nd Type "Poiret" Greatcoat of the Simplified Pattern, marked to the 112th Infantry Regiment (Toulon), which is displayed at the *Musée de la Grande Guerre* in Meaux. Notice the abolition of the recess of the crown on this képi, which effectively eliminates the formation of water pockets from the top of the headdress during rainy weather. This example does not have a unit number to the front which is in accordance with the notice of 9 December 1914. **(YO)**

Thus, the notice of December 1914 had therefore officially introduced the light

[151] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Allocation de matières premières et prix de base de confection pour les nouveaux uniformes*» 12 December 1914.
[152] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes*» 9 December 1914.

blue 2nd Type Képi as the primary headwear for the French soldier alongside the 1st Type, which had already been in circulation with the desire to replace the 1884 and the 1884/14 models. Therefore, the appearance of the French army still did not appear homogeneous until the end of 1915 due to the mix-and-match of several képi models in the field. In an effort to practice homogeneity of colour, the *Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes* from 9 December 1914 had therefore demanded the new 2nd Type képi for the metropolitan army to be in "light blue cloth, same as the simplified 1st Type model described in the notice from 27 September 1914."[153]

Photo (39): French infantrymen pose for a photograph, 21 May 1915, wearing the Képi Model 1914 2nd Type without the unit patch to the front. **(YO)**

As previously mentioned, the notice described the removal of the recess in the cap for the top to be blended with the edges of the crown. Therefore, this eliminated the formation of water pockets from the top of the képi during rainy weather. This was decided, because on 27 November 1914, General Joffre had noticed that the recessed top of the crown retained water - he therefore requested that the central crown henceforth be sewn to the same level as the top edges of the cap.[154] This was the primary factor which differentiated the 1st Type from the 2nd Type képis. Furthermore, although the notice described the ventilation slots as possessing the same colour as the cloth of the képi, in reality, much like the 1st Type and the 1884/14 and 1884 models, a variety of colours were used.[155] Additionally, the notice from December 1914 was the first piece of published regulations that declared the abolition of possessing the unit number on all képis for all branches, apart from *Chasseurs* Battalions. This was, however, commonly ignored by the soldiers, and it is very common to find period photographs of the men at the front proudly displaying their unit number on their headdress.

Photo (40): This Territorial of the 46th Regiment (Reims) wears the Model 1914 2nd Type with the unit patch to the front, ignoring the notice of 9 December 1914. **(YO)**

[153] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes*» 9 December 1914.
[154] Coune, *Képi: une coiffure française,* p.122.
[155] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes*» 9 December 1914.

In the following months, further directives were added for modifications to the usage of these simplified képis with regards to uniformity and aesthetic appearance: On 28 January 1915, colonial troops were authorised to feature an anchor cut in scarlet cloth to the front of the képi. This applied to both the 1st and 2nd Types in service within the colonial army.[156] The *Chasseurs* on the other hand, as mentioned earlier, were the only branch still permitted by the directive to wear the unit number (in daffodil yellow) sewn to the front.[157]

Photo (41): Colonial infantrymen of the 6th Regiment wearing cut-out scarlet cloth anchors of the colonial army to the front of their képis. **(YO)**

Overall, the simplified képis of the 1884, 1884/14, 1st and 2nd Type models remained the standard-issue combat headgear for the French army up until the introduction of the Adrian helmet. However, these models weren't the only types worn at the frontline. The next section scrutinises képis of commercial manufacture and private purchase, which were choices that many officers and NCOs preferred for better style and comfort.

Photo (42): French soldiers pose for a group photo, c.1915. The variety of képi patterns is interesting, ranging from the standard issue first type Model 1914s in different shades of blue cloth, Model 1884/14s in English cloth, as well as commercially-produced képis (which will be looked at in the next section). Note the prevalence of anti-gas goggles strapped to their képis. **(YO)**

[156] Coune, *Képi: une coiffure française,* p.127.
[157] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes*», 9 December 1914.

Private Purchase & Commercially Manufactured Képis, 1914 - 1918

French officers and NCOs typically equipped themselves with private purchase or commercially manufactured képis of various cloth, fabric, and felt materials, which in fact ignored the regulations of the issued directive of 9 December 1914 which clearly stated that "Officers should wear an Other Ranks' képi of light blue cloth", referring to the regulation models of both the 1884/14 and the 1914.[158] In spite of this, officers sought after more luxurious methods of style and comfort and took it upon their own budget to do so. The construction of private purchase képis mostly took after the designs of the old patterns, such as the *Polo* and *Foulard* designs, integrated with ornamental features such as the pre-war Hungarian knots and rank bars to adorn the képis manufactured in the new regulation cloth (though it was fairly common to see Spanish and English imported cloth used). Such privately purchased képis were manufactured by an array of tailor firms nationwide, from Marseille to Tours, with perhaps one of the most notable tailors which was popular among officers being *La Belle Jardinière*, a Parisian emporium known for their high prices which reflected the quality of their products.

Infantry Lieutenant's Demi-Foulard Képi:
This Bévière (Tours) tailored private purchase infantry lieutenant's *Demi-Foulard* képi in horizon blue cloth is of the manufactures from the first semester of 1915. The lining is of high quality blue satin. The *Demi-Foulard* style was a popular pattern from 1884 onwards, with the Hungarian knot for ranking also still being carried on into wartime productions. Although officers' headwear were typically adorned with brass regimental numbering, the lieutenant who wore this képi adhered to the regulations issued in December 1914, which called for unit numbers to be removed from headdress. **(YO)**

[158] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Notice Descriptive de Nouveaux Uniformes*» 9 December 1914.

Left photo (43): A French Hotchkiss machine gun team of the 88th Territorial Infantry Regiment (Lorient) in a frontline trench, c.1915. The standing captain with a képi wears one in the *Demi-Foulard* pattern, like the authentic specimen shown on the previous page. **(YO)**

The emergence of officers' képis in blue cloth had appeared since the descriptive notice of 9 September 1914, which described that officers were only allowed to have képis made of blue cloth, eradicating the previous headdress iconic of the period of the *Belle Époque*.[159] However, prioritising fashion over practicality, this led to a variety of different styles of képis being worn by officers, and it is simply impossible to cover every variant as the possibilities of these designs are endless; the interpretation of the regulations was limited only by the imagination of the officers themselves or the master tailors.

Right photo (44): A captured soldier of the 164th Infantry Regiment (Verdun) pictured in Münster, 1 June 1918. He wears a commercially-manufactured képi in horizon blue cloth. **(YO)**

However, the ornamental structure of the *Belle Époque* period which had carried over into the designs of the privately-purchased and commercially-manufactured képis in light blue cloth technically went against the

[159] *SHD*, 5 N 567, «*Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes*» 10 October 1915.

regulations of 9 December 1914, which prohibited any indication of rank on the headdress, particularly on ones used at the frontline.[160] This was in accordance with the law mentioned earlier, where officers and NCOs were expected to wear the regulation képi in light blue cloth, a demand which was wholefully ignored. However, certain officers and NCOs had abided by these directives and had thus frontline-intended simplified examples, typically in the *Polo* or *Foulard* form and with any lack of indication of rank apart from a regimental number in gold cannetille. These examples typically possessed very little in the way of ornamental furnishings. On the other hand, képis worn at the rear almost entirely abided by the rules of the pre-war period, apart from them being manufactured in the new light blue cloth which was in accordance with the latest directives of the autumn and winter of 1914 and 1915. These headdresses usually possessed rank soutaches, Hungarian knots, embroidered attributes or unit numbers, or even a cloth band of distinction for certain specialities of the Health Service.

The képis intended for frontline use typically complied with the notice of 9 December 1914, which prohibited any indication of rank on the headdress, and therefore had a lack in overall furnishings.[161] The material of the képis was often in fine cloth, and rank distinctions could be made in the form of buttons, which were typically of gilt, covered cloth, or a smooth corozo style. However, many officers and NCOs made no distinctions between képis used in the reserve line and frontline, and used highly furnished and ornamented headdress in the frontline. It was a common trend for easy rank distinction among troops as well as a sense of *esprit de corps*.

Photo (45): Captured French soldiers, several of whom are officers and NCOs, wear either the new helmet or privately purchased képis. **(YO)**

However, there was an issue with this new rule. These new, more discreet models caused breaches of discipline of the regulatory salute of enlisted men to officers due to the absence or concealment of rank indications on these képis. For this reason, Clemenceau decreed on 22 February 1918 that only the képi in the pre-war colors would henceforth be authorised from 1

[160] *SHD*, 16 N 2661-1, «*Notice Descriptive des Nouveaux Uniformes*» 9 December 1914.
[161] Ibid.

June 1918 onwards. It is also recalled in the note that the headband must include the number of the regiment or the regulatory attribute. In theory, the officer's képi in horizon blue cloth therefore disappeared before the end of the war.[162]

Photo (46): The majority of these officers of the 3rd Engineer Regiment (Arras) wear private purchase képis in the *Polo* or *Foulard* pattern, indicative of the style of the pre-war period. **(YO)**

Private Purchase Polo Képi of a *Chasseur Aspirant*:
This privately-purchased *Polo* specimen belonged to Louis Pierre Jules Maraval, a *Chasseur Aspirant* in the 11th *Chasseurs* Battalion (Annecy). He wore this particular képi when he was stationed in Germany as part of the French army's (Army of the Rhine) occupation following the German defeat in November 1918. In the 1940's, Maraval went on to be recognised with France's highest military award, the Legion of Honour. **(YO)**

[162] Coune, *Képi: une coiffure française,* pp.130-131.

From this section, it is clear to see the immense pride that the French felt about the representation of their identity through their headgear. The képi, a longstanding tradition in the French army, became the identity of their forces, just as the shako was in the days of the great Napoleon. The pre-war legacy that the képi had on the French was so immense, that it was an aspect of the uniform that carried on well into the Great War. An amalgamation of different patterns, the overall appearance, the simple and economic production abilities of them, and the uniqueness of the private purchase and commercially produced headwear all added to the overall representation of the French army.

The persistence on maintaining the *esprit de corps* of the army, encapsulated in their headdress, was a concern for military traditionalists, just as it was in the days of the pre-war period when Berteaux's persistence on modernisation was shrugged off by the republicans as well as the likes of Georges Scott and Édouard Detaille. As seen, a compromise was eventually met, which permitted the traditional képis to be kept, but in a way that was adapted to more practical patterns and colours.

However, as fashionable and as popular as the képi was in the representation and identity of the French military, it became more apparent that this headwear did not provide sufficient protection for the heads of the soldiers in the muddy trenches of Artois and Champagne, nor were they suitable in preventing wooden splinters from the forested regions of the Vosges from splitting men's skulls. Thus, came a time when one had to sacrifice the aesthetic of such a headdress for something more effective to save the lives of their men, who in the long run, could guarantee the future security of France if they stayed in the fight longer.

Once again, a nationwide mobilisation of ideas occurred that sought after the creation of a piece of protective equipment. This will be investigated in the next section, Chapter IV, which talks about the production, distribution, the effectiveness, and the legacy of the steel helmet that became the identity of the *Poilu* that the French think so highly of today, over one hundred years later.

V. The Steel Helmet
1915 - 1918

The Steel Helmet During the Great War, its Production, & its Distribution

This section will cover the standard-issue steel "Adrian" helmet during the Great War by studying its development, construction, distribution, and utilisation in the field. Due to limitations in source material, this section will not cover the development and trials of the commercially-manufactured models or prototypes that eventually led to the creation of the Adrian helmet, but rather just the standard-issue Model 1915. There will also be a run-down of the developmental phases of head protection that led to the design and mass production of the first modern combat helmet patented by Intendant-General Auguste-Louis Adrian.

"In November 1914, Joffre rejected a proposal to outfit French soldiers with steel helmets, arguing that he would wring 'the Boche's neck' before two months were up."[163] However, as the war dragged on longer than expected, it became more apparent to the army that a more effective form of head protection should be distributed to the soldiers on the frontline. No longer did the aesthetic and appearance of a uniform take priority over practicality and life-saving measures that could save a significant number of men. Therefore, the compromise of the modernisation efforts truly succeeded, and further developments of head protection soon came along.

Prior to adopting a steel helmet, a steel skullcap, officially referred to as *calottes protège-tête métalliques* or informally, *cervellière*, was issued to French soldiers and were worn under the képis.[164] They were issued in three sizes.[165] However, these skull caps, though somewhat effective in reducing fatalities as a result of head wounds, were unpopular with soldiers due to discomfort. Oftentimes, the soldiers wore the *cervellières* on top of their képis, much to the discontent of their superiors. To rectify this, On 19 June 1915, an order was issued demanding that troops use a piece of light blue cloth to line the interior of the *cervellière*.[166]

However as uncomfortable as the *cervellière* was, the results of its effectiveness were excellent. In May 1915, surgeon Jean-Francois-Auguste Le Dentu, in communication with the Academy of Medicine, clearly highlighted the relative immunity a steel bowl had on a fighter.[167] It was therefore a question of perfecting this initial idea by transforming this steel hemisphere into a complete helmet. Thus, a more practical solution for a mass-produced protective headwear was officially confirmed in May 1915, with the first letter directed towards the generals commanding the army and the directors of states and services being drafted on 20 May 1915, specifying that "it was decided that the troops of the Infantry and Engineers will be equipped

[163] Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary 1914-1918* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), p.114.
[164] *SHD*, 16 N 2661, The distribution of steel skullcaps to the front, 18 March 1915.
[165] Ibid.
[166] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (14), The utilisation of steel skullcaps during the summer season, 19 June 1915.
[167] François Audouy, *Contribution à l'Étude des Traumatismes du Crâne par Projectiles de Guerre: Indication Opératoire, Technique Opératoire,* (1917), pp.44-45.

with a steel helmet. Distribution of this headdress will commence at the start of the month."[168] Under such conditions, the manufacture and distribution of *cervellières* were therefore stopped, but the remaining stock were distributed among the clothing warehouses in the regions of Lyon, Dijon, Tours, Orléans, and Le Mans.[169]

Later in June, the issue regarding the limitation of helmet distributions arose and was addressed by the Ministry of War. Although the steel helmets were already being issued to troops that month, it would take several months before all frontline servicemen were to receive the new helmet, which meant that there was still an abundance of the *cervellières* in stock as well as on the field. The Director of Intendance, Defait, issued an order on the 19 June 1915, specifying that in accordance with the opinion expressed by the General Commander-in-Chief, the leftover stock of the *cervellières* would be distributed to troops of the interior during the summer season, as the priority of receiving the newly-produced steel helmets would go to troops at the frontline.

Photo (47): A soldier of the 54th Infantry Regiment (Compiègne) wearing a *cervellière* on top of his képi. **(ML)**

After the formal adoption of the idea of the helmet, it was decided that the construction of the Adrian helmet would consist of a rounded half-spherical bowl, internally lined with a cloth and sheepskin liner that conformed to the interior shape of the bowl. The bowl was externally furnished on its anteroposterior median line with a curved piece (crest) and, on the frontal region, with an insignia of the branch of service. Finally, it was completed at the front by a wide visor that protected the eyes, at the back by a neck guard, which also allowed the man wearing it to shoot comfortably in all positions and to sleep without having to remove his helmet, if necessary. A thin leather chinstrap was attached to loops on the interior sides of the helmet, at the point of the seam that joins the visor and the neck guard, which allowed the helmet to be securely fastened to the head. The cap, crest, visor and neck cover, riveted or welded to each other, were made of rolled sheet steel. It was deemed that this sheet of steel must be hard enough to withstand low velocity rounds as well as shell fragments and bullet-filled projectiles. The

[168] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (63), The decision to distribute steel helmets to the Infantry and Engineers, 20 May 1915.
[169] Ibid.

steel, which was seven tenths of a millimeter thick, resisted a tensile force of forty-three kilograms per square millimeter, the corresponding elongation being approximately fifteen to eighteen per hundred.[170] The complete helmet weighed six hundred to eight hundred grams.[171]

With this design in mind, which clearly had a balance of both aesthetic and practicality, on 26 May 1915, the Ministry of War sent a letter to Joseph Joffre, General of Division and Commander-in-Chief of the French army, confirming the commencement of the fabrication of steel helmets which were to be adopted for the Infantry, Artillery, and Engineer branches.[172] The letter further clarified that "the first hundred industrially manufactured helmets have just arrived at the 5th department and their examination gave rise to observations concerning in particular the adaptation of the liner to the different sizes. The final development (of the helmet) will require a few more days and manufacturing in large quantities can begin during the first half of June."[173] The French Ministry of War had commissioned five contractors (later six) in the provision of the steel helmets (which were manufactured in nine different sizes and were shipped in boxes of fifty of the same size) and the first quantities distributed were as follows:[174]

Weeks	Quantity
1	10,000
2	18,000
3	20,000
4	30,000
5 & onwards	45,000

As for the order of supplying the army, it was clearly outlined that the helmets produced would have to be sent from the factories to the warehouses, from where they would be sent to the armies. On 2 June 1915, Lieutenant Colonel Ponidron stressed that the helmets must be distributed among all the warehouses in proportion to the workforce supplied by each warehouse. There was also no establishment of an emergency order directing any particular priority towards any specific army, however there was an order issued that certain branches of the army receive priority in the reception of the helmet, with the utmost importance going to the Infantry, then the Engineers, and lastly the Artillery.[175] This had largely to do with the respective branches being

[170] Audouy, *Contribution à l'Étude des Traumatismes du Crâne par Projectiles de Guerre*, pp.45-46.
[171] Ibid., 46.
[172] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (63), The decision to distribute steel helmets, 26 May 1915.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid. Unable to locate the official documents naming the makers of the helmet, but the known makers were: *Japy Frères, La Compagnie des Compteurs (Compagnie de fabrication de compteurs et matériel d'usines à gaz), Delmas (Ets Léon Delmas), Dupeyron (Ets Auguste Dupeyron), Le Jouet de Paris (Société Industrielle de Ferblanterie SIF),* and *Reflex (SCS Gosset & Cie, Phares Auteroche)*. All of them were Parisian-based.
[175] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (68), The distribution of helmets, 2 June 1915.

exposed to the dangers of warfare, with the Infantry and Engineers being in the frontline and therefore directly exposed to more life-threatening elements as opposed to the Artillery, who were typically behind the line.

On that same day (2 June 1915), Joffre released a statement of the Ministry of War's justification on the adoption of this new form of head protection being to do with "protecting the head of men against shell splinters and shrapnel", which were to be issued with haste to the Infantry, *Chasseurs*, Colonial Infantry, Engineers, and Artillery, which would formally be adopted as the new campaign headdress.[176]

Joffre specified that the distribution of the new helmets was to be done through warehouses and would begin around the middle of June. He also outlined the characteristics of the new helmet, by specifying that the material would be of steel, and the crest on top of the helmet would be in the shape of the *bourgignotte*, which clearly took influence from Detaille's helmet designed in the pre-war era which was previously covered in the earlier chapters. Joffre specified that the colours applied on the new helmets in the factory would be in "light blue" to match the colour of the new uniform. Furthermore, it became apparent to the Ministry of War that it would be necessary to be able to distinguish the branch of service as according to the insignia on the front of the helmet, as almost all branches of the army by then were wearing the new light blue uniform, as opposed to the ancient kit of the pre-war era where the uniforms of each arm of service possessed their own unique colours and characteristics that made them easily distinguishable. As of 20 June 1915, these attributes were specified to the following branches:[177]

Branch of Service	**Description of the Insignia**
Infantry & Cavalry	Grenade
Chasseurs	Hunting Horn
Artillery	Two Crossed Cannons
Engineers	Cuirass with a "Pot on the Head"
Colonial Infantry	Anchor with Grenade

[176] Ibid.
On 17 June 1915, Maurice Pellé, writing on behalf of the Grand Quartier Général decided that the helmets were to be issued to the foot squadrons of cavalry divisions and to the cycling platoons of corps cavalry regiments, and they were to be distributed at the same to those of the Infantry: *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (79), The decision to distribute helmets to foot squadrons of cavalry divisions and to the cycling platoons of corps cavalry regiments, 17 June 1915.
[177] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (82), «*La mise en service du nouveau casque métallique*» 20 June 1915.

Photo (48): Young conscripts from the 6th squad of the 128th Infantry Regiment (Amiens-Abbeville) from the class of 1916 pose for a group photo, 20 February 1916. Their helmets are in a luminous horizon blue colour, typical of the first productions of 1915. **(YO)**

Even with the restrictions on the uniqueness of the uniform in the service of different branches, the designs of the varying helmet insignias still presented themselves as a form of military fashion statement. Soldiers of all ranks were designated to receive the helmets with the respective badges of their branch of service, and higher-grade servicemen did not receive any special furnishings with regards to insignia, though plenty took the opportunity to customise them, either adhering to regulations or simply ignoring them. This demonstrated many troops' persistence on maintaining an aesthetic and stylish appearance, as the army had taken immense pride in the appearance of their military since the days of Napoleon - it was a grand form of symbolism.

On 20 June 1915, the official document written by the Ministry of War announcing the first fabrication of the helmet was released: "the contracts awarded for the supply of the new metal helmet will enter an active execution phase. The first deliveries from the *Japy* factories will take place at the beginning of next week; those of the five factories in Paris, the following week."[178] *Japy Frères*, a clock making firm, was the first company commissioned by the Ministry of War to produce helmets in cooperation with the design of Louis Adrian. However, it

[178] Ibid.

must be noted that before these large, Parisian firms were sought after to mass-produce helmets for the army, traditional military equipment manufacturers had been expected to produce useful head protection for the Infantry, taking on the Adrian design. *Franck & Siraudin*, traditional manufacturers of the beautiful pre-war cavalry helmets of the 1872/74 models were not adopted as the official manufacturer of the new regulation helmet due to a multitude of reasons. Firstly, the material of their commercially-produced helmets of the Adrian design were of tempered steel, which meant that a high velocity impact would shatter the helmet, proving it to be quite dangerous for its wearer with the potentiality of it inflicting life-threatening head wounds (consequently these tempered steel helmets were banned at the end of September 1915).[179] Secondly, the firm did not have the equipment to produce the new regulation insignia, and thus relied on the pre-war shako insignia designs which could not be issued en masse.[180] Lastly, their lacking abilities in mass producing headwear due to equipment limitations and incapable quick delivery times proved that they were impotent of being an official supplier of the army.[181]

This demonstrates the changing nature of warfare in which the army has to adapt to these rising challenges in order to suit the needs for the army. The old, traditional makers of helmets that relied on inadequate material for modern combat saw a shift towards preference of firms that could churn out millions of modern combat helmets. This does fit into the thesis of Goya, who argues that the changing nature of warfare forced the French army to adapt. In this case, it is relevant to the mass production of helmets as the initial periods of observation and tests determined that not only was the adoption of a steel helmet ultimately necessary in minimising fatalities, but they could not rely on the traditional pre-war makers (of cavalry and tempered steel helmets) due to the poor quality of materials used. Therefore, the French had to adapt to the modernisation of warfare through industrial means by seeking out new firms who would be able to mass-produce protective equipment.

One of the advantages that came with commissioning several mass-producing firms unlike *Franck & Siraudin* was the ability to cater to the production of helmets in several sizes in a limited time frame. The classifications of the sizing had to be constructed pertaining to soldiers with different head sizes - it was therefore decided that the helmets were going to be manufactured in nine different sizes. According to the notice of the new helmet from 30 June 1915, the sizing classifications are as follows:[182]

Classification	Size (cm)
A1	54
A2	55
A3	56

[179] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2,* p.473.
[180] Ibid., p.475.
[181] Ibid.
[182] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (6), «*Notice sur le nouveau casque métallique*» 30 June 1915.

B1	57
B2	58
B3	59
C1	60
C2	61
C3	62

The sizing process was quite technical: an indication of the size was stamped into the leather liner, and an ink stamp was applied to the inside of the crown alongside the manufacturer stamp. Furthermore, as according to the notice of 30 June, "strips of cloth cut into shape, a certain number of which will be attached to all shipments of helmets, and intended to be inserted if necessary between the turban and the base, will allow the adaptation of the helmet to all conformations of the head."[183] These pieces of cloth, which were recycled material/scraps from old uniforms or scraps of leftover unused cloth from the factories, served as a backing for the leather liner, allowing it to be attached to the interior prongs of the helmet and thus enabled it to be comfortably conformed to the head of the wearer.

Following the order for the first manufactures of the new helmet, the issue of logistics and deliveries to the front had to be addressed: helmets would be sent at the request of the central administration as and when received at the various clothing warehouses responsible for ensuring their supply to the armies (according to the indications by the generals responsible), and until up to the limit of available supplies to the front, which bases (reserve storages) were to be reserved for replacements. Shipments to warehouses would also be made simultaneously as production progresses. However, for the colonial troops, who, normally, were not dependent on warehouses for the supply of clothing items, the helmets were sent directly to the colonial depots respectively concerned both for the colonial elements stationed at the front and for their reinforcement detachments.[184] For all branches of the army, it was specified that helmets will always be shipped, carefully packaged, in sufficiently strong crates, with each crate containing fifty helmets of the same size and the branch or subdivision of the branch for which the helmets are intended for. Distributions to the troops at the front were made by a regiment or unit forming a corps, in the order and under the conditions which was specified by the General Commander-in-Chief.[185]

On 3 August 1915, a question was raised by the General Commander-in-Chief as to whether or not the steel helmet should also be distributed to the Health Service, specifically corps doctors as well as to doctors and nurses in divisional stretcher-bearer groups and corps stretcher-bearer groups, with the exception of the section of hygiene and prophylaxis.[186] On 18

[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (30), The decision to distribute helmets to the Health Service, 3 August 1915.

August, the Ministry of War issued a response, sharing agreement with the General Commander-in-Chief with regards to seeing the necessities to issue helmets to men of the Health Service, and demanded further knowledge regarding the quantities and the logistics of deliveries to the respective warehouses. Furthermore, a question was raised regarding the necessity of creating a branch insignia for the Health Service, with the possibility of a "caduceus model" being established.[187] Thus, the Health Service received their own individual branch insignia, in the form of a caduceus with the serpent of Epidaurus encircling the mirror of prudence, framed by oak leaves. Calling on the traditional imagery of medicine, this stylistic choice was a nod to the historical design of medical services (though it is important to note that the French army mistakenly refers to what is the Rod of Asclepius as the Caduceus, a common error).

Modèle 1915 Adrian Helmet - Health Service: This helmet which is badged to the Health Service and attributed to an army pharmacist is in almost mint condition. This specimen, of the first productions, is in its factory-applied horizon blue configuration. **(YO)**

Later that month, on 11 August, it was also decided that troops of the Army of Africa would receive the new helmet. This branch of the army was among the last to receive the helmet, as a sense of traditionalism was initially hoped to have been preserved, with the iconic look of the North African troops being not only a pride of French military fashion (another example of French favouring of aesthetic over practicality), but in accordance with Islamic practices of the time. However, the General Chief of Staff, Graziani, came up with a compromise which allowed the Army of Africa to retain their traditional headdress but simultaneously be issued the new helmet. The idea was that the chéchia would be kept as a secondary headdress and worn in cantonments and on marches away from the enemy and the frontline.[188] He noted that there were

[187] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (121), «*Projet de Circulaire attribuant le nouveau casque d'Infanterie aux Zouaves et Tirailleurs*» 18 August 1915.
[188] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (39), The decision to retain the chéchia

only advantages in providing the *Tirailleurs* and the *Zouaves* with a helmet that protected them against shrapnel and debris. Furthermore, he justified that troops in the Army of Africa had already been accustomed to wearing a helmet in Morocco and on colonial expeditions; riflemen wore cork helmets without showing the slightest aversion to them. To Graziani, this was a justifiable enough reason for the adoption of a steel helmet, which apart from a slight difference in weight, proved no other hindrance to the form of practicality.

However, according to a document from 18 August 1915 regarding the topic of the adoption of the steel helmet for the Army of Africa, it was noted that initially, the idea of such a change in headdress for the North Africans was met with skepticism. It was at first decided that the metal helmet would not be distributed to the *Zouaves* and the *Tirailleurs*, as for aesthetic and religious reasons, considering that their traditional headwear, the chéchia, would have been more representative of the identity of the Army of Africa. However, by 16 August 1915, it became clear that the new steel helmet would be all the more appreciated by the African troops, as the metal skullcap was deemed difficult to fit underneath the chéchia.

One of the other reasons as to why it became necessary that these North African troops be issued the new helmet, was due to the noticed frequency of head wounds from shrapnel bullets and shell fragments. The *Zouaves* and *Tirailleurs* would therefore have considered themselves forgotten or sacrificed in the eyes of their superiors if they noticed that all the troops of other branches received a new protective helmet, while they alone were exempted from the endowment of this headdress. Under these conditions, it was thus decided that the new helmet would be distributed to the *Zouaves* and the *Tirailleurs* with their own respective insignia. These troops would, however, keep the chéchia as their secondary headdress, which continued to be worn in cantonments and during marches away from the frontlines, as mentioned earlier.[189]

Therefore, practicality prevailed over aesthetic and traditional values, and it was thus decided that the native riflemen would therefore be very much appreciative to receive this new protective headwear (although the prescriptions of the Quran, which are very vague on this subject, seem to prohibit the wearing of any piece of headdress with a visor).[190]

Photo (49): After an assault, French infantrymen and soldiers of the Army of Africa account for their wounded. Notice the North African troops wearing the chéchia. **(YO)**

for Zouaves and Tirailleurs in the rear, 19 August 1915.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Ibid.

Modèle 1915 Adrian Helmet - Army of Africa: This specimen of the African troops helmet is of the early productions that pre-dates October 1915, identifiable through the prevalence of two coats of light and dark khaki paint applied by brush to envelope the factory horizon blue paint. This helmet has taken notable battle damage from shrapnel, which perforated the steel. **(YO)**

After the first deliveries of the steel helmets to all frontline troops were made, the next few months permitted a window of time and opportunity for observations to be made to address the possibilities of further ameliorations and adjustments that needed to be undertaken for practicality and utility of the helmet on the frontline. One of the first changes was regarding the quality of the standard chinstrap. Particular attention was drawn to the insufficient resistance of the sheepskin which was used to make the chinstraps of the new helmet; it was deemed far too brittle.[191] It was thus decided to substitute it for goatskin, which is much more resistant and durable.[192] In addition, supplies of

[191] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (54), The order for replacement of the first chinstrap models, 14 September 1915.
[192] Ibid.

replacement chinstraps were distributed to the clothing warehouses as quickly as possible. Requests for accessories of this nature were therefore addressed to these establishments.

For the adaptation of these replacement chinstraps to helmets, it was apparent that the rivet on the original chinstrap had to be replaced as well - an unfortunate limitation of the assembly of which presented difficulties, given the special tools that would have been required. However soldiers in the field sought an alternative method by simply sewing a thread commonly used by shoemakers (for shoe repairs).[193] This very simple process seemed to have given as much satisfaction as the rivet from the point of view of solidity. On 13 September 1915, the *Directeur de l'Intendance* wrote in a letter addressed to the *Général Commandant en Chef des Armées de l'Est* regarding the new replacement chinstraps:

> In response to your letter of September 5, 1915, I have the honour to inform you that my attention had already been drawn to the insufficient resistance of the tan-colored sheepskins originally used for the making of the chinstraps of the new metal helmet. For about a month, much more resistant goatskins have been substituted for sheepskins; but, given the urgency, and to avoid delays in helmet deliveries, around five hundred thousand of them were still fitted with sheepskin chinstraps. In accordance with your request, I am taking the necessary steps to ensure that the warehouses are, as quickly as possible, supplied with replacement chinstraps. However, I ask you to kindly point out to the competent authorities that in order for the armed forces to adapt these replacement chinstraps to helmets, it will be necessary to replace the rivet, the assembly of which would present difficulties, given the special tools required. It would be necessary to simply sew with the thread commonly used by shoemakers for shoe repairs. This very simple process, within the reach of all units, seems to give as much satisfaction as the rivet, from a point of view of solidity.[194]

This task was carried out, but did not necessarily apply to all ranks within the army - officers were given the luxury of switching out the regular enlisted man's chinstrap for a private-purchase braided one in high quality leather. The design and buckle systems differed according to the private tailors. However, it was believed that many officers opted for the regular issued chinstraps as opposed to private-purchased ones, to present themselves as less of a target for enemy marksmen. In this case, the same adoption of an improved chinstrap therefore applied to officers.

After this period of assessment and reform, in October 1915, it was officially decided that troops of the Cavalry would also be issued steel helmets. Prior to this decision, elements of the Cavalry were issued with 1915 modified versions of the 1872/74 helmets in light blue paint, but any documentation of orders of this temporary issue helmet was unable to be located, and therefore it cannot be presented in detail with an accompaniment of sources. Eventually, all Cavalry units on the front, including the *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, were equipped with the regulation model steel helmets, which featured a flaming grenade as the distinctive insignia (identical to that of the infantry) and the chinstrap was made of reinforced leather as according to the revised,

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[193] Ibid.

[194] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (54), «*Remplacement des jugulaires du nouveau casque métallique*» 13 September 1915.

improved versions introduced in September 1915. The beautiful pre-war helmets of heavy cavalry units such as the *Cuirassiers* and *Dragons*, and the helmets of the light cavalry such as the *Hussards* and *Chasseurs à Cheval* which were exchanged for the new regulation steel helmet were, without delay and hesitation, sent to the depots of the respective corps. However the pre-war pattern shakos were still continued to be shipped to the general store in Vanves for further usage, especially behind the frontlines. It was agreed upon that if, as a result of changes in the order of battle, the supplies provided for a warehouse proved insufficient, the army concerned would be ordered to notify Major General Pellé in order to allow the necessary levelling of the equipment to be carried out.[195]

Photo (50): C.1915, these dismounted cavalrymen of the 4th Dragoon Regiment (Commercy- Sézanne) wear covered modified cavalry helmets which were a mixture in design and construction of both the Adrian helmet and the pre-war 1872/74 cavalry helmets. **(ML)**

Right photo (51): This French cavalryman of the 4th Dragoon Regiment (Commercy-Sézane) still wears the beautiful pre-war 1872/74 helmet instead of the steel Adrian helmet, despite him donning the new horizon blue uniform. **(YO)**

As of October 1915, all the main ground combat units of the army were equipped with the new helmet. Below is the fully-updated list of all the branches issued the steel helmet, as of October 1915, following the introduction of the helmet for the Cavalry. The documents scrutinised at the *Service Historique de la Défense* at Vincennes did not provide information regarding the introduction of the helmets and their respective insignias for the Aviation, the *Intendance*, and the *Artillerie Spéciale*. Therefore, they have been disregarded in this updated chart:

[195] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (8), The decision to distribute the new helmets to the Cavalry, 16 October 1915.

Branch of Service	Description of the Insignia	Photo Reference (YO)
Infantry & Cavalry	Grenade	
Chasseurs	Hunting Horn	
Artillery	Two Crossed Cannons	
Engineers	Cuirass with a “Pot on the Head”	
Colonial Infantry	Anchor with Grenade	

Health Service	Caduceus	
Army of Africa	Crescent Moon	

After the initial mass-supply of the armies with the new helmet, it became apparent that the first helmet deliveries in the summer and autumn of 1915 possessed paint that was too bright and/or luminous for practical use in the field. Soldiers had initially attempted to rectify this hindrance by applying mud for camouflage effects. However, this practice was officially banned after October 1916, due to the Health Service noting that splashes of dried mud leaking into an open head wound would further facilitate infection. In the autumn of 1915, after the first mass deliveries of steel helmets had made its way to the frontlines in time for the offensives at Champagne and Artois, General Joffre had confirmed a decree on 30 October 1915 which introduced helmet covers:

> The armies have just informed me that, despite the light blue colour of the helmet of the general model, it projected reflections visible from afar. It is therefore necessary to provide the troops with a helmet cover, which would be worn in the trenches and in combat. I have the honour to ask you, therefore, to take, urgently, all the necessary measures for the creation of this uniform component which would be ideal to have in light blue colour. If, due to a lack of colouring materials, it is not possible to make light blue helmet covers, they should be given a neutral colour that contrasts as little as possible with that of the uniform.[196]

Evident through the order of 30 October, the original prioritised colour intended for these covers were supposed to be in light blue cloth in order to appear homogenous to the new light blue uniform. In reality, a variety of other colours which ranged from dark blue/iron blue (the order decreed that the covers were to be made in the same iron blue-grey (*cretonne*) cotton used for the early war képi covers) beige, or neutral cloth were utilised. The commissariat department started distributing these cloth helmet covers starting in November 1915, and they saw mass

[196] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (21), «*Emploi d'un couvre-casque avec le nouveau casque métallique*» 30 October 1915.

distribution among soldiers in most military branches[197] However, the introduction of these covers was not without controversy. The proposition of adopting a helmet cover was challenged by some who viewed it as unnecessary and a misallocation of resources of production, especially when considering the new orders decreed in the autumn of 1915 for factories to bake helmets longer, dulling the paint, thus defeating the purpose of a helmet cover.

> The question is asked (to me), by different regions, of knowing if, as requested by certain army formations, it is necessary to provide helmet covers for the metal helmets of the new model recently put into service on the front. A priori, I do not consider this measure necessary, having observed that the helmet in question is already coated with a very adherent layer of matte light blue paint, harmonising perfectly with the rest of the uniform and therefore filling sufficient conditions of invisibility. I have the honour to submit this question to your consideration and to ask you, if you consider that it should be resolved in the affirmative, to let me know as soon as possible the colour to adopt for this accessory.[198]

Photo (52): French prisoners of war and their German captors of the 1st Grenadier Regiment near Fort de Vaux, Verdun, 1916. Notice one Frenchman wearing a helmet cover while the rest do not. **(YO)**

From this excerpt, one can see the initial skepticism revolving around the idea for the introduction of the helmet covers. It was simply seen as unnecessary. Troops were no longer facing the issue of having helmets in too bright and luminous of a paint as the factories had extended the baking process, and the new matte, light blue paint was already seen as homogenous to the rest of the light blue uniform.

The helmet covers were originally intended to be a camouflage component to conceal the conspicuous paint of the early-produced helmets, however, a large batch of helmets with rectified paint in matte light blue had already been distributed to soldiers in the frontline, thus resolving the issue of the luminous factory paint and eradicating any urgency for the manufacturing and distribution of cloth covers. Either way, fabrication continued and they were still distributed en masse. The construction of these covers were relatively simple - they were made up of two identical pieces of canvas which had a semi-elliptical shape and were joined together by a single or double

[197] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Francaise dans la Première Guerre Mondiale (Tome 2),* p.466.
[198] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (21), response by Major-Général Pellé to «*Emploi d'un couvre-casque avec le nouveau casque métallique*» 30 October 1915.

stitched seam. The rectilinear sides were bordered by a hem in which a drawstring was passed through, intended to tighten the cover onto the helmet.

Photo (53): French machine-gunners of the 149th Infantry Regiment (Épinal), c.1916. They wear light blue cloth covers of the double stitched seam pattern. **(YO)**

Photo (54): Exhausted and weary French soldiers shuffle into captivity, c.1916. Most of the Frenchmen wear regulation beige cloth helmet covers of the single stitched seam pattern. **(YO)**

Appealing to the French idea of aesthetics, the utilisation of these helmet covers was felt by some to be lacking in spirit, the same reasoning as to the persistence of servicemen wearing unit numbers on their képis until the end of the war despite the practice being banned in December 1914. To prevent the branch badge from being hidden, some soldiers attached their service badges over the front of their helmet covers, and much more unusually, the same was done with the crest. Such a practice is shown on an army Engineer's helmet on display at the *Musée de Notre Dame de Lorette*, as well as demonstrated in some period photos, albeit being a non-regulation practice.[199] However, the distribution of these camouflage covers did not last for over a year, as according to an order issued on 3 June 1916, at the request of the General Commander-in-Chief, the general model helmets were to receive, "as an overall measure, a dull paint intended to reduce their visibility."[200] As a result, the continued usage of the helmet cover then became useless, and it

[199] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2,* p.471.
[200] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (42), «*Suppression de l'emploi du couvre-casque*» 3 June 1916.

became necessary after having already satisfied the demands of the armies and clothing warehouses to cease the fabrication of cloth covers without resulting in harm to the treasury due to mass spending on the manufacturing of these items.[201]

Photo (55): An exhausted-looking French medical section wear helmet covers in dark blue cloth. The man on the far left wears his infantry badge over the front of the cover, presenting a sense of *esprit de corps*. **(YO)**

A second reason as to the final disbandment of the use of helmet covers lay in the reasoning in which the Health Service had noticed that these covers, which had become grimy after extensive use, was as harmful as mud. Furthermore, a fear was expressed by the Health Service that projected cloth in open head wounds would facilitate further infections, an identical reasoning to the eventual banning of the practice of using mud as camouflage, which will be discussed later. Consequently, the utilisation of helmet covers was banned by the winter of 1916 and those already in use were ordered to be discarded. Despite being officially banned by regulations, soldiers ignored it and continued to use cloth covers up until the end of the war, though in limited numbers. Ultimately, the utilisation of these cloth covers became symbolic of the French soldier of late 1915 - 1916, and became an ephemeral item that defined the look of the *Poilu* in 1916, particularly during the Battles of Verdun and the Somme.

[201] Ibid.

Modèle 1915 Adrian Helmet with Cloth Cover: This specimen, of regulation beige cloth in the single stitched seam pattern, is a complete matching set to the helmet which came together. The helmet is badged to the Health Service. One can see the sun-fade mark of where the chinstrap used to sit on top of the front of the cover. **(YO)**

Despite the banning of these cloth covers, the issue of needing better concealment for headwear still stood despite the new matte paint which were factory-applied to the helmets. The 1st section of the general inspector of the clothing department carried out a study in which it was observed that a helmet could possess a dark, matte tint more suitable for combat, if left for longer baking during the manufacturing process, which led to a slight modification of the colour which thus resulted in the helmet being of an iron-grey colour as opposed to blue-grey.[202] This was one of the solutions regarding improvement in concealment since the helmet cover was banished. Either that, or the helmet could, without inconvenience, be repainted in the field by the soldiers, which would cost three *centimes* per piece.

Paint manufacturers were confident that uncooked, brush-applied paint on steel would not soften/melt under sunlight, and that sufficient drying would be complete within half an hour to an hour upon application. Furthermore, the analysis of the unbaked, brush-applied paint from the point of view of harmfulness in the event of head injury, carried out at the analysis laboratory in Paris, gave the conclusion on 21 June 1916 that the paint of the helmet did not contain any substance capable of aggravating injuries. The confirmation of absent risks regarding any health

[202] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (24), «*Fourniture de peinture pour le revernissage des casques*» 8 July 1916.

and logistical concerns allowed the paint to be supplied, along with brushes in paint cans and pots, to large units in 10 kilogram cans and to others in 1 kilogram boxes, and therefore the order for the first quantity of 40,000 kilograms of paint was made (one kilogram of paint per hundred helmets).[203] This was a prime example of adaptation and mass production in practice, demonstrating how the French army worked to deal with mundane but essential elements of military practice. The default logistical arrangement of these deliveries of paint, was that 2/3 shipments were to be made in 10 kilogram boxes, while 1/3 being in 1 kilogram boxes, with deliveries commencing approximately eight days after the award and finalisation of contracts (i.e. in approximately fifteen days, at a rate of approximately 600 kilograms per day).[204]

By August, the specific numbers and orders for these paint deliveries to adhere to the newly-revised paint coats for readily field-issued helmets (dull blue paint for metropolitan units, khaki for African troops which was intended to reduce visibility) were specified, with official acknowledgement that helmet covers would gradually be eliminated from service. By application of these provisions and, in accordance with the indications given by the General Commander-in-Chief, a supply of 40,000 kilograms of paint of this type was being produced at the time of this acknowledgement in August, and had planned to be distributed within approximately one month between the various clothing warehouses, as according to the emergency order indicated below by the Service of the Intendance:[205]

Warehouses	**Quantities of Paint**
Lyon	9,000 kgs
Dijon	3,750 kgs
Orléans	6,000 kgs
Tours	6,000 kgs
Le Mans	4,500 kgs
Mézidon	5,500 kgs
Vierzon	5,250 kgs
-	**Total:** 40,000 kgs

[203] Ibid.

[204] Ibid.

[205] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (34), «*Peinture pour les casques métalliques des troupes en campagne*» 16 August 1916.

Modèle 1915 Adrian Helmet - Infantry: This battered Infantry helmet has a coat of midnight blue paint applied by brush over its factory-applied horizon blue paint. **(YO)**

Photo below: Of interest is a helmet cover in blue calico which had been stuffed under the liner by the soldier to be used as extra padding and insulation, presumably following the general order for its removal from the helmet at the end of 1916. The leather liner is of the first pattern, with seven fingers, manufactured between June 1915 and September 1916.

Since the clothing warehouses were now equipped with matte blue paint for helmets, all helmets in service which had not yet been the subject of this measure would have to be repainted in a dull colour. As soon as this operation was completed, fabric helmet covers were no longer used en masse, which, being often unclean, presented the same disadvantages as mud camouflaging, which was also a health risk posed towards the soldiers. In fact, it was reported to the General Commander-in-Chief that many skull injuries were soiled and had transcended into abnormally serious conditions because the men, to make their light blue helmets less visible, had camouflaged their helmets with a thick coating of mud. Thus, the patches of mud had been

carried into open wounds by projectiles.[206] Therefore, it was decided that such practices had to be prohibited. An example of this mud camouflaging practice can be seen on the helmet worn by *Général de Brigade* Georges Challe, commander of the 4th Infantry Division (killed in action on 11 October 1917), which is currently in the collection of the *Musée de l'Armée* in Paris.[207] The change in the paint finish was a good substitute following the suppression of the cloth helmet covers and the ban of mud camouflaging techniques, and it was practical enough to see it being used and remain unchanged for the remainder of the war.[208]

Left photo (56): Soldiers of the 103rd Infantry Regiment (Paris & Argentan) in frontline trenches at Mesnil-lès-Hurlus. The infantrymen here have coated their helmets with chalky mud for camouflage purposes, a practice which was banned after October 1916 for reasons already described. **(ML)**

Right photo (57): French troops of the 30th Infantry Regiment (Annecy) occupy a frontline trench while a CSRG 1915 "Chauchat" machine gunner observes no man's land, c.1916. Notice the man second from left (leaning on the sandbag wall), wearing a helmet which has been deliberately covered in chalky mud, resembling a camouflage pattern. **(YO)**

[206] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (12), «*Peinture des casques en service*» 15 October 1916.
[207] Mirouze, Dekerle, *l'Armée Française dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Tome 2,* p.466.
[208] *SHD*, 16 N 2661 (12), «*Peinture des casques en service*» 15 October 1916.

The Success & Practicality of the Steel Helmet

The examination of the design, production, distribution, and rectifications of the steel helmet has already been done, albeit yet investigating the true efficiency it had on the men wearing them. After all, a helmet was intended to protect its wearer. The overall aesthetic profile is only a secondary feature of much less importance than the efficiency of one. If the design of a combat helmet had to be narrowed down to just two factors out of the choices of efficiency, practicality, and aesthetic, it is imperative that aesthetics be left out for the sake of providing protection to its wearer. British "Brodie" helmets, for example, sacrificed aesthetic for efficiency and practicality of production. Therefore, what was the true protective value of the Adrian helmet?

Compared to the number of wounds to all other parts of the body, the percentage of injuries to the skull can provide useful information, as can the comparison of the degrees of severity of these injuries sustained before and after the mass issue of the Adrian helmet. Principal physician, Roussy, in a memorandum presented to the Academy of Medicine in a session from 7 March 1916, obtained his information from the Medical Office of the Place de Paris and added up by category of the same type of wounds; on one hand, the wounded examined in July and August 1915, none of whom wore a helmet, and on the other hand, those examined in December 1915 and January 1916, who wore helmets at the time they sustained wounds.[209]

Photo (58): French trench sweepers investigate a ditch filled with dead comrades during the Third Battle of Champagne, April - May 1917. Although 1917 was the least bloodiest year for the French army, the losses sustained during the Chemin des Dames and Champagne offensives led to the outbreak of cases of collective indiscipline which affected half of the army, suspending all offensive operations. The losses would have proportionately been higher had the steel helmet not been fully adopted by this time, as it was noticed that the introduction of the Adrian helmet had saved the lives of many French soldiers. **(ML)**

[209] Audouy, *Contribution à l'Étude des Traumatismes du Crâne par Projectiles de Guerre*, pp.46-47.

Period	Head Wounds	Wounds to the Rest of the Body	Ratio
July 1915	171	1,937	8.7 for 100
August 1915	183	1,761	10 for 100
December 1915	71	342	20.7 for 100
January 1916	84	579	14.5 for 100

Modèle 1915 Adrian Helmet - Colonial Infantry: This speci- men, repainted in the field by brush in midnight blue as per the 1916 directive, is badged to the Colonial Infantry, identifiable through the "RF" flaming bomb over a fouled anchor. The left side of this helmet was struck by shrapnel which tore through the steel and the leather liner. The impact appears small, and it is likely the wearer survived, despite suffering a minor head wound. **(YO)**

For the first period of July to August 1915, a total of 354 skull injuries were reported compared to 3,698 injuries to the rest of the body and an overall head wound percentage of 8.49.[210] For the second period, from December 1915 to January 1916, 155 skull injuries were reported in comparison to 921 injuries to the rest of the body, with a percentage of

[210] Ibid., p.47.

16.82 per 100 wounds.[211] This percentage of head wounds had therefore almost exactly doubled since the adoption of the steel helmet. This had led to a rise in confusion among the general staff with regards to the effectiveness of the helmet, and whether introducing them was a mistake. Was it that men simply did not understand the true purpose of the helmet? After all, it was described as per the standards of the Health Service that the sheet of steel must be hard enough to withstand shell fragments and other smaller projectiles. Did this give the men an extra layer of overconfidence, leading them to be more careless about their safety and fully entrusting the protective capabilities of their helmets to protect them from any incoming projectiles towards the head? Were soldiers sticking their heads over the parapets of the trenches more often only to catch an unfortunate bullet? These questions led to a rumoured desire among the high command to ban the distribution of the steel helmets.

However, the Health Service, who understood statistics more, noticed that the figures, although paradoxical in appearance, were an eloquent demonstration of the effectiveness of the helmet and its protective value. They indicated that in the first case, the percentage of head wounds was only 8.5 because a large number of helmetless men who were perforated in the skull were "mortally wounded" - they therefore succumbed to their injuries on the battlefield, at aid stations, in ambulances or in hospitals, while in the second case where the percentage was 16.82, wearing a helmet in fact protected their skulls. As a result, the number of wounded grew, but the amount of dead dropped. The wounded, having survived and gone into convalescence, were therefore examined. These statistics and facts were confirmed by the investigations conducted by the direct examinations of all those wounded in the skull with or without wearing a helmet.

Wounds to the skull when a man was without a helmet was almost always very serious, characterised at first by long periods of coma, blindness, deafness, various paralysis, amnesia, headaches, etc.. Splintering fractures were quite often complicated by the loss of brain substance, requiring one or more trepanations which therefore caused large losses of bone substance and led to the formation of large, impulsive and pulsatile scars, or more or less voluminous cerebral hernias accompanied by intellectual weakening, inability or lowering of resistance to mental work, as well as various stubborn cerebral disorders.[212] However, recorded impacts and wounds to the skull, that were done while a soldier was wearing a helmet, was, on the contrary, relatively minor, if not slight.

Many of the listed characteristics were absent or of short duration; they healed in a very short time and completely, and very often did not require trepanation. In a very large number of cases, the projectile, cushioned by the great resistance of the helmet (the force of the splinters had been broken down due to the strength of the steel) remained embedded in the metal or made only a bruised wound in the scalp and the external layer of the underlying bone, or had remained in the thickness of the bone without penetrating it. In other instances, the projectile's trajectory had fortunately deflected off the helmet. Therefore, even though this deflection had not completely prevented the injury, it had significantly lessened its severity. It seems evident that

[211] Ibid.

[212] Ibid., p.48.

the wearer would have been killed or gravely wounded in each of these instances if he had not worn his helmet. Therefore, the protective role of the metal helmet was obvious, as it extinguished the active force of projectiles and preserved, nearly unscathed or without major functional disorders, the lives of many soldiers.

The overall adoption of the steel helmet and the several stages it saw with regards to improvement regarding protective and health measures demonstrates that the army eventually saw the priority of practicality over aesthetic. Sacrifices with regards to stylistic designs and overall profiles of the helmet were made, in order to prove beneficial in protecting the lives of their men. Though the Adrian was an aesthetic-looking helmet, it can be argued that practicality was not sacrificed over design.

A Military Fashion Statement

The "Adrian" helmet was a revolutionary design in both practicality and aesthetics. It was so popular that it was widely adopted by several armies, and at the time of the Great War and in the inter-war period, was the most utilised helmet design in the world, having been distributed to troops of the Kingdom of Italy, Belgium, the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Serbia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Poland, and several other factions (to a lesser extent, the United States - soldiers of the 369th Infantry, the Harlem Hellfighters, donned the Adrian helmet, as well as medical personnel of the American Field Service).[213] The Adrian helmet was also adopted for the convenience with supplying their troops from French factories (as opposed to designing and producing a national helmet which would cost a lot of money and resources) and the effectiveness as seen in its structural integrity, notably with the top crest which proved more effective from deflecting overhead shrapnel and debris as opposed to the British helmets. The states that adopted the French pattern purchased stocks from the French government, with each faction having their own specific frontal attributes, which in itself adds to the concept of a military fashion statement. In December 1915, Winston Churchill, while serving as a major with the British army's Grenadier Guards, was presented with an Adrian helmet by French General Émile Fayolle. Churchill can be seen wearing his French helmet in photographs as well as in a portrait painted by Sir John Lavery. He expressed his love for its aesthetic design over the British Mark I pattern.[214] His helmet still currently hangs on a wall at his estate in Chartwell.

The design of the steel helmet possessed some minor differences between the several manufacturers of the Adrian (crest shapes, riveting patterns, etc.), but the true variety lay in the design of the badges for each individual branch of the French army. By the end of the war, (not counting the insignia of the *Artillerie Spéciale* which was added on Modèle 1919 tanker helmets), the Adrian helmet had eight statutory badges for the branches of the Infantry, Artillery, Engineers, *Chasseurs* (light infantry and alpine infantry), Health Service, Colonial Army, Army of Africa, and *Intendance*, each possessing their own unique design. Unfortunately, the badge of

[213] It is interesting to note that the Italian army initially purchased stocks of the French models before acquiring the license to manufacture their own simplified model of the Adrian in 1916.

[214] Nicholas Rankin, *Churchill's Wizards: The British Genius for Deception 1914-1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p.83.

the *Intendance* is not covered in this thesis, as any documentation of its manufacturing and utilisation could not be located at Vincennes. Although using a form of insignia may appear like another anachronistic aspect of the French military uniform, they did serve a purpose of unit distinction, and were therefore not entirely for aesthetics. It was both practical, and a military fashion statement.

Further aesthetic customisations could be, and were made to the helmet, with stars added to the front for Generals, private-purchased braided chinstraps for officers, and a variety of customisations done, from painted rank bars or welded barrettes on the helmet. The braided chinstraps for officers, though aesthetic in design, were often abandoned in favour for the regular-issue Other Ranks' chinstrap, as an elaborate example would prove to make an excellent target for enemy marksmen. The crest of the Adrian, a very prominent feature of its aesthetic appearance which was largely inspired by the design of the pre-war cavalry helmets, Édouard Detaille's trial helmets, as well as the helmets of contemporary firemen, was not only for an aesthetic appearance, but doubled as a form of protection from overhead debris and shrapnel which lessened the impact onto the rest of the helmet. This demonstrated that the French design was in touch with both an aesthetic appearance and practicality. However, this compromise made it more complex to manufacture due to it being composed of several pieces, as opposed to other steel helmets of other nations, such as the British Mark I "Brodie" and German *Stahlhelm*, which were stamped from a single sheet of steel.

Overall, it is evident that the creation of Louis Adrian was a marvel in aesthetic as well as in practicality. To pay homage to the impact the helmet had on the French army of the Great War and its memory, a sculpture of his ornate design sits on top of his resting place in Genêts.

Modèle 1915 Adrian Helmet - Engineers: This helmet, which is badged to the Army Engineers, is attributed to a soldier who served in the 3rd Machine Gun Company. The helmet is coated in a darker shade of blue applied by brush in the field, as per the summer 1916 regulations. **(YO)**

Right photo: The details of the owner have been hand-inscribed into the underside of the helmet brim. The initials "SL" of a former wearer as well as the number of the 126th Infantry Regiment (Brive) have been scratched out and replaced by "Meyer, *3e Compagnie Mitrailleuse*," suggesting reissue. Some machine gun companies were attached to Engineer Regiments for protection.

Left photo: The leather liner in this specimen is of the second pattern, manufactured after September 1916. It is made of multiple pieces and has six fingers as opposed to the one-piece first pattern liner which has seven fingers. This was done in an effort to economise on the usage of leather by enabling smaller scraps to be used. Between the liner and the shell, corrugated aluminium spacers are visible, which were factory-implemented and were used to absorb shock impact.

VI. Conclusion

It is evident that between 1871 and 1918, the French army saw some of the most profound changes and adaptations into almost every single aspect for better effectiveness and functionality in the field. However, it is also within this timeframe in which the French army saw significant development and progression of its uniform, moulding it into a form of national identity and patriotic fervour which enabled the nation to be roused up to defend their homeland from the invader, with the hopes of reclaiming the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, and eventually marching into Berlin. This thesis promoted the idea that the uniform and headdress of the French army had adapted, developed, and progressed significantly from being just a form of military aesthetic (with a reliance on sustainable economisation), into one that echoed those factors as well as an added feature of practicality as a result of a compromise between traditionalists and modernists.

In the case of abandoning the traditions and opting for more practical kit, it was not solely a learning process of the French army, as investigated in this thesis. Such a practice can be seen in almost all warring parties, with the most apparent being that of the Germany army, where they had abandoned the spiked leather *Pickelhauben* for the more effective steel helmets in 1916, and also when they had abolished unit-specific coloured piping on their *Feldmütze* caps and opted for full *feldgrau* for easier manufacturing and eradication of conspicuousness. For the French army, these adaptations were appropriate and effective, as they met with the demand for mass-producing new uniform components during the clothing crisis of 1914/15, as well as equipping their troops in colours more suitable for modern warfare.

The Great War represented a clear break with the past for the French army and a significant leap into the twentieth century. Challenged with an amalgamation of factors as explored in the thesis, it became more apparent that tradition and overreliance on the past had to be tossed aside to make way for newer, more suitable responses to the changing nature of warfare. As discussed previously though, efforts to modernise had already been undertaken in the pre-war period albeit slowly, but the challenges of war and the urgency of needing to outfit troops in a conscript army made the situation extremely serious and demanded acceleration of the process. It can thus be argued that had the French army not been faced with a challenge of war, they still would have made the modernisation efforts, just at a slower pace. The July 1914 approval (a month before France went to war) of the new uniform demonstrated the French War Ministry's willingness to adapt to the idea of modern warfare, but the urgency was only really ushered on during the cases of the clothing crisis of 1914/15 after the serious loss of life experienced by the French army in the opening months of the war.

All of this pertains to the subject of the historiography of the French army as a whole, which was investigated in *The Historiography of the French Army: 1871 - 1918*. The subject of this thesis which revolves around the development of the uniforms is typically viewed as an afterthought in the range of historiography, due to the fact that to an extent, it is irrelevant in the scale of tactics and strategy let alone the outcome of a battle. However, it can be considered as a

more niche subject that not many have delved into. One must understand the relevance of said historiography with the French military uniforms in the pre-war period and the transitional phases into the First World War.

As previously discussed in *The Period of Trials and Potential Reform: 1903 - 1915*, the French military in the pre-war period was heavily fuelled by militarism, nationalism, and traditionalism, which stubbornly resisted against modernisation, and any proposal of said modernisation was met with intense criticisms and refusals, not only due to the political affiliation between military fashion and the government's ideals, but also budgetary concerns due to financial limitations. It is interesting to note that wartime eventually saw the mass mobilisation of France's industries that saw wide production of the required materials possible, a feat that would not have been possible in peacetime. Historically, the French army had always prioritised aesthetic over functionality, which was also seen in its failed period of trials of newly proposed uniforms, where an initial wave of toned, camouflaged uniforms pushed forward by modernists was met with intense criticism for not representing the *esprit de corps* and the symbolism of France. Eventually, due to financial and industrial limitations as well as the losses sustained in the early war period, it led to the clothing crisis of 1914/15, and the army was forced to modernise. This led to the introduction of the iconic horizon blue uniform that came to symbolise the French soldier of the Great War.

Thus, this set in motion the further development of the French army uniform, with the headdress being simplified considerably, as explored in *The Képi: 1884 - 1918*. Though not as stylish as the models of the pre-war period, the aesthetic appeal of the wartime képis had to cater towards industrial simplicities of mass production in a simplified pattern and in the newly adopted cloth. Long gone were the days of the tall, characteristic *casquettes d'Afriques* and the vibrant *garance* képis of the pre-war period. Demand for mass manufacturing saw the development of the simplified models in horizon blue cloth, as well as the productions of commercially-produced examples which saw service as the primary combat headgear of the French army up until the introduction of the steel helmet.

The steel helmet was where things delved into originality. Unlike the képi, the helmet was not based on a pre-existing design, but rather an amalgamation of different influences that led to its creation, as explored in *The Steel Helmet: 1915 - 1918*. Reliant on aesthetic, practicality, economisation, and functionality, the design of the helmet was largely inspired by the characteristic pre-war cavalry helmets as well as the medieval *bourguignottes*. This section did not only look at the aesthetic and practicality of the helmet, but also the production and distribution of these helmets to the troops, as well as the success rate in which it served its purpose of protecting its wearers. Additionally, the Adrian helmet was a form of military fashion statement and is viewed in a form of admiration when studying the French soldier of the Great War.

Hopefully, readers of this thesis will have gained an educational insight into the evolution and development of the French army uniform and headdress between the years of 1871 - 1918. This occurred through moments of militarism, nationalism, and traditionalism, through the face

of necessary modernisation (an aspect supported by the contemporary anti-traditionalists and modernists, as discussed in the thesis) and was a prelude to how the army and the politics surrounding it eventually found a compromise in the pre-war and early war period which greatly benefitted the army during its campaign of 1914-1918. Thus, this period saw the French army develop not only in terms of strategy and tactics, as seen in the wide range of historiographies discussed, but also in the uniform the soldier possessed, which ever so symbolised the French soldier of the days of the early Third Republic up until the end of the Great War.

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