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“Laugh, When I Gives You a Joke”: The Forms and Functions of Humor in the Great War

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“LAUGH, WHEN I GIVES YOU A JOKE”: THE FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF HUMOR IN THE GREAT WAR

A Master’s Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts, History

By

Samuel Sakoulas Griffin

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ABSTRACT

In today’s popular memory, the First World War experience is not well-known for its humor. Yet during and after the war, soldiers produced a small but significant wave of wartime joke books and humorous war-story collections, in part to cope with their experiences in terrible, industrialized war, and also as a way to interpret, commemorate, and remember the war. These humorous interpretations and memories of the war clashed with the dominant literary reaction to the war, that of the mutilation of bodies and pointless deaths. But humor appeared in the midst of the slaughter, and today serves as an opening for understanding the World War One experience. Soldiers used humor to cope with wartime stresses, even their own impending deaths. Humor also served as an unstable mediator in tense interpersonal interactions between officers and rank-and-file soldiers, at times serving both supportive and subversive roles. One instance of the latter was how humor undermined traditional romantic and medieval tropes of ideal soldiering, altering what the ideal soldier looked like in the new age of warfare. Meanwhile, humor also demarcated the battlefront-homefront divide, showing both conflict and connection between soldiers on the front and those at home. Humor shows anew how this divide was underlined by gender, and reveals a significant trend of male anxiety on account of the changes to the gender divide brought on by the war. Finally, some soldiers pondered how humor would fit into visions of world peace after the ‘war to end all war,’ showing how the relevance of soldiers’ humor stretched far beyond the conflict.

KEYWORDS: the Great War, the First World War, humor, jokes, subversion, support, authority, ideal soldier tropes, gender, Crascredo

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INTRODUCTION

The First World War experience is not well-known for its humor. The death toll of over four years of industrialized warfare leaves little room for humorous interpretation. The dominant literary reactions of contemporaries, from the poets Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves to the memoirists Ernst Jünger and Erich Maria Remarque, emphasized the slaughter, the death, the mutilation of bodies, and the futility of trench warfare. The post-war feelings of disillusionment, mourning, and depression have stuck with us, historians and laymen alike. Given the gravity hanging over the popular memory of the Great War, one might be forgiven if, when presented with a work on humor in the war, one can only think of BBC's *Blackadder Goes Forth.* The humor in the popular 1980s sitcom tends to minimize, in the minds of its viewers, the role of humor in the actual war 70 years before it. Ironically though, *Blackadder* and all its satire hits on many themes that resonated deeply with soldiers of the Great War, and its humor, or at least the presence of humor in the show, accurately reflects happenings on the front.

Humor, of course, appeared even in the midst of the most terrible war fought to that point. Soldiers created and delivered jokes in the trenches to cope with the stresses of war and to maintain resilience and morale. At other times, spontaneous funny events occurred that soldiers could not help but laugh at. Soldiers recorded such humorous happenings in books like *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers* by Carleton B. Case (1919) and *The Best 500 Cockney War Stories* (1921), or listed their favorite quips and jokes in joke books like *Khaki Komedy* (1918) and *Navy Nonsense* (1918). The jokes and stories recorded by soldiers have a lot to reveal about the war experience and suggest that some soldiers wished to remember the war in a way that greatly contrasted the memory constructed by many of the poets, artists, and memoirists of the war,

which remains dominant in today's popular memory of the war, despite (or indeed, perhaps because of) *Blackadder's* best efforts. Despite the criticism it received for using the tragedy of the Great War as a springboard for comedy, *Blackadder's* satirical depiction of the war is validated by, and carries on the spirit of, the wave of wartime and post-war joke collections, which show that humorous interpretations of the Great War began with the soldiers who fought in the trenches.[1]

This thesis will look at some forms and functions of humor among soldiers in the First World War, arguing that soldiers used humor to cope with and remember their war experience, contrasting the reverent interpretations that have fixed our popular memory of the war to this day. By treating the humorous interpretations and memories of the war seriously, historians can use humor to understand wartime interpersonal and group relations and interactions, such as the dynamic between soldiers and officers, or battlefront and homefront. In these interactions between individuals, humor could serve to connect or divide; between individuals and wider hierarchies and ideologies within the military and society, humor could both subvert and support the traditional status quo. Soldiers also used humor to understand and express the myriad of military and social changes presented by the conflict, such as changes in the identity of a soldier on the battlefield and a shift in the gender dynamic on the homefront. Finally, some soldiers pondered how humor would fit into visions of world peace after the "war to end all war," showing how the relevance of soldiers' humor stretched far beyond the conflict.

The first chapter of this thesis will introduce my sources, and explore how they position humor as a different theme or 'theater' of memory reproduction and commemoration of the war that contrasted popular contemporary interpretations and modern popular memory of the war.

[1] Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 133.

Veterans understood better than anyone how humor functioned during the war, and the joke books and story collections they created in the aftermath make those functions explicit. Veterans used humor as a legitimate way to interpret their participation in the conflict, and convey the war experience to others, which is why it is important to understand their humor.

The second chapter will look at some of the forms and functions of humor during the war, including its use for coping with the wartime experience, its usefulness in soldiers' self-identification, and its mediation of interpersonal relationships, especially between rank-and-file soldiers and their officers. It will revolve around the central argument that humor served as a neutral tool, or neutral territory, between subversion and support of military hierarchies and ideologies. The second chapter will briefly open with how humor functioned as a coping mechanism, before moving into two main sections that will position humor in its role of highlighting tense interactions between common soldiers and officers. Humor exists on a spectrum in its relationships with authority, so I frame humor as a neutral "safe zone" between subversion and support for soldiers and officers, the latter of whom tended to represent the military's authority and hierarchal structure as a whole. Humor created spaces for soldiers to question higher-ranked individuals and military authority without the risk that open insubordination posed. Conversely, officers could also wield humor and jokes to improve morale, include themselves in the army group dynamics, and relay tough orders in a more palatable way. Humor is useful for looking at more than interpersonal or group dynamics, as it can bring combatants' identity as soldiers and men into sharper focus. The final section of chapter two will carry the subversive/supportive argument further and will look at how humor interacted with romantic and medieval ideals of soldiering, gallantry, bravery, and self-sacrifice. These tropes of the 'ideal soldier' were recontextualized and challenged by humor during the

war. Illusive and ambiguous, humor was simultaneously a space for creating intra-military conflict and soothing tensions within the ranks, showcasing a full spectrum of functions and relationships with overarching authority structures and traditional ideologies.

Chapter three pivots slightly to how humor existed between soldiers on the battlefront and civilians on the homefront. Once again humor shows its duality, expressing stark divisions between troops and civilians, homefront and battlefield, while also serving as a vessel for soldiers to relate their experiences to those back at home. Underlying the battlefront-homefront divide was a strong gender divide, which humor also clearly expressed. Much of this humor showed a great deal of gendered anxiety on the part of the male soldiers, who feared the emasculating effects of the war, what their absence on the homefront meant for their wives and girlfriends, and how the war was changing gender relations. This will bring us back to the topic of soldiers' identity and masculinity, and how those too were under constant strain from the pressures of war.

The final chapter is a case study on *No Joke*, a collection of jokes, cartoons, and essays on humor by a veteran who wrote under the pseudonym Crascredo. An obscure source, *No Joke* is unique for being mainly composed of memoir-essays that dealt explicitly with humor, and many of its themes will connect directly to the other major sections of the thesis. In addition, given how useful it was to my work, *No Joke* deserves its own section to bring it into the canon of humorous writings of the Great War.

Some final thoughts on humor are needed. It is particularly challenging to study humor; specific instances of humor are created in conditions that cannot be replicated or reproduced. If a joke is funny, it is because of the surrounding context and specifics of that joke; what was happening around the joke? Who was the audience? Who was the joke on? How was it

delivered? Why did the combination of those factors make it funny and not some other description? One might try to retell a joke or describe a funny situation or event, but outside of its context, it will rarely feel as funny. That is the challenge of historians attempting to study the humor of the First World War. More than a hundred years separate us from the context of the jokes made in the trenches. Though we strive to sift through and understand a joke made long ago, sometimes humor's function of excluding those not 'in' on the joke excludes even the historian. As Allan Douglas wrote, "Humor makes its own methodological demands; and one cannot analyze with the traditional tools of intellectual history an object [that] is deliberately elusive, often unstably antiphrastic, and that combines verbal and visual codes. Finding meaning (or more often meanings) [in humor] demands close attention to language, rhetoric, and the techniques of humor generation."[2] In the quest to understand the forms and functions of humor in the First World War, it must be dissected, analyzed, and recontextualized. But there is a risk to that. Jakub Kazecki wonders if by explaining and studying humor and jokes, they cease to become funny.[3] Anyone who has had a joke fall flat and been forced to explain the joke knows that it is not as funny for being explained. Will this process of understanding humor drain the actual humor out of the situations and jokes? Perhaps; but we must endeavor nonetheless.

These demands lead me back to Robert Darnton's methodology in *The Great Cat Massacre*: that of "reading" events and actions as a text.[4] Here I will "read" humor and jokes to pull out meaning inscribed by those who created them, attacking the most "opaque" part of a foreign system of meaning to unravel it.[5] Darnton's Cat Massacre was a violent event that is

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[2] Allen Douglas, *War, Memory, and the Politics of Humor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 6.
[3] Jakub Kazecki, *Laughter in the Trenches: Humour and Front Experience in German First World War Narratives* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 1-2.
[4] Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 3.
[5] Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre,* 78.

especially strange to modern readers, who at first glance might fail to see why the slaughter of cats by the working class would be funny. My sources (joke books and story collections focusing on humorous events) were created for others to understand and connect to, which means they are not as opaque as the seemingly random massacre of cats. However, modern readers might miss the humor in the jokes amidst the most violent war ever fought to that point, especially when those readers are influenced by the gravity hanging over the popular memory of the war. Like Darnton, I believe that it is possible to "get" the humor of people of the past, and therefore begin to understand the landscape of meaning that soldiers of the Great War operated in. By doing so, I reconstruct a history of humor and jokes in the Great War that dramatically clashes with the dominant contemporary reaction to the conflict, and complicates our popular memory of the tragic war that was supposed to end all war.

REMEMBERANCE, COMMEMORATION, AND THE MEMORY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR THROUGH JOKE BOOKS AND HUMOR COLLECTIONS

The dominant literary reactions to the First World War focused on the horror, death, mourning, disillusionment, exhaustion, and depression the war caused. "Memories of war in the twentieth century," Jay Winter tells us, "deal with exceptional and extreme experiences of massive, industrialized, violence and mass death."[6] Even a cursory glance at the historiography of war remembrance backs this up; historians focus on commemoration or memorials, on the reigning interpretations of the conflict: the horror, mutilation, and critique of war seen in the works of the soldier-poets like Sassoon, Graves, or Wilfred Owens; the "detached" description of Jünger or Stefan Zweig, or the loss and drama of Remarque, Vera Brittain, or Earnest Hemingway.[7] As Winter argued, at the heart of the "memory boom" in the historiography of the Great War is "the need to attend to, to acknowledge the victims of war and the ravages" of the war.[8] These interpretations of the war have stuck with us, laymen and historians alike.

Yet many soldiers and writers of joke books in the post-war era felt that represented only half of the story of the war, and chose to represent the other, humorous side as well; these interpretations and memories of the conflict have been buried over the last century. Humor served as a way to remember the war that clashed with the dominant interpretation. Winter looked at different "theaters of memory" reproduction, which for him included letters, war

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[6] Jay Winter, *War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 4.

[7] Susanne Brandt, "Memory of the War: Popular Memory 1918-1945, 1945 to the Present," 1914-1918-online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War, Freie Universität Berlin, May 24, 2017, doi: 10.15463/ie1418.10958/1.1.

[8] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the 20th Century* (Yale University Press, 2006), 3.

novels, photography, film, museums, and war crime trials.[9] Drawing from that analogy, I argue that humor was another 'theater' of war, a space where the meaning and memory of the war were struggled over. Veterans, whether they were collecting humor or just recounting their memories, understood war memory in humorous terms, constructing an irreverent memory of the war that contrasted not only with the dominant contemporary literary reaction to the war, but also our modern-day popular memory of it.

Veterans of the First World War recognized, understood, and commented on how humor, laughter, smiling, and cheerfulness were vital to coping with the war experience and maintaining morale. They teamed up with publishers to make that explicit. In the final years of the war and throughout the decade following the Armistice, a small but significant wave of joke books and humorous story collections hit the markets in Britain and the United States, among them *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers* by Carleton B. Case (1919), *The Best 500 Cockney War Stories* (1921), *Trench Gas: A Bunch of Many Clever Chestnuts* (1918), *Khaki Komedy* and its companion *Navy Nonsense* (both 1918), and *World War Jokes* by C. L. Majors (1930). Like trench newspapers, soldier-produced sources commonly used by First World War historians who discuss humor, these joke books had the expressed goal of cheering up soldiers, providing some laughs to contrast the war experience.[10] But their goals reached beyond those of trench newspapers because they also aimed to connect veterans and civilians through humor. The joke books suggest on an obvious level that jokes and humor were in demand amidst a more general reaction of sadness and somber remembrance. They also represented a way in which soldiers wished to shape the memory of the war experience, one that greatly contrasted the memory

[9] Winter, *Remembering War.*

[10] Trench newspapers or soldier newspapers are a near-ubiquitous source for humor in World War One, and for good reason. See for example, Robert L. Nelson, "Soldier Newspapers: A Useful Source in the Social and Cultural History of the First World War and Beyond," *War in History* 17, no. 2 (2010): 167–91.

constructed by the poets, artists, and memoirists of the war. Humor, it might be said, became a 'theater' of struggle over the memory of the war itself. These joke collections, a type of source so far overlooked by historians, suggest how important humor was in the psyche of First World War soldiers. Jokes and funny stories were compiled and organized in books and pamphlets with a considerable amount of overlap. Thus, humor struck a chord with civilians and soldiers, and show how humor constituted a lens through which soldiers experienced the war, and then later remembered and reconstructed the meaning of the war. Not only did joke books represent a way for combatants and civilians to cope with the horrors of the previous four years, but they also provided a unique interpretation of the wartime experience.

Many collections of short stories about the war aimed to showcase the humorous side of the war, as opposed to the more depressing side that had already begun to engrain itself in popular memory. "The comedy side of the war," wrote Carleton Case, editor of *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers* (1919), "has been quickly seen and readily interpreted by the world's great writers, as well as by the very officers and men, in all departments of the service, who themselves participated in both the serious and the frivolous affairs of warfare as developed day by day."[11] Even by 1919, Case declared, "enough and too much has been told of the horrors of war. To hear the pleasanter side, the merry doings of our soldiers and their allies, the victorious hosts of freedom, is a welcome relief to war-weary hearts."[12] Case severely underestimated the scope of the memory of the horrors of war, but he makes an important point about what the public needed in addition to the more negative interpretations of the war.

[11] Carleton B. Case, *Funny Stories Told by the Soldiers* (Chicago: Shrewesbury Publishing Co., 1919), 3.
[12] Case, *Funny Stories Told by the Soldiers,* 3.

Case's view of multiple 'sides' of the war was an idea fully developed by Dolphus Edward Compere in *Army Frowns and Smiles* a year later. *Army Frowns and Smiles* is a particularly interesting case study. Compere, an army doctor, published the book in 1920, culminating his two-year search for medical reform and justice. Compere was a first-lieutenant in the US medical corps. On October 11, 1918, he witnessed a young private by the name of Russell Wood die at camp Morrison, Virginia, "without proper medical attention."[13] His book was in part a history of his crusade to seek justice for the young victim; it recounts how he found Wood dying and tried to give him care but was hampered by the red tape and bureaucracy of the army medical staff, which resulted in Wood's untimely death. Compere tried to report the incident but was honorably discharged for his efforts, and branded a liar on official records without his knowledge. After learning of this, he attempted to appeal, but he was denied a proper hearing or investigation. His book includes correspondence he sent to and received from military officials, politicians, the press, medical professionals, and even the President as he sought out justice for himself and reforms for military medical practice. For the most part, his complaints were swept under the rug, and he was told that no more could be done for his case. The first half of his book is a sharp indictment of military and state corruption, bureaucratic neglect, and injustice.[14]

Then abruptly, his book changes genre, form, content, and purpose. The latter 140 pages are a compilation of songs, jokes, "smilisms" (what today we might call "one-liners"), and funny stories he heard during the war. Almost out of nowhere, Compere spins 180 degrees to deliver some laughs. It is baffling why this abrupt change occurs Why did Compere choose to present

[13] D.E. Compere, *Army Frowns and Smiles* (Dallas: Hargreaves Printing Company, 1920), 5.
[14] Compere, *Army Frowns and Smiles,* 1-44.

his book in this way? "Unless I be misunderstood," he wrote, "I desire to hereby register a vote recommending myself most highly as an optimist and not as a pessimist and as evidence of such optimism, I beg to transcribe a few of my smiles, composed, accumulated and dispensed during army life, which I trust will relieve all Frowns and produce more Smiles."[15] Compere had faith that the latter half of his book would relieve the depressive air the first half produced. He also wanted to be known as an optimist despite all the wrongs done to him.

Army Frowns and Smiles looks like two separate projects stitched together, but Compere clearly had his reasons for doing so. His preface built off Case's observation of the two sides of war, stating that "there are two sides to every story, even Army life. The dark, sad, serious experiences, reversed by the comic, joyous, light-hearted happenings, which are smile productive." Compere held the comic and funny side of war to be equal to the dark and serious side. He describes *Army Frowns and Smiles* as "a serious, urgent appeal for justice, flavored by the soldier's courage shield, a smile."[16] Compere uses humor as a palate-cleanser for his reader after they consume his mostly depressing narrative. The *Smiles* half of the book added to the small wave of works that attempted to remember and record both 'sides' of the war, the serious and the funny, the bleak and the humorous. One did not have to look hard after the war in the United States or Britain to find a collection of jokes or funny stories like *Navy Nonsense*, *Khaki Komedy*, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers*, or *Quips and Memoirs of the Corps.* These books both recorded and memorialized the humor spread and used by soldiers throughout the war, and served as a way to cheer up soldiers and civilians alike.

[15] Compere, *Army Frowns and Smiles,* 47.
[16] Compere, *Army Frowns and Smiles,* 17.

Many joke books attempted to unify their audience across the battlefront-homefront divide that was created by the diverging experiences of soldiers on the front those left at home. Authors and editors had considerable hope that humor could reconnect soldiers with civilians and reconcile their respective wartime experiences. Crascredo, the somewhat cryptic author of *No Joke,* wrote the following in a small preface to his work, alluding to the renowned British cartoonist George Denholm Armour: "If, with me, you can laugh a short laugh at war whenever and wherever Mr. Armour has a joke about it--why, then, we shall be of one mind, Mr. Armour and you and I, in finding something humorous sometimes bobbing up where the whole is assuredly No Joke."[17] His audience had a chance to connect with him and his war experience through laughter.

C. L. Majors thought the same about his *World War Jokes*, a collection of his favorite jokes and anecdotes from the war: "To the layman [these jokes and stories] will give the optimistic insight to the army and navy life and a better understanding of the hardships, though cheerfully and uncomplainingly met, lived by the men in the service in time of war."[18] Not every joke would "meet the entertaining temperament of all the people, but there is to be found among them stories that will satisfy the sense of humor of everyone."[19] Humor, Majors believed, had something to offer to everyone, and was the perfect window for the 'layman,' the non-combatant, to catch a glimpse of the wartime experience which might otherwise seem incomprehensible. And for veterans, humor would be a "happy medium through which to renew and ever to keep alive the comradeships formed during the service" and present "the sunny side

[17] Crascredo, *No Joke* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), vii. Armour is best known for his work for *Punch*, a satirical publication popular during the war.
[18] C. L. Majors, *World War Jokes* (Ramer, Tennessee: n.p., 1930), iii.
[19] Majors, *World War Jokes,* iii.

of the Army and Navy life."[20] Thus, the postwar wave of joke books and story collections, while clashing with the dominant narrative emerging about the war, represented both a way that soldiers coped with and interpreted their war experience, and how they attempted to relate that experience with the homefront.

Humor thus constitutes a window into the experiences of the past, even the events not typically associated with humor and laughter, like the industrialized carnage of the First World War. The joke books and humorous story collections argue, either implicitly by their presence or explicitly in their introductions, that funny things happened during and within a decidedly tragic war. Some suggested that enough had been written on the somber "side" of the war, and chose to represent the humorous "side" as well. While this was likely a method of coping, which will be discussed next, it is relevant to understand that humor was considered a legitimate way to interpret, convey, and memorialize the conflict by those who fought in it.

[20] Majors, *World War Jokes,* iii.

COPING, SUBVERTING, AND SUPPORTING: THE FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF HUMOR ON THE FRONT

Soldiers' writings reveal a number of forms and functions of humor on the front lines, including highlighting reactions to front experiences, interpersonal relations, and self-identification. Central to all these themes is the argument that humor functioned as a space and a tool between subversion and support of the military hierarchy and the war effort as a whole. Humor could often be supportive, wielded by those in authority in propaganda; or on a more personal level, humor helped officers soften military strictness when giving orders, breaking bad news, or maintaining morale. The most fundamental function of humor in the war was to help soldiers cope with the stress and terror of industrialized warfare. Soldiers were quite aware of this fact, saying so explicitly in the heat of battle and later in the introductions to their joke collections. This humor can generally be constructed as supportive humor as it ultimately aided the war effort, improved morale, and unified soldiers across rank and class.

On the other hand, humor's creative, spontaneous, and superfluous nature inherently clashed with the rigid ideologies and processes of the military during wartime operations. Humor created a safe space for soldiers to question military authority and make fun of individual officers without the risk that open insubordination posed; in this function it might look like passive resistance against military authority. Shifting the focus from interpersonal conflict to personal identification, we can see there too how humor subverted wider military ideologies. Soldiers used self-deprecating humor to challenge romantic and medieval characteristics of 'ideal' soldiers that were thrust upon them by civilians and militaries alike. Jokes depicting soldiers as anything other than courageous, loyal, and chivalrous, or indeed as openly antiheroic,

looked very subversive to traditional military ideologies. In fluctuating between supportive and subversive forms of humor in this chapter, I hope to highlight humor's neutrality and ambiguity in interpersonal interactions and tension between individuals and wider ideologies.

"It's Only Us Keepin' So Ruddy Cheerful as Pulls Us Through": Humor as a Coping Mechanism

The most fundamental function of humor in the war was to help soldiers cope with the stress and terror of industrialized warfare. Starting with Paul Fussell's discussion of "gallows humor" and the great "irony" of the war, scholars who have looked at the forms and functions of humor in the First World War have long understood and viewed humor as a coping mechanism for soldiers.[21] The only edited collection of essays on humor and the war, *Humor, Entertainment, and Popular Culture during World War I*, focused on the "emergence of humor as entertainment and coping mechanism" among soldiers. The essays within remain mostly limited to themes within that broader topic.[22] In her 2019 dissertation "Humour and Representation in British Literature of the First World War," Emily Anderson summed up the historiography by saying scholars "often either overlooked humorous First World War literature or discussed it for its role as a coping mechanism, emphasizing its psychological importance and ways in which it boosted morale."[23] Edward Madigan's "Sticking to a Hateful Task: Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combatant Courage, 1914–1918" typifies that approach by showing how

[21] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 8-9, 33-36, and chapter 6.
[22] Clémentine Tholas-Disset and Karen A. Ritzenhoff, eds., *Humor, Entertainment, and Popular Culture during World War I* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 3.
[23] Emily Anderson, "Humour and Representation in British Literature of the First World War (1914–18)" (Dissertation, Newcastle University, 2019), iii.

humor was folded into concepts of resilience, courage, and morale.[24] Since the observation that humor was a coping mechanism is relatively well-worn, my purpose here will be to briefly posit some specific aspects and usages of humor to cope that scholars before me have not already identified. First is the observation that soldiers, too, recognized humor as a coping mechanism, saying so explicitly in the heat of battle and later in the introductions to their joke collections; which is to say that historians focused exclusively on this fact and were not necessarily original with their broad arguments. Second is how soldiers employed humor moments before their death as a way to take back control of the situation, and how surviving soldiers interpreted that humor or perhaps added layers of their own.

As discussed above, soldiers highlighted the fact that they used humor to cope with their experiences. The stories found within collections, joke books, and memoirs explicitly comment on how humor, smiling, and good spirits functioned as a coping mechanism for anything from monotonous day-to-day operations to extreme stress, death, and killing. Many did this to specifically memorialize humor's function during the war. The editors of *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories* collected humorous anecdotes from Cockney veterans for "the remembering, and the retelling, of those war days when laughter sometimes saved men's reason. Cockneys the world over have left to posterity a record of noble and imperishable achievement."[25] Humor is not only recognized by the editors as a valid way to remember and retell the war, but also as a major coping mechanism, saving men's reason and keeping them in the fight. "Pack your troubles in your old kit bag; And smile, smile, smile," was a common lyric

[24] Edward Madigan, "'Sticking to a Hateful Task': Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combatant Courage, 1914–1918," *War in History* 20, no. 1 (2013), 76-98.
[25] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories* (The London Evening News. Associated Newspapers Ltd., 1921), 5. Sometimes also titled *The Best 500 Cockney War Stories*.

in songs and poems about maintaining morale and sticking to the task.[26] The phrase "Smile! Smile! Smile!" became a common moniker for many a joke about a soldier's ability to cope, such as the following:

> 1st Soldier: I'm fed up with this stunt.
> 2nd Soldier: Same 'ere. 'Tain't 'arf a life, ain't it? No rest, no beer, blinkin' leave stopped—er, got any fags?
> 1st: No, mate.
> 2nd: No fags, no nuffink. It's only us keepin' so ruddy cheerful as pulls us through.
> *– V. Marston, S.W.20.*[27]

Multiple layers of humor can be unpacked from this. First, the second soldier recognized how their spirit and good attitude pulled them through. On another level it is also a joke; it is clearly sarcasm and hyperbole to claim that only their cheerfulness kept them going. But like most effective jokes, it is grounded in a foundation of truth: their cheerful humor is supporting them in some capacity. Even in the midst of the horrors of war, humor was created in stressful situations. One soldier tried to comfort another by saying "Why don't you do as the song says, Pack all your troubles in your old kitbag, and smile, smile, smile?" To which he replied sadly and somewhat tongue-in-cheek, "I tried that once, but the Quartermaster didn't have enough kitbags."[28] Even if the sad soldier could not force himself to smile away his troubles, as the saying went, he still used humor to explain why.

Other soldiers recognized how humor could appear in the midst of war. An army Alphabet, made by J. W. S. Henderson, had J standing for "Joking," suggesting how relevant it was to his wartime experience.[29] B. J. Berry of the 9th Norfolk Regiment recounts how he and

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[26] *Khaki Komedy* (Chicago: Howell Publishing Company, 1918), 7.
[27] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 158. "Fags" is a common slang term for cigarettes.
[28] *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers* (1919) by Carleton B. Case, 62-63.
[29] *The ANZAC Book* (1916), 116.

seven others dived into a dugout all at once to avoid a gas attack. As the eight of them "tried to scramble through a narrow opening at once," they "landed in a wriggling mass on the floor. Some were kneeling and some were sitting, all with serious faces, until one fellow said: 'Phew, it's hell of a war, but yer carn't 'elp laughin', can yer?'"[30] Even the stress of the war could not stifle the laughter of a funny situation. Humor and sarcasm served as a counterpart to encouragement, both aiding in the support of soldiers. Francis Patrick Duffy, a Catholic chaplain in the Irish-American Sixty-Ninth, explained how "the strong help the weak by encouragement," but also by "sharp biting words when sympathy would only increase weakness…they got through on spirit. The tasks were impossible from mere flesh and blood, but what flesh and blood cannot do, Spirit can make them do."[31] Humor thus constituted an important aspect of the fighting spirit and a crucial way to cope with the war experience, and soldiers recognized this.

Other authors have effectively covered how soldiers used humor to cope with their wartime experience in general. But many specific acts of coping have yet to be fully discussed, such as soldiers' use of humor in their dying moments. The act of dying is a serious affair, yet many soldiers chose to joke in their final moments (or at least, that is how those moments were remembered). No other jokes show the spontaneity of humor in war quite as well as the funny words of a dying man. Lord Moran wrote much later that humor was perhaps the only way they could have coped with such a thing. "Humour that touched everything with ridicule," he said, "had taken the bit out of the last thing, death."[32] As Marta Gorgula has argued, since it is difficult to imagine one's own demise, humor allows one to regain a sense of control over circumstances

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[30] *The Best 500 Cockney War Stories* (1921), 55.

[31] Francis Patrick Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story: Life and Death with the Fighting Sixty-Ninth – Irish American Soldiers in World War One* (Paris: Adansonia Publishing, 2019), 31. First published in 1919 under the title *Father Duffy's story, a tale of humor and heroism, of life and death with the fighting Sixty-ninth*.

[32] Lord Moran, *Anatomy of Courage* (London: Robinson, 2007), 152. First published 1945. Quoted in Madigan, "Sticking to a Hateful Task," 93.

that cannot be controlled: "From this perspective, humor may be conceived of, in part, as a route by which a sense of meaning or control is achieved via adaptive distancing from an otherwise overwhelming situation."[33] At times, the dying would joke to cope upon the realization of their imminent death. In other cases, these jokes certainly would have been to cheer up those around them who had to witness their death.

F. W. Brown of the 7th Suffolks Regiment was trapped with several wounded men in a shell hole at Albert on March 29, 1918. Being uninjured, Brown announced he would make a sprint for a nearby shell hole to fetch and direct the medics and stretcher-bearers. Brown wrote that one of his wounded companions, on hearing his remark, "grinned up at me and, with death written on his face, panted: 'Go it, Applegarf, an' I'll time yer.' The Cockney was dead when I left the shell hole."[34] The dying man's joke is twofold: first, he refers to Brown as Willie Applegarth, England's star Olympic sprinter. Then he suggests that he, in his dying state, will be able to time Brown on his run. This bit of humor was the man's final effort to provide to the spirit of his comrades and the greater war effort; the last of his energy was spent on an encouraging joke.

A soldier of the 13th King's Royal Rifles, hit by multiple bullets, was being placed on a stretcher to be carried down the line when a doctor asked him his name. The soldier looked up with a smile and answered: "Bunn, sir, and the blighters have put some currants into me this time." He died shortly thereafter.[35] Bunn equated the bullets to currants and constructed a pun based on his last name to refer to himself as a currant bun. The brave soldier chose to lighten the mood of himself and the doctor with humor. Father Duffy wrote how Harry McCoun was struck

[33] Marta Gorgula, "'Oh, It's a Lovely War': The Aims and Importance of Humor," in Rafał Borysławski ed. *Histories of Laughter and Laughter in History* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 39.
[34] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 51.
[35] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 90.

by a shell that tore off his left hand. He held up the stump and shouted "well, boys, there goes my left wing!"[36] McCoun suffered a serious injury and likely knew he would face death, yet he immediately used humor to relay that vital information to his mates. He died the next morning. Soldiers faced injury and imminent death with bravery and humor.

On the other hand, soldiers displaying humor in their last moments might only reflect how their comrades choose to record their deaths. Brown and Duffy, in trying to find meaning in the deaths of the soldiers around them, might have chosen to remember their deaths in a way that deflect the gloomy reality of brutalized death on the battlefield. It is also possible that dying soldiers' humor stucks out in memories better than more prevalent moans of pain, words or regret, or dying wishes. The stories of humor could be a substitution for repressed memories of trauma; in other words, memories of joking in final moments could be fabricated as a new layer of coping with that traumatic experience. Given that the dead cannot speak for themselves, the singular point of view of the survivors, operating under heavy stress and trauma, must be called into question. Additionally, soldiers recording such moments might have a personal, cultural, or nationalistic reason to portray deaths in such a way that it makes their country, city, or their unit's humorous spirit and bravery shine through. The entire book dedicated to the humor of Cockney soldiers certainly suggests this; those submitting stories of their fallen Cockney brothers would have a vested interest in making their final moments memorable for their humor and bravery.

These stories of humor during final moments might be an insistence that their comrades died a relatively meaningful and peaceful death, to protect their reputations as men and a soldiers, or to protect the audience from the true gore and horror of wartime deaths. Just as a

[36] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 45.

soldier might insist to a grieving mother that her son died without pain, like the main character Paul Bäumer in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, writers of humorous death stories might have chosen to present a narrative of their friends' deaths that they believed their audience would be able to handle. In the story, Paul is on leave and visits the mother of his friend Kemmerich, whom he witnessed die horribly, gurgling on his own blood, after getting his leg amputated and suffering for a number of days in a field hospital. Kemmerich's mother begs to know how her son died. Paul repeatedly insists and swears on his life that he died instantly, without pain. His assurances seem to comfort her.[37] Just as Paul shields Kemmerich's mother from the true nature of her son's death, so too Brown, Duffy, and other writers might have been shielding their readers from the reality of death on the front by masking it with humor.

Finally, in an intersection between the production of memory of the war and coping with those memories, soldiers might have emphasized humorous moments in death to return some agency and meaning to the dying soldier. This was done perhaps in direct response to the growing narrative of the senselessness of soldiers' deaths and soldiers' portrayals as helpless victims.[38] Showing soldiers' humor, even at their death, was a way to take back control of the perception of soldiers. In sum, humor as a coping mechanism still has themes and topics to offer historians. First, like modern historians, contemporary writers also recognized and commented on how humor helped them cope with the stresses of war. Second, despite the coverage from both groups, there are still some spaces of humor and coping that need exploring, such as soldiers' use of humor surrounding death. The process of dying is generally a serious affair, but soldiers in their dying moments chose to employ humor for the benefit of their comrades. At

[37] Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1975), 175-177. Original German-language version published in 1929.
[38] Helen B. McCartney, "The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 90, no. 2 (2014): 299–315.

times the stories we have might be fabricated memories that survivors used to cope or shield their audience from the truth. But in such instances when dying soldiers actually joked in their final moments, their comrades took note and praised their efforts, and as an act of remembrance chose to recall those events with humor and death entwined.

"And Confound You, for Missing the Major": Subversive Humor

The use of humor was not limited to helping soldiers cope with their experiences. Among its many forms and functions, humor was an important vessel for subverting, critiquing, and mocking military authority, the trope of the ideal soldier, the wider war effort, and a variety of social ideologies. Humor can also be used to understand relationships between soldiers and their overarching authority structure, the military hierarchy. This especially applied to their relationship with their superior officers, where wider class tensions between enlisted men and commissioned officers lay. Humor was a medium through which soldiers could challenge authority in a safe manner. Whether the humor was anecdotes or jokes passed around in papers and books, soldiers laughed at and connected to jokes that made fun of their superiors, humorously asserted their individualism, or attempted to regain some semblance of control in a world where they controlled very little.

As David Paletz observed, humor may range "along a spectrum in its relationships with authority," from supportive to benign, to undermining and subversive.[39] A central debate among historians who study humor is where humor falls on that spectrum. In the broadest sense, Paletz is correct; humor is a neutral weapon that can be wielded by those in or without authority to

[39] David L. Paletz, "Political Humor and Authority: From Support to Subversion," *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale de Science Politique* 11, no. 4 (1990): 483–93.

either support or subvert authority. A large number of World War One scholars, influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's work on humor in the Middle Ages, have considered humor and laughter to be "intrinsically subversive and in conflict with authority."[40] Ann Taylor Allen argued that humor "acted as a creative force, breaking down rigid ideologies, traditions and mores, affirming the freedom of individuals."[41] Another key reason humor inherently rubs up against authority is because it is superfluous. It serves a certain additive role to be sure, adding human emotion, tension relief, and cheerful spirit to stressful situations. But humor rarely adds anything in a clear and tangible way that is obviously necessary to the completion of whatever task the authority is looking to achieve. Rather, humor most often is a distraction. And in the context of war and military authority, humor is not strictly necessary to carry out the war on any level, making it an unwanted expression of creativity and individualism undermining a structure that functions on uniformity and military statism.

Soldiers' humor manifested itself in various forms. It is useful to understand humor as a tool that anyone can pick up and use. Humor was at the disposal of the common soldier, ready to be picked up and wielded in rhetorical clashes with higher authority or ideologies. In the case of many quips and jokes that poke fun at military authority, from their direct officers to high command, humor can look like a weapon, digging and poking. At other times humor acts like a shield, partially defending soldiers from the consequences of their insubordinate words and critiques. If a critique or rude comment can also generate laughter, it is likely the speaker will 'get away' with the comment, even when the speaker's comment implies deeper resentment towards authority. Another way to understand humor is to think of it as a space that one enters.

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[40] Jan Rüger, "Laughter and War in Berlin," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 67 (2009), 27.

[41] Ann Taylor Allen, *Satire and Society in Wilhelmine Germany: Kladderadatsch & Simplicissimus 1890-1914*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 229, quoted in Rüger, "Laughter and War in Berlin." 27.

Once in this space, communication that would seem impossible elsewhere can occur. Jason Crouthamel sees humor as a "safe zone" where soldiers could explore their sexuality and express their dissatisfaction with military hierarchy and ideology.[42] Martina Kessel and Patrick Merziger equate the spatial boundaries of humor as a marketplace, "an embattled arena where producers, censors, and consumers continuously tested the limits of what could be said."[43] Whether it took the form of a space, a tool, or both, humor was a neutral player in the dynamics between the common ranker and military authority, between the average man and social hierarchies. Thus, humor could be wielded by anyone to subvert or support, undermine or reinforce whatever concept they wished. Humor might be seen as the no-man's-land between opposing forces, or the front lines of hierarchical military and class conflict. Soldiers often followed the banner of humor into these metaphorical battles.

Just underneath the surface of the officer and soldier interactions were wider class tensions. For example, by the beginning of the war, the British officer corps had built up centuries of aristocratic traditions and prestige. The legacy of the Glorious Revolution and the restoration had established a deep-set fear of standing armies of common soldiers and a proclivity to recruit officers from the upper class.[44] While the actual presence of aristocracy diminished during the war, the elitist, upper-class monopoly on the Officer Corps was very much in place.[45] Contrasting them were the regular enlisted soldiers, who as the war dragged on increasingly consisted of a cross-section of the lower and working classes, dominion troops, and colonial troops, especially after conscription started in January 1916.

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[42] Jason Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.
[43] Martina Kessel and Patrick Merziger, eds. *The Politics of Humour: Laughter, Inclusion and Exclusion in the Twentieth Century* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 13.
[44] C. B. Otley, "The Social Origins of British Army Officers," *The Sociological Review* 18, no. 2 (1990), 213-14.
[45] Otley, "The Social Origins of British Army Officers," 234.

As Nick Mansfield argued in his survey of the 19th-century British Army, *Soldiers as Workers: Class, Employment, Conflict and the Nineteenth-century Military*, class conflict was pervasive in the military, where "mutinies, strikes, and disputes took place against a background of unwavering passive resistance."[46] Mansfield looked at instances of "low level" class conflict, including drinking, looting, self-harm, desertion, fraternizing with the enemy, and loss of discipline. I add humor to the list of 'low-level' or 'passive' class resistance and argue that it too reveals "a spirit of resistance" based on class.[47] The two groups that will get the most attention here, due to the sources under consideration, are Cockneys and ANZAC soldiers. "Cockney" was and is used to describe people born in East End, London, traditionally within earshot of the bells of St Mary-le-Bow. Working class and generally looked down upon by the rest of British society, Cockneys were known for their distinct accents and vernacular, love of practical jokes, and humor, both good-natured and coarse.[48] Dominion soldiers from New Zealand and Australia, meanwhile, formed a distinct ANZAC identity of a similar nature. Their contrast to the British in their accents, sardonic sense of humor, and insolent contempt for danger became part of their legend of ANZAC Spirit.[49] The impudent, lower-class Cockney or ANZAC soldiers were the perfect contrast to a well-born and aristocratic officer who would often be commanding them. Conflict that could easily be constructed as class-based was bound to happen; humor was frequently born out of such conflict, mediating the tension between the two parties.

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[46] Nick Mansfield, *Soldiers as Workers: Class, Employment, Conflict and the Nineteenth-century Military* (United Kingdom: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 174.
[47] Mansfield, *Soldier as Workers*, 206.
[48] Reginald Pelham Bolton, "The Cockney and His Dialect," *The Journal of American Folklore* 8, no. 30 (1895), 222–29. For a full overview of the Dialect and its history, see William Matthews, *Cockney Past and Present: A Short History of the Dialect of London* (London: Routledge, 1938).
[49] Arthur Burke, "The Spirit of ANZAC," anzacday.org.au, Anzac Day Commemoration Committee, accessed March 22, 2023, https://anzacday.org.au/spirit-of-anzac; and "Dawn of the Legend: The Anzac Spirit," awm.gov.au, Australian War Memorial, October 30, 2019, https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/dawn/spirit.

Joke books contain many varied examples of soldiers questioning their officers and their duties in the relatively safe space of humor. U.S. General Leonard Wood told the story of a captain overloading his new orderly with a long list of duties and tasks. "Your work will be to clean my boots, buttons, belt, and so forth," the captain said, "shave me, see to my horse, which you must groom thoroughly, and clean the equipment. After that you go to your hut, help to serve the breakfast, and after breakfast lend a hand washing up. At eight o'clock you go on parade and drill till twelve o'clock…" He might have continued for some time, had the recruit not broken in with: "Excuse me, sir, is there anyone else in the army besides me?"[50] The new orderly sensed that he was fighting his "own personal war," which is how the joke book titled the story. He interrupted his new boss, challenging both the duties he had to perform and the captain dealing out those duties. The story overall paints the officer in a bad light, through which the bright humor of the orderly shines. Its inclusion in a joke book might seem harmless, but certainly, in an age of strict military hierarchies and censorship, something that made fun of officers and showcased a challenge to military duties would be suspect. Yet according to the author, the story itself was told by General Leonard Wood, former US Army chief of staff. Apparently, the humor inherent in the story overcame any qualms higher authority might have had with it.

Some soldiers, when faced with criticism or imminent punishment from a superior, would relieve the tension with humor. A soldier in the Essex Yeomanry recounted a story of a "Mounted Marine." His cavalry unit had been riding for several hours on a wet, windy, and miserable night. They halted in a field which, owing to the heavy rain, was more like a lake. On receiving the order to dismount, one soldier remained mounted and flashed a small flashlight on

[50] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 33.

the water. His sergeant immediately accosted him, shouting to the wayward soldier: "Why the dickens are you still mounted, and what the deuce are you looking for anyway?" The Cockney soldier replied cheekily, "Blimey, sergeant, where's the landing stage?"[51] The soldier used humor as a shield when approached by a none-too-gentle sergeant, with multiple effects. His joke answered both questions at once, humorously commented on the situation the company found themselves in, and deflected the anger of the officer for his delay in following orders.

Other accounts show how humor was used to cut rising tension between superiors and the rank and file. One example comes from Italy. Hearing that Sir Sidney Lawford was arriving to inspect their wagon lines, men of the 41st Division spent time clearing their camp of wiring and making things "ship shape." As one soldier recalled, Lawford "arrived about 11 a.m. with a number of his staff, dismounted ... and promptly tripped over a piece of wire. Imagine our chagrin. However, the feeling passed away when a Cockney driver (evidently one of the wire-collecting fatigue) said in a voice audible to everyone… "Blimey, if he ain't fallen over the only piece of blinking wire in Italy!"[52] The well-timed joke immediately relieved the embarrassment of the fallen lieutenant-general and the tension of the accident. The humor also covered for the soldiers who had, in some respects, failed at their duties of cleaning the camp for an inspection.

Humor was such an effective shield that it could protect soldiers from the consequences of boldly lying to their superiors. An ANZAC soldier wrote how a man named Henessy lit up a cigarette right as an officer approached, an inopportune time. Henessy quickly stuck his lit cigarette down his coat pocket to avoid the officer seeing it. As he approached, the officer sniffed about a bit, then asked Henessy: "Are you smoking?" "No, sir!" the soldier replied "Well, I can

[51] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 130.
[52] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 167.

smell smoke!" insisted the officer. The officer paused for a moment, then looked hard at our unlucky protagonist: "What's your name?" he asked. "'Enessy, sir." "Well, Henessy, your pocket's on fire!" Henessy looked, recounts the narrator, and "hang me if that bloomin' cigarette 'adn't set fire to 'is coat pocket!" But the officer, apparently in a hurry, only said, "Don't do it again!" and walked off. Henessy might have ruined his coat pocket, but the humorous situation helped him avoid the potential of serious military discipline because of a cheeky (and quite obvious) fib.[53]

Since humor was superfluous, it occasionally distracted from day-to-day military operations and communications. Frederick Heath, a major in the 13th Battalion (Kensington), recalled how one company commander, tasked with sending in situation reports several times a day, grew tired of the monotony of the general "wind up" and determined to shake things up. To pull the legs of the officers at their battalion H.Q., he "wrote a situation report in verse, sent it over the wire to B.H.Q., where, of course, it was taken down in prose and read with complete consternation by the C.O. and adjutant!" To Heath, this hilarity showed "the gay spirit which meant so much in the front line at a time when everyone's nerves were on edge. It was written less than two days before the German offensive of March 21." C Company Situation Report, March 19, 1918, went as follows:

> There is nothing I can tell you
> That you really do not know—
> Except that we are on the Ridge
> And Fritz is down below.
>
> I'm tired of "situations"
> And of "wind" entirely "vane."

[53] *The ANZAC Book* (London: Cassel and Company, Ltd, 1916), 47.

The gas-guard yawns and tells me
"It's blowing up for rain."

He's a human little fellow.
With a thoughtful point of view,
And his report (uncensored)
I pass, please, on to you.

"When's old Fritzie coming over?
Does the General really know?
The Colonel seems to think so,
The Captain tells us 'No.'

"When's someone going to tell us
We can 'Stand-to' as before?
An hour at dawn and one at dusk,
Lor' blimey, who wants more?"[54]

The Company Commander used humor and rhyme to cope with the monotony of his duties. In doing so he purposefully pranked the officers at the communications headquarters, likely embarrassing some while making others laugh. He broke protocol, disrupted uniformity and normalcy, and communicated in a manner that was far from professional, efficient, or clear. But to his men, Heath included, it meant the world, calming nerves and bringing smiles. In another scenario, instead of saying the usual "all present or accounted for" during a customary roundup, a young recruit said "all present on account of the war," spreading grins throughout the parade ground.[55] Was it a gaffe? If so, the ignorance of the proper military protocol still brought smiles. If it was on purpose, the joke cleverly twisted military normality in order to make it more relevant to the situation the soldiers found themselves in. Humor like this shows some harmless

[54] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 122. Interestingly, Heath explains that the word "vane" in the second verse refers to the weather vane used in the trenches to indicate if the wind was favorable or not for a gas attack. This shows how joke books were used for explaining the war experience to its audience.
[55] *Navy Nonsense: a Companion to Khaki Komedy,* (Chicago: Howell Publishing Company, 1918), 35.

insubordination was likely to cause tension between the humorist and his superiors yet also forge unity it forged between troops with laughter. These jokes perfectly encapsulate the range of functions humor could achieve on the front and the way humor struck a middle ground between subversion and support of the military authority structure and the war effort in general.

Similarly, a Cockney soldier named Higson wrote of a trench-warfare version of the game telephone. A long line of soldiers had been hiking through mud and rain when the tail-end of their party asked for a halt. The officer up front asked what the problem was, and his question and the answer went down and back up the chain of men. Apparently, someone further back had lost his gumboots in the mud. "Who's the fool who lost his gumboot?" demanded the Officer, annoyed at the delay. This message receded into the distance with the words "fool" and "gumboot" preceded by, as Higson recalled, "increasingly lurid adjectives." Minutes later the answer was passed up, getting louder and louder: "Charlie Chaplin," "Charlie Chaplin," "CHARLIE CHAPLIN." Higson wrote how that got a smile out of everyone: "even our sorely-tried officer had to laugh."[56] An entire group of soldiers shrugged off the effective communication desired by their superior officer for a bit of fun. This breakdown of necessary military and interpersonal communication could easily devolve into a stronger challenge to authority, or trigger chastisement from the officer. Yet the humor diffused the tension surrounding the annoyed officer and even got a laugh out of him. Because this subversion of authority and military processes happened in the safe zone of humor, no negative confrontation is created. Thus, humor could serve multiple roles at once, subverting authority while also placating it.

[56] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 134-135.

On the more subversive side of the humor spectrum, soldiers found great pleasure in jokes played on their superior officers. They were especially pervasive in the postwar wave of joke books. These jokes highlight rank distinctions and tensions, yet also alleviate those tensions. A particularly popular joke, found in many trench newspapers and joke books, went as follows:

> Captain (sharply)—"Button up that coat."
> Married Recruit (absently)—"Yes, my dear."[57]

Even if no such verbal interaction actually happened, it is the popularity of this joke, and others like it, that matters. One aspect of the joke is the absentminded recruit, hardly paying attention to his superior officer. Soldiers who resent their superiors would certainly connect with this joke, in their desire to ignore them. The other aspect of the joke compares the captain to a nagging wife. The unfortunate recruit has apparently escaped his home life with a domineering wife only to arrive in the army in a similar position. The accidental calling of a captain "my dear," and his obeying the order as if it came from a woman and not a superior, changes the dynamic between officer and recruit just slightly, and in gendered terms. The order was followed, but the power in the relationship was slightly shifted because the officers' status had been reduced in gendered terms to that of a wife, not an officer. Soldiers reading this would laugh thinking how funny it might be if they, too, called their captain "my dear."

Other jokes show soldiers equating officers to mothers rather than wives:

> Voice (from the tent where the corporal in charge had put out the lights) - "Corporal."
> Corporal- "what the devil's up now?"
> Voice- "you've forgotten something."

[57] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 10; also appears in *Khaki Komedy,* 40; and Compere, *Army Frowns and Smiles,* 178.

Corporal- "forgotten what?"
Voice- "forgotten to kiss us good night."[58]

One can almost hear the gales of laughter that must have erupted from such a statement. The soldier, acting in the dual safe zone of anonymity and humor, is able to construct a joke that eats at the heart of the officer-soldier dynamic. Comparing a corporal and his duties to a mother would certainly have a tender and endearing effect, to be sure,but also moves the corporal, again with gendered terms, to a status different and potentially lesser than his rank. In a way it might make the authority of the corporal more palatable, thus increasing understanding between rank and officer, but in the same move, it also allows the soldier to openly make fun of his superior, shifting, ever so slightly, the power dynamic between them.

The soldier in the dark used anonymity as a secondary shield, along with humor, to create that disruption of the soldier-officer interaction. Other soldiers found different ways to back up their humor. Many more seasoned soldiers preyed on new officers, finding space to make fun of them to their faces without their knowledge, due to their difference in experience at the front. C. T. Coates recounted how a 5·9 German artillery shell had burst in a section of his trench, "and caused–as 5·9's usually did–a bit of a mess." A brand-new officer came around the trench, saw the damage, and asked: "Whatever caused this mess?" Without the slightest suspicion of a smile a Cockney private answered: "An explosive bullet, sir!"[59] Coates lays out what is obvious to any man on the front, that Five-Nines (5.9-inch German artillery shells) were a common destructive force and part of everyday life. The new officer, being ignorant of this, opens himself up to mockery by questioning what could have made a mess of the trench. The Cockney private could

[58] *Khaki Komedy,* 47.
[59] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 63.

joke that it was "an explosive bullet" without cracking a smile from his own joke. This clever Cockney was able to get one on a new officer without him knowing.

Many jokes and stories depict common soldiers purposely embarrassing officers. In one story recorded by Carleton Case, a column of troops clambered down a rocky ledge and set up camp beside a delightful little pool of water. The commanding officer immediately placed a sentry at the pool. Soon a lieutenant scrambled down the ledge and quickly prepared for a plunge into that pool. But he was met with a sharp command from across the pond: "Halt!" cried the sentry. "What are your orders?" said the lieutenant. "Sir," came the answer, "my orders are to prevent all officers, soldiers, and natives from bathing in that pool. The water is reserved for the coffee for supper." Annoyed and embarrassed, the officer demanded, "Why didn't you tell me before I stripped?" Smiling, the sentry replied, "Sir, I have no orders to prevent any man from stripping."[60] The sentry cleverly found a loophole in his orders to pull off a prank on the lieutenant, likely embarrassing him in front of a group of soldiers. Even if this particular scenario did not really happen as Case recorded it, its inclusion in the storybook is significant. In another story, a soldier told his sergeant-major that he had named his mule "Satan," which narrowly beat out the name "Sergeant-Major." It was a toss-up, but in the end, the soldier didn't want to hurt the mule's feelings.[61] The fact that the officer is the butt of the joke is a veiled assault on the pride and respectability, and therefore the authority, of the officer and on the rank system itself.

Some jokes were targeted toward a specific individual, adding a more personal dimension to humor that rubbed against authority. An admiral "whose use of profanity was well known in the navy" was inspecting the brig on one of his ships, scrutinizing the prisoners. "What the hell

[60] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 67.
[61] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 115.

are you in for?" he demanded of one young fellow. "For using profanity, sir," was the reply. Concerned, "the admiral said no more."[62] On one occasion Father Duffy was lightly teased by a major. He "got square" with him by turning around and telling his company the following story: A major had been shot at by a German sniper while visiting one of his companies in the trenches. He made a big fuss about it with the captain, who in turn bawled out an old sergeant for allowing such things to happen. The sergeant went himself to settle the Heinie that was raising all the trouble. Finally, he got sight of the man, took careful aim, and fired. As he saw his shot reach home, he muttered, "take that, confound you, for missing the major."[63]

Even out of any context, it is difficult not to laugh at this. The joke itself was a popular one, it is likely that Duffy heard it elsewhere first. The hapless sergeant in the story is taking revenge on the German sniper not for shooting at his superior, but rather for missing him. Father Duffy, meanwhile, uses this joke to get even with the real major in his company. To "get square" with a superior officer has the potential to look very threatening to military hierarchy and thus the military status quo, because that implies an equalizing of the relationship between them.

As Tim Cook observed in his work on Canadian soldiers' humor in the Great War, some soldiers dared to joke about open insubordination with quips about running away from battle. These jokes would have a particular edge to them, as cowardice and desertion could and often did result in military execution.[64] Still, soldiers joked about it, defying both their officers' wishes and the expectations of bravery thrust upon them. Joke books included such quips despite their subversive nature to the war effort and the image of the ideal soldier. *Trench Gas* included a story about Pat, who became overcome by fright and ran for the rear as his regiment came under

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[62] *Navy Nonsense,* 35.
[63] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 81-82.
[64] Tim Cook, "'I Will Meet the World With a Smile And a Joke': Canadian Soldiers' Humour in the Great War," *Canadian Military History* 22, no. 2 (2013): 48-62.

fire. An officer called on him to stop, shouting: "Stop, or I'll fire at you!" But Pat only increased his speed. "Fire away!" he yelled. "Phwat's wan bullet to a bushel av 'em?"[65] Cook frames this type of humor as soldiers "embracing the anti-heroic," which will be discussed below.[66] For now, the more important aspect of the joke is how openly subversive it is to officers' command and the greater military structure as a whole. In a complete breakdown of discipline, Pat abandons the fight, going so far as to suggest that he has better odds to live running from his own officer than fighting the enemy, a message high military command would be terrified to hear expressed by its soldiers.

In sum, humor's ambiguity and neutrality allowed it to harbor some of the most interesting and tense interactions between common soldiers and their superior officers, the latter of whom inherently represented larger military and social authority structures. As Amanda Laugesen argued in her work on Australian soldier-entertainers in the war, "Authority figures could be made fun of within the relatively safe boundaries" of humor, just as humor "could help men deal with fear and death."[67] Sometimes it would do both at once, in the case of purely superfluous humor. Humor was a safe zone that could be entered when a soldier wanted to do or say something outside of military norms. Because of this, it mediated soldier-officer relationships, soothing conflicts and differences while also drawing attention to those differences. However, that did not stop humor from being a contested space. For all that it did in mediating the relationship between authority and inferiority, humor was frequently a tool for the underdog to attack authority. Even when humor wasn't directly attacking an authority figure or the authority structure itself, its superfluous nature inherently rubbed against the daily operations

[65] Bert Miller, *Trench Gas: A Bunch of Many Clever Chestnuts* (Boston: A.M. Davis Co. Publishers, 1918).
[66] Cook, "I Will Meet the World With a Smile And a Joke," 58.
[67] Amanda Laugesen, "More than a Luxury: Australian Soldiers as Entertainers and Audiences in the First World War," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 6, no. 3 (2013), 235.

of the military machine, and the creativity and individualism it presented clashed with the uniformity expected by authority.

"Don't Touch 'em, Sonny!": Supportive Humor

"I think I'm going to die," said a broken soldier. It was January 1st, 1918. He was part of the U.S. 69th Regiment, the Fighting Irish-Americans. On this particular date, they were fighting for their lives against the elements, exhaustion, and hunger. They marched through the foothills of the Vosges Mountains through snow and mud, pulling unwilling mules without proper equipment, and, in an egregious oversight, no reserve food rations. The villages in the Vosges could not support them, even when the soldiers offered to pay for food. According to the chaplain Francis Duffy, the men were "footsore, hungry, broken-backed, frozen, half-dead… but they will make it through."[68] He had cause for optimism, for he could see the different ways the men carried on, stuck to the task, and encouraged each other. As a chaplain, Duffy felt that part of his job was monitoring and maintaining morale, so he frequently noticed those who helped him in this task. He also took a special interest in humor, which is perhaps why this particular interaction got recorded in his diary. "I think I'm going to die," said the straggler, a youth of eighteen. Beaten and broken by the cold and the strain, he feared the worst. But along came Lieutenant Henry Bootz, a big man, six-and-a-half feet tall, with a strong heart to match his strong frame. "You can't die without my permission," laughed the big lieutenant, "and I don't intend to give it!"[69] He then took the young boy's pack, and they hiked on for seven more miles.

[68] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 29.
[69] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 30.

To contrast the previous section, if humor was a tool that could be used to undermine or subvert military authority, in the right hands it could also be wielded toward the opposite effect. Officers like Lieutenant Bootz frequently utilized humor to maintain morale, encourage their men, relay orders, and in general carry on the war effort by any means necessary. Humor was used by those in authority to train, teach, discipline, punish, give orders, and announce bad news, making their authority more palatable to the soldiers receiving those harsh communications. Meanwhile, soldiers frequently used humor that showed their support of their authorities and the war effort. Jokes and stories that showcase this appear much more frequently than humor that undermined the war effort or military authority. It is especially pervasive in patriotic pieces and in propaganda. A central and obvious effect of many of the written materials was helping soldiers cope with their wartime experience, helping them "stick it," thus keeping them in the fight. Jan Rüger noted that since this humor appeared more frequently, it has gotten more attention from scholars over the years who have generally concluded that due to humor's function as a coping mechanism, it was mainly supportive of the military hierarchy and the war effort.[70] In seeing humor as a neutral tool and treating both sides, this thesis follows Jakub Kazecki in arguing that humor is "characterized by ambivalence and both subversive and affirmative abilities."[71] The following section explores humor's ability to support the war effort when in the hands of competent military authority figures.

Carleton Case treats us with a typical example of 'affirmative' or supportive humor. It is a patriotic story about a severely wounded soldier who was crying in his hospital bed. A

[70] Rüger, "Laughter and War in Berlin," 27. For examples, see Jean-Yves Le Naour, "Laughter and Tears in the Great War: The Need for Laughter/The Guilt of Humour," *Journal of European Studies* 31, no. 123 (2001), 265-275; or Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914-1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), especially pages 388-390.
[71] Kazecki, *Laughter in the Trenches,* 26.

newspaper correspondent came across him and stopped to investigate. “Are you in great pain?” the newspaperman asked. The lad looked into the other’s eyes and nodded with a choking sob. “Where does it hurt?” the correspondent pursued. “It ain’t that,” was the reply; “it’s because they yanked me out of the scrap when I still had ten rounds left.”[72] The crux of the joke is the revelation that the soldier is not crying from the pain of his wound, but rather that he was taken out of the fight too early. The more patriotic and particularly enthusiastic soldiers would certainly laugh and cheer at this joke; officers would find it useful for encouraging the type of behavior and attitude needed on the front lines. Jokes and stories of this nature are pervasive in memoirs, joke books, and collections.

Still, it is important to understand specific uses and situations that soldiers and officers employed supportive humor on the front lines. Officers frequently used humor to create connections with their wards, especially to communicate to them that they were in the right place, doing the right thing. One officer told a recruit, who had been a salesman in civilian life: “you’re right in here [in the army], for you will get plenty of orders.”[73] The officer uses the joke to comfort the recruit by relating his new position to his past occupation. He also subtly comments on military life in a joking manner, and since the recruit is ‘in’ on this little joke, it creates a further connection between the two men through a shared humorous moment.

Officers particularly skilled in interpersonal communications could employ humor to a variety of effects, sometimes simultaneously. Humor was used to calm nerves, teach lessons about the attitude and philosophy of being a soldier, and define proper behavior on the front. One company at Passchendaele had been reinstated to full strength after a draft. Confidence was high,

[72] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 25-26.
[73] *Navy Nonsense,* 34.

so that "when Fritz treated us to an air raid about eight miles behind the line I am afraid he was almost ignored" by most of the veterans and officers. "Our Cockney sergeant was voicing the opinion that it wasn't a bad war when up rushed one recruit holding the chin strap of his tin hat and panting, 'Aero—aero—aeroplanes!' The sergeant looked at him for a second and said, 'All right, sonny, don't touch 'em.' A flush came to the youngster's face, and he walked away—a soldier." [74] The recruit was understandably terrified by the aerial assault. The sergeant aptly chose humor as the vessel for chastisement and battlefront education. He easily could have used harsher language to belittle and teach the recruit. He could have explained that soldiers on the ground are powerless against aircraft, thus there is no need to run about reporting them. In nihilistic terms, he could have expressed how there was nothing they could do about it, so there was no bother panicking. He could have outlined in non-humorous terms whose duty or responsibility it was to handle enemy aircraft. Instead, he chooses a lightly teasing tone of a mentor. "All right, sonny, don't touch 'em," jokingly yet softly and effectively communicated several key messages. The recruit walks away embarrassed, but in the eyes of the writer, he was now a true soldier.

That type of humor is an example of the fatalistic and often morbidly humorous "Logic of No Man's Land."[75] Essentially, this logic boiled down to: you will either die or live, so why worry? It could be described as a variant of positive nihilism, and it was a common philosophy of a soldier. "When one is a soldier," the full reasoning went, "it is one of two things. One is either in a dangerous place, or a cushy one. If in the latter, there is no need to worry. If one is in a dangerous place, it is one of two things. One is wounded, or one is not. If one is not, there is no

[74] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 116.
[75] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 32-33.

need to worry. If the former, it is either dangerous or slight. If slight, there is no need to worry, but if dangerous, it is one of two alternatives. One dies or recovers. If the latter, why worry? If you die you cannot. In these circumstances the real Tommy never worries."[76] So went a sign posted in a British dugout.

Certainly, if one can simply set aside and laugh away the human need to worry, and the myriad of emotions that humans utilize in times of stress, danger, injury, and death, then the logic of no man's land is flawless. But this philosophy is less known for logical rigor than it is known for showcasing the humor and attitude needed to survive the war experience. Notice, too, just how the sergeant's words forged the terrified recruit into a soldier, the sign in the dugout affirms that this logic was part of what makes a soldier a "true Tommy," I. E. a true soldier. One soldier used the same kind of humor to teach a particularly dodgy soldier this concept. When one of his party kept ducking at the stray bullets that were whistling by, the soldier said to him: "Can't yer stop that bobbin' abaht? They won't 'urt yer unless they 'its yer."[77] They won't hurt you unless they hit you… so why worry? This soldier chose to employ this humorous quip as a way to teach normal battlefield behavior and introduce the special form of front-line nihilism. Morbid humor ran deep in the psyche and philosophy of trench survival and coping tactics. It was how soldiers chose to understand their chances of survival and cope with the potentiality of their injury or death. And they teach each other this mindset using humor.

Officers employed humor to relieve wartime tension at critical moments of extreme stress. Humor was a crucial regulator of morale. One soldier recalls the first day of the Somme Offensive. The British were in assembly trenches waiting for the dreaded "zero hour." Nearby some German guns were pounding them, and in consequence, the troops were not feeling in the

[76] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 218.
[77] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 32-33.

best of spirits. With them was a very popular Cockney corporal. He took his helmet off his head when the tension was high and, banging on it with his bayonet, cried: "Roll up, me lucky lads! Seven shies a tanner! Who'll 'ave a go!" That bit of nonsense, the soldier remarked, "relieved the tension and enabled us to pull ourselves together."[78] The officer, sensing the low spirits of his men right before the offensive began, employed some physical theatrics and verbal "nonsense" to break the tension, allowing his men to regain their senses and spirit.

Jokes could be used by officers to soften military language, and getting orders across in a funny way could certainly make them more likely to be followed. One drill sergeant, when addressing a squad of recruits, instructed on how commands should be followed as soon as the command is given: "at the command 'Eyes Right!' I want to hear every soldier's eyeballs *click*."[79] Humorous hyperbole, effectively used, could get the point across in a way that encouraged recruits to do their duty and like it too. The humor did not always land perfectly. One officer jokingly told some Jesuit recruits that "they were exercising a traditional privilege of seeking a higher state of perfection by quitting the Jesuits and joining the [army]"[80] One recruit found the comment shocking and another found it quite amusing.

Humor could act like a package in which orders and announcements were shipped to their recipients. This was especially useful for breaking bad news to weary men. One battalion of the London Regiment had been having "a particularly grueling time in the trenches," but "some of the men were cheered with thoughts of impending leave." Unfortunately for them, "the Germans started a 'big push' in another sector, and all leave was suddenly canceled." An N.C.O. broke this news to the poor soldiers in the following manner: "All you blokes wot's going on leaf, ain't

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[78] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 88.
[79] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 14. Paraphrased, emphasis added on the onomatopoeia.
[80] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 7.

going on leaf, 'cause you're unlucky." Despite the great disappointment, "this way of putting it amused even the men concerned."[81] It would have been a critical moment of tension and stress for the officer delivering the news. He had to inform this group of men that their expected leave, which was helping them stick through the tough time in the trenches, was being denied. He faced their disappointed wrath and potentially a mutiny, depending on the mental condition of the men. Humor was perhaps the only way this officer could have delivered the news without receiving backlash and resistance. So, he worked in a joke for the reason they lost their leave. "You aren't going on leave because you're unlucky." It was true, they were unlucky. He offered no lame excuses or broad military explanations, just the truth; that is what made the joke effective. And it worked, even on the men immediately concerned with their upcoming leave. And the writer explicitly states that appreciating this humor and taking part in it was part of the "real spirit" that kept the men going. Their officer used humor and empathy to accomplish his normal military duties and tighten group dynamics and morale all in one move. Thus, humor could be mobilized by officers to reinforce military authority and support the war effort.

Just as the common soldier could use humor as a shield to defend them from the consequences of speaking subversively out against their superiors, humor could also shield them from unintended neglect of duty or unintended mocking of a superior. One sentry at a battery position in Armentières was blown four yards from his post by an explosion from a German shell. As he scrambled to his feet, the sergeant of the guard came along, and the sentry's first words were, "Sorry, sergeant, for deserting me post."[82] The soldier hides his embarrassment

[81] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 164.
[82] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 53.

behind a joke as if he had deserted his post momentarily and not been physically blown away from it.

A company commander recalls a story of high tension created out of, yet also relieved by, the humor of an absent-minded sentry. The commander saw a general slip and fall in the mud of the trenches. Discipline stifled any desire on his part for mirth, "but to my horror," he wrote, the sentry, without turning away from his periscope, called over his shoulder: "'Ere, chum, get up; this ain't a blinkin' skatin' rink!" Fortunately for all involved, the general's sense of humor "was equal to the occasion," and he replied to the "now horror-stricken sentry" with an affable "Quite."[83] A few things stand out about how the men treat humor in this story. The first is how for the company commander, discipline initially stifled any desire to laugh at the officer, suggesting that soldiers considered humor and discipline to be at odds. The second is how humor created such a moment of tension that the company commander, and the unwitting sentry, felt "horror" upon their respective realization that the sentry had just made a joke out of the general falling over. It is clear that humor was a risky business if genuine fear was created out of this situation. Depending on the sensitivity of the officer or their proclivity to punish snide comments, both the sentry and the company commander potentially faced chastisement, unseemly duties, or punishment. The third important point is how the General's sense of humor "was equal to the occasion," because only a sense of humor could resolve the situation in a favorable way for all parties. He was able to take his fall and the sentry's joke in stride, offering back a friendly quip of agreement, and thus the tension was relieved. Humor solved the problems that humor created.

[83] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 174-75.

In sum, humor was certainly a tool that could be used in support of the war effort. A large number of patriotic jokes in propaganda and in later jokes books and stories bear this out. Humor was used to teach lessons, soften harsh military language, connect officers and ranks, mediate conflict, maintain morale, and of course, cope with the stresses of war. As Jan Rüger noted, the fact that humor was a coping mechanism has led many World War One scholars to conclude that humor was mainly supportive of military authority and the war effort.[84] As the past two sections make clear, humor should be seen more as a middle-ground between subversion and support. In order to balance out the many works that emphasize humor's supportive role, the next section will pivot back to a subversive function of humor: how it challenged the romantic "ideal soldier" type during the war.

"I'm Not a Soldier; I'm a Blooming Bulrush!": The Changing of the Ideal Soldier

In March of 1918, Father Duffy sat with George McAdie having a philosophical discussion on what being a soldier meant. Duffy considered soldiers to be "the most interesting beings in the world," and they tried to pick out their key characteristics: "their loyalty, courage, humor, their fits of laziness and sulkiness."[85] Duffy groups humor with other characteristics that make up the ideal soldier type, he then contrasts those characteristics with certain unwanted traits. Duffy's thoughts are indicative of a larger wartime rearrangement of what it meant to be a soldier. The "ideal soldier" trope is a semi-fluid set of romantic, masculine, medieval, and military ideals and expectations built around the fighting men. These ideals reached back centuries and remained pervasive in propaganda throughout the war; like knights of old, 20th-

[84] A recent example would be Koenraad Du Pont, "Nature and Functions of Humor in Trench Newspapers (1914–1918)," in *Humor, Entertainment, and Popular Culture during World War I,* eds. Tholas-Disset and Ritzenhoff, 107-121.
[85] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 49.

century soldiers were to be chivalrous, heroic, brave, loyal, honorable, proud, clean, strong, obedient, and self-sacrificial.[86] Father Duffy would add humorous to that list. During the war, humor greatly challenged the tropes of the Ideal Soldier while also being absorbed into them. Jakub Kazecki wrote how "the projection of an ideal soldier," was clearly expressed through the employment of humor and laughter.[87] Yet at the same time, as Jason Crouthamel argued, humor allowed soldiers to generate "dissonant perspectives on masculinity that did not easily fit into revealing images of the 'good comrade' sanctified in propaganda."[88] Edward Madigan further argued that the conflict "prompted a re-imagining of courage" and other ideals such as self-sacrifice, which was expressed by soldiers' use of humor.[89] As the industrial modernity of the Great War drained the romance out of war itself, humor expressed changes in the ideal soldier ideology, being integrated into it even while it undermined it.

It is clear that having a good sense of humor was important to soldiers; they looked for it and appreciated it in their fellow soldiers. Father Duffy's memoir is filled with his own humor, but his descriptions of other people frequently mention their humor, placing it with importance alongside other needed traits of a soldier. As a chaplain, he cares fundamentally about morale, so he makes special notes on those with cheery attitudes and good senses of humor. He describes his friend Joyce Kilmer as "a sturdy fellow, manly, humorous, interesting," placing humor next to strength and masculinity.[90] His superiors are judged on their humor as well; he calls Lieutenant-Colonel Mitchell "efficient without bustle, authoritative without bluster, never

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[86] See Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[87] Kazecki, *Laughter in the Trenches*, 57.
[88] Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front,* 97-98. Also argued by Anderson, ""Humour and Representation in British Literature of the First World War," 88-95.
[89] Madigan, "Sticking to a Hateful Task," 78.
[90] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 9.

unreasonable and full of quaint native humor."[91] Humor is mentioned with traits one might expect out of leadership, such as authority, efficiency, and fairness.

Father Duffy was not alone in looking for and appreciating the humor in the men around him. One soldier observed how humor could be connected to bravery, gallantry, and following orders. Before his regiment made an attack on "The Mound of Death," St. Eloi, a brigadier-general addressed the battalion with the following parable: "He told us the tale of two mice which fell into a basin of milk. The faint-hearted one gave up and was drowned. The other churned away with his legs until the milk turned into butter and he could walk away! He hoped that we would show the same determination in our attack." On the following day one of his squad fell into a massive mine crater, "which, of course, was very muddy. As he plunged about in it he shouted 'When I've churned this ruddy mud into concrete I'm 'opping aht of it.' This was the action in which our gallant chaplain, Captain the Rev. Noel Mellish, won the V.C."[92] The chaplain's application of the moral told by the Brigadier-General likely did not win him the Victorian Cross; that comment is a new layer of sarcasm. But if his earlier comment is to be taken seriously, the writer really did connect the joke the Chaplain made in the crater to his gallantry, beginning to merge humor into the classical ideals of soldiering.

Humor was so important to soldiers that many companies and regiments unofficially granted their funniest members titles like 'company humorist' or 'company comic.' These men might be considered the humorous counterparts to the more recognized poet-soldiers that received popular attention after the war. E. W. Fellows of the 6th Battalion, recalls a story about his pal, Wally Robins, "our company humorist," getting angry at a German aeroplane for

[91] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 62.
[92] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 63.

distracting him, causing him to trip over barbed wire. "I wish they would keep their bloomin' aeroplanes out of the way," he quipped.[93] Another "company humorist," suffering with his squad from lack of water and swollen tongues, found his voice alone among his dehydrated comrades, muttering: "Don't it make you mad to fink of the times you left the barf tap running?"[94] Bradley, known as the resident comic aboard the *Stoker, R.N.*, managed to get out of punishment, even gaining the respect of the skipper, by using his wit and giving "the best excuse of the year."[95] J. T. Jones recalled having a "funny man" in his company (he used the phrase as a title, and not in a purely descriptive manner).[96] Humorous people were well-liked and remembered fondly, and were recognized as a legitimate type of soldier as important as the ideal, heroic type. As one soldier succinctly put it: "in the army of today, Jokers of the packs are accorded their proper importance."[97]

Many descriptions of soldiers fit humor into the ideal soldier type. One especially explicit example comes from the *ANZAC Book*, written in the trenches at Gallipoli. A section of the book is dedicated to explaining and describing the "ANZAC Types."[98] One type is the Wallaby Joe. A Wallaby Joe was an outdoorsman, a horse rider, and a good cook; he spoke laconically and cursed frequently; he seized the initiative and never got lost in the trenches; "his training at the military camps of Australia and, later, in Egypt, combined with the knowledge he had been imbibing from Nature all his life, made him an ideal soldier."[99] One could almost tack on the famous Dos Equis Beer commercial tagline, "He was… the most interesting man in the

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[93] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 164.
[94] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 133.
[95] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 188.
[96] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 95.
[97] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 51.
[98] *The ANZAC Book,* 45-48.
[99] *The ANZAC Book,* 45.

world."[100] Eventually, we are told, the Wallaby Joe is killed in action bravely going on scouting missions alone. Wallaby Joe was the ideal soldier to the last, as self-sacrifice was one of the most important aspects of the ideal soldier ideology during the war.[101]

A second ANZAC type was "the Dag." The Dag was quite the character, flamboyant, eccentric, and entertaining. Always wearing "his best Sunday grin," the Dag landed at Gallipoli and immediately started cracking jokes. "Why don't the Turks come out and show themselves?" the jokester asks. "Wot for?" asks another. "Why, for us blokes to shoot at, of course!"[102] The Dag is constantly toeing the line between insubordination and support, yet his humor helps him get away with most of his antics. He approaches the war with his signature brand of humor, in contrast to the ideal soldier Wallaby Joe. The Dag is likely the ANZAC term for "company humorist," but the difference is that it is an entire sub-type of ANZAC soldier, a title shared by many rather than a role shared by a single outstanding comic. The Dag is the ANZAC soldier that would likely clash most often with the traditional aristocratic officer.

The third ANZAC Type is the Bobbie. "Bobbie of the army" he is called, and is almost a combination of the first two types. "Bobbie, the ever-smiling embodiment of breezy youth; the spirit of cheerfulness; the Beau Brummell of the trenches. Bobbie landed with the regiment, and went through thick and thin with it. But always with a smile and never a scratch."[103] Bobbie makes it through battle after battle, always smiling and keeping good cheer and humor. If not for Bobbie many would have given up, but instead they learn to "stick it" like their idol. In the story Bobbie gets sick, and the writer imagines him charming the nurses so they will have a hard time

[100] Dos Equis TV commercials starring Jonathan Goldsmith that ran from 2006 to 2018.
[101] Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter, "Bereaved and Aggrieved: Combat Motivation and the Ideology of Sacrifice in the First World War," *Historical Research 83*, no. 219 (2010), 159–63.
[102] *The ANZAC Book,* 46-47.
[103] *The ANZAC Book,* 47. Beau Brummell was a real and fictionalized figure popular throughout Europe in the 19th century, associated with style, fashion, dandyism, and also wit and humor.

letting him go. Of course, Bobbie's absence is a blow to morale, but it would be an ill wind that blows nobody good, says the author: "Bobbie's chocolate sweetened the bitterness of parting; Bobbie's tinned fruit sustains us in his absence; Bobbie's cigarettes soothe our sorrow."[104] The piece is signed by "Tentmate." This revelation brings the whole story of Bobbie into question and perhaps suggests a fourth ANZAC type, an unscrupulous one that happily benefits from his tentmate's absence.

In any case, the more significant observation is how the *ANZAC Book* treats these three types as equally important and necessary. One is an ideal soldier, which certainly might suggest some separation between the ideal soldier and someone who is humorous. But considering that the other two types are projected as just as important, just as quintessentially ANZAC, and just as necessary to the war effort, it more likely suggests that all three are ideal soldier types. And given that Bobbie is the perfect blend of the joking Dag and the heroic Wallaby Joe, it is clear that the romanticized concepts and tropes of the ideal soldier were being shaped and infiltrated by humor, just as the 'ideal' British Army was being 'infiltrated' by Dominion troops during the war. This brings up again the class consideration under the surface of many of my sources, especially *The ANZAC Book* and *The Best 500 Cockney War Stories.*

Many jokes suggest that soldiers were a bunch of fools, immoral criminals, cowards, or some combination thereof, highlighting the democratization of the army. Here the tensions created out of the new class makeup of the military really show. "Now," one joke had a colonel saying, "I want a good smart bugler." At that, out stepped a dilapidated fellow who had a thick stubble of black beard. "What!" said the colonel, eying him up and down, "Are you a bugler?"

[104] *The ANZAC Book,* 48.

"Oh, bugler!" said he. "I thought you said *burglar*."[105] It appears the army, based on that joke, had been infiltrated by criminals. In another joke, a chaplain, upon being asked if he went everywhere the sailors went, replied, "no ma'am, not everywhere, only in *this* world."[106] The chaplain had little hope those soldiers would join him in the afterlife, given what he had seen of their morality. These types of jokes, underlined by strong class anxieties, suggested that most soldiers were not, in fact, ideal.

Soldiers were under a tremendous amount of pressure to live up to romantic ideals of warfare. When the ideal soldier trope ran headfirst into the reality of war and actual soldiers, the incongruity created space for humor to crop up. In addition to being incorporated into the ideal soldier fantasy, humor was frequently very subversive to the ideal soldier trope; self-deprecating jokes or snide comments about a fellow soldier inherently rubbed against what soldiers were supposed to consider themselves to be. As Tim Cook argued, soldiers used humor to embrace the "antiheroic." Soldiers would joke about themselves as fearful or cowardly in order to reject the romantic labels the homefront and the military applied to them; the antiheroic "played against the constructed civilian image that equated all servicemen with selfless heroics."[107] Soldiers frequently attacked the characteristics of the ideal soldier by attacking themselves. An ANZAC soldier supplied "Another Attempt At An Anzac Alphabet," with a number of his letters becoming a vessel for self-deprecation and the rejection of ideal soldier traits:

> **D** was the *Daring* I failed to display
> When fragments of shrapnel came whizzing my way.
>
> **I** was the *Idiot* who stuck up my head
> Before I was taught to take cover instead.

[105] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 88. My emphasis.
[106] *Navy Nonsense,* 14.
[107] Cook, "I Will Meet the World With a Smile And a Joke," 58.

K was the *Knowledge* I quickly acquired
Of hiding whenever the enemy fired.

Y in the world have I ever been placed
In a trench of cold water right up to my waist?[108]

These letters hint that soldiers were not always what they were supposed to be, and they coped with that fact by using humor and rhyme. Soldiers frequently contrasted the idealized soldier with what they were in reality, pitting their experience against romantic ideologies. *The ANZAC Book* is full of it. The first piece after the editors' note shows that tension explicitly. It is titled "The Ideal and the Real," and depicts first a well-equipped, clean ANZAC soldier, with fixed bayonet, ready to attack (see Figure 1). This image is contrasted with the "real" ANZAC, slowly trudging along, overburdened with gear, dirty, and looking rather dejected.[109]

Soldiers used jokes to poke fun at the difference between modern soldiers and the knights in shining armor of old, signaling the rejection of comparisons between them. At times, invoking medieval or romantic tropes could serve as a burning insult. One rainy night on the Locre-Dranoutre Road in 1914, a British supply convoy made their way on a narrow strip of pavé road, with mud surrounding them. They were confronted by "a squadron of French Cuirassiers, complete with 'tin bellies' and helmets with horse-hair trimmings," commanded by a particularly haughty officer. The French officer is contrasted with the "diminutive sergeant of the A.S.C., wet through, fed up, but complete with cigarette." Neither would yield the paved road to the other for the mud, and there was no interpreter, so "impasse barely describes the condition of things." The sergeant did not ask the Frenchmen nicely to move, instead, he "merely stood there,

[108] *The ANZAC Book,* 146-147.
[109] *The ANZAC Book,* xv.

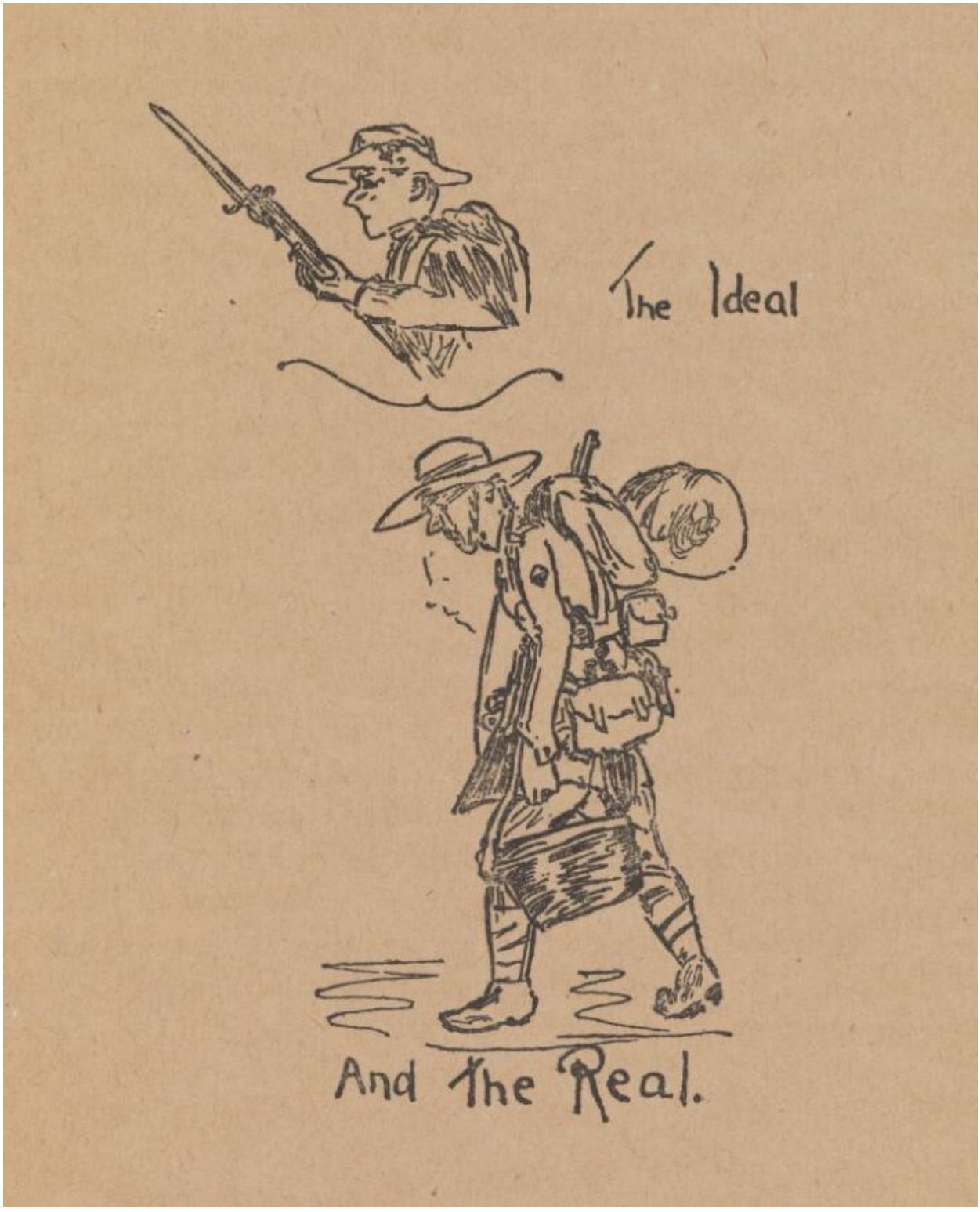

Figure 1. The Ideal and the Real

and, removing his cigarette from his mouth, uttered these immortal words: 'Here, ally off the perishing pavé, you son of a knight in shinin' armour!'"[110] And the French did. He won the confrontation with humor that diminished the romantic image of a medieval knight, mocking the armor and dress of the French cavalry, and exemplifying a modern soldier as something altogether different from a knight in shining armor. The victor of the confrontation between the old 'ideal' and the new 'real' was the new soldier, soaked from rain, holding a cigarette. In other words, the picture of the ideal soldier had changed dramatically.

A significant number of jokes and humorous stories invoked descriptions of heroes and gallantry during embarrassing moments for soldiers and officers, most especially involving men falling over. In the story about the ice-skating general, discussed earlier, the writer did just that: "Entering one fire-bay, the gallant general slipped and sat down uncommonly hard in the mud."[111] The writer did not make fun of the general at the moment, but in recounting the story later he attached, rather cheekily, the "gallant" description to the general who was falling on his rear. This appears frequently when people fall and make a fool of themselves. The chaplain who fell into a massive shell hole was discussed earlier in the context of incorporating humor into the ideas of gallantry. Just as likely though, the writer might have called him a "gallant chaplain" in jest because of how ridiculous it was that he fell in the muddy hole.[112] One gunner who had never ridden a horse was put on one for a ride, and A. Lepley wrote how funny it was to watch the gunner try to hang on until eventually "our hero" falls to the ground, embarrassed.[113] Another story about two men marching went as follows: "Suddenly the front man slipped and the prop

[110] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 147-148.
[111] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 174.
[112] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 69.
[113] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 152.

fell down in the mud and splashed the thin man from head to foot. To add to his discomfort the little fat man gave a hearty laugh. 'Can't see anything to larf at, mate,' said the mud-splashed hero, looking down at himself."[114] The oxymoronic moniker "mud-splashed hero" contrasts the reality of soldiers with heroic ideals. Oftentimes, when soldiers invoked gallantry, bravery, or heroics, they did so to sarcastically refer to someone who had just fallen over.

Humor as a way to cope with one's imminent death was discussed above. In addition to using humor as a coping mechanism, many soldiers connected one's sense of humor with gallantry and bravery during the act of dying. E.C. Easts of the 2nd Londoners made such a connection when looking for a medic for his own head wound, he found a young man on a roadside, mortally wounded. "As I bent over him to give him a drink," he wrote, "he noticed my blood-streaked face and gasped: 'Crikey! Your barber was blinkin' clumsy this morning.' So passed a gallant 2nd London man."[115] Easts conflated the way the man died, "joking at the last," with gallantry.[116] Easts might consider this way of dying to be a "good death," another romantic trope a soldier had to keep in mind constantly, with death ever-present.[117] Humor was a significant part of how soldiers' deaths were determined or remembered to be gallant or brave. A different fatally wounded soldier shouted out: "wot time does this 'ere war end, 'cos I've got an appointment wiv my medical adviser!" The recorder of the story sadly notes afterward: "Dear, brave old chap. His appointment was never kept."[118] The soldier named Bunn, discussed earlier, joked about how the Germans put some currents in him. Struck by this show of humor in his

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[114] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 98.
[115] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 56.
[116] "Joking At The Last" was the title of the story.
[117] Here I am informed by Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2009), especially chapter 1, "Dying." No detailed study has been done on the act of dying or concepts of the 'good death' during World War One; it is my assumption that these romantic ideas had relevance in most belligerent nations during the Great War, even after nearly 50 years since the American Civil War.
[118] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 86.

dying moments, J. E. Cully concluded with "this gallant Cockney died afterwards."[119] Similarly, F. W. Brown, when recalling the story of the wounded soldier who called him Applegarf, described the man as "heroic."[120] As they watched the men around them die in horrific ways, soldiers integrated humor into the process of dying well, positioning it alongside more obvious romantic traits like gallantry and heroics.

Humor could reveal thoughts and opinions that denied the role of a soldier at all to the men on the field, men fundamentally shrugged off the ideal soldier type by describing themselves as anything other than soldiers. Emily Anderson studied humor and identity in natural history parodies in trench newspapers, arguing that soldiers used parody "to describe themselves, in faux-academic style, as a series of strange species of creature," categorizing themselves "in response to the identities presented by military life," such as the ideal soldier type.[121] This served "to trouble different hierarchies and taxonomies, including military hierarchies."[122] Soldiers used humor to self-identify, regaining some control over their lives. One soldier recounted how a private, wishing to appear as cheerful and brave as possible before going over the top, turned to his platoon sergeant and said: "I suppose we will be making history in a few minutes, sergeant?" "No," replied the sergeant: "our first objective is about 250 yards straight to the front. What you have to do is to get from here to there as quickly as your legs will carry you. We are making *geography* this morning, my lad!"[123]

With this joke, the officer constructs a reality where he and his men are not soldiers, they are geographers; they do not make history as a heroic soldier might, they are drudges that care

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[119] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 90.
[120] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 51.
[121] Emily Anderson, "'There are Many Strange Animals That Will Repay […] study': Humour and Identity in Trench-Newspaper Natural Histories," *Literature & History*, 31, no. 1 (2022), 43.
[122] Anderson, "There are Many Strange Animals That Will Repay […] study," 43.
[123] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 136, my emphasis.

only about a small piece of land. In a sense, the joke denies the possibility of honor and glory in combat altogether by suggesting how menial and specific their objective is. They will not become heroes from this engagement, at best, they might be geographers. This joke is reminiscent of, or perhaps inspired by, the famous remark General Charles Harington made before the mine detonation during the Messines offensive: "Gentlemen, I don't know whether we are going to make history tomorrow, but at any rate we shall change geography."[124]

Another soldier commented on the dehumanizing effects of conditions in the trenches, also calling into question their status as soldiers. He and his fellows were muddy and drenched after an extended time in the trenches, when they were then called upon to move out. "Hurry up out of this, my gallant soldiers," was the cheery call of the sergeant to his waist-deep and rain-sodden men. "Soldiers!" came the derisive answer from one of them. "I'm not a soldier; I'm a blooming bulrush!"[125] The cheery captain calling them "my gallant soldiers" is another example of the sarcastic invocation of soldierly ideals to describe men in bad spirits, covered in mud. The contemptuous reply from the soldier denies his rank and status as a soldier, reducing himself and those around him to a bulrush. The man clearly does not feel like heroes in the rain-soaked trenches, he felt like swamp vegetation.

While humor explicitly attacking the ideal soldier trope was relatively rare, many more jokes damaged the romantic ideology indirectly. Self-deprecating humor is at the forefront, as attacking the soldier identity of the self indirectly attacks the wider ideology behind that identity. Most did it in a more implicit way by simply tearing down the image of a soldier by questioning anything from their loyalty, bravery, willingness to fight, reasoning to fight, or other aspects of

[124] Lytton, Neville. *The Press and the General Staff* (London: Collins Sons & Co., 1921), 97.
[125] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 84.

their personality. Many jokes suggested that soldiers were a bunch of unscrupulous, disingenuous thieves or opportunists, or sometimes fools. These jokes inherently invert the ideal soldier tropes. Some jokes commented on the varied motivations of soldiers, depicting many as just in it for money or food. One joke depicts a soldier entering a major's office, and his good right arm "forgets" to snap up into a salute. "What kind of soldier are you?" demands the major. "Why sir," he replies, "I don't claim to be a soldier. I'm just attached to the army for rations."[126]

A small number of jokes painted soldiers as specifically desiring honor, glory, and medals, a rather disingenuous look for the humble hero. One soldier, nicknamed "Toot-Sweet," shocked his superior officer by saying as much. A volunteer runner was needed to cover a particularly dangerous piece of ground, and Toot-Sweet, who had already done two such dangerous runs, volunteered again. "But," said the company officer, "I can't send you again—someone else must go." He was floored when Toot-Sweet said, "Giv' us this charnce, sir. I've got two mentions in dispatches now, an' I only want annuvver to git a medal." He was allowed to go, but he did not get a medal.[127]

Humor also could be created out of situations where soldiers looked or acted outside of the ideal soldier tropes. G. M. Rampton recalled seeing a company of British soldiers bathing when a German plane approached, and to his amusement, they joined the fight naked. "It was the funniest thing in the world to see fellows running about in their "birthday suits" plus only tin hats, taking pot shots at the aeroplane," he wrote. "Even Fritz seemed surprised, because it was some moments before he replied with his machine gun. We watched him fly away back to his own lines and a voice broke the silence with, 'Blinkin' fools to put on our tin 'ats. Uvverwise

[126] Paul Dupont, *Yank Talk - A Review of A. E. F. Humor, Trench and Billet* (Paris. n.d., circa 1918-1919), 8.
[127] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 69.

'ole Fritz wouldn't a known but what we might be Germans.' I often wonder if any other battalion had the 'honour' of 'attacking the enemy' clad only in tin hats."[128] Those soldiers were perhaps as far from knights in shining armor as they could have been, and they had the unique 'honor' of fighting naked.

However, humor was ever a double-edged sword. One soldier, nicknamed Crascredo, wrote a chapter in his book *No Joke* about how humor and laughter became integrated into the Ideal Soldier trope, yet also posed a danger to good soldiering. The way to tell the difference, he believed, was *when* a soldier was laughing. "It is a time-honoured assumption that in war," he asserted, "all good soldiers laugh at danger."[129] However, most soldiers not being madmen, "they only laugh at danger when danger is past."[130] Risk is only a joking matter, it seems, when there is no longer any risk. That is not a failing of the soldiers, he insists, but simply how laughter works; to laugh is "to express mirth or joy" through "an explosive inarticulate sound of the voice," which is impossible under the explosive sounds of war.[131] Only on the rarest occasions, involving exceptional men and exceptional situations, could laughing in the face of danger could be seen as "gallant" and "inspiriting."[132] A *Punch* cartoon Crascredo includes depicts one such instance of gallantry (see Figure 2): a soldier taunts the enemy line, boldly throwing a jampot bomb at them, saying, "Divide that amongst ye!" [133]

[128] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 36-37.
[129] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 35.
[130] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 35.
[131] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 35.
[132] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 35.
[133] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 37.

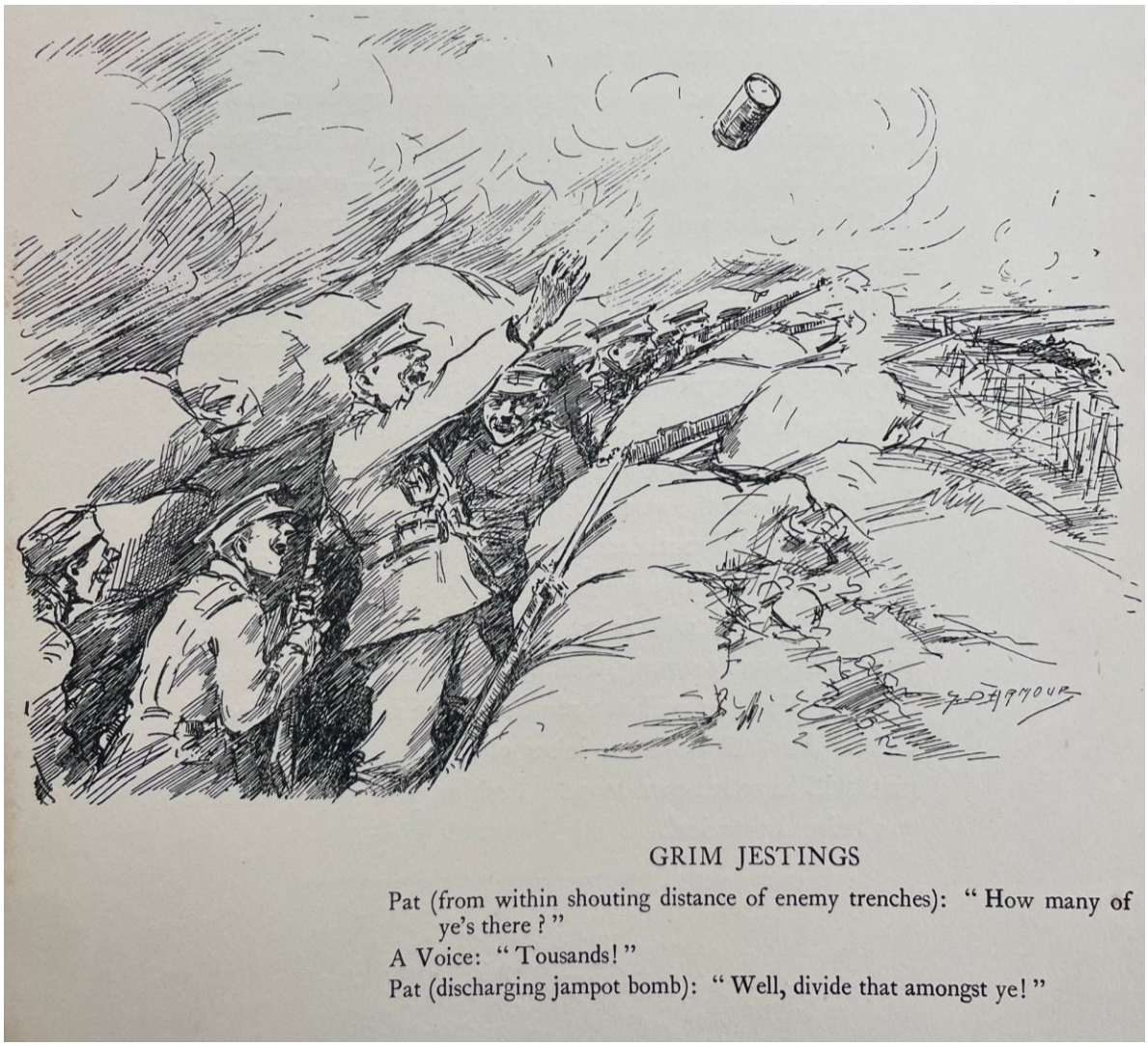

Figure 2. "Divide that amongst ye!"

Yet Crascredo understood laughter as a "privilege of Reason," and humans, as rational creatures, rarely saw "any reason to laugh at danger in actual time of danger."[134] That is why laughter, despite being seen as gallant under some exceptional situations, was actually a warning sign of madness, a sign of the loss of reason and rationality on the battlefield. Crascredo explained that "the soldier of experience knows" that *laughter without reason* "is one of the first things to be watched for (and immediately suppressed) in other soldiers."[135] Some soldiers,

[134] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 36.
[135] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 36.

Crascredo warned, would begin to laugh at bombardments, the laughter of hysteria. Given that good soldiers should not have hysterics, soldiers had to be prevented from laughing during battle, so as to avoid them laughing themselves into incapacitating themselves. "But after the danger is over–*then* a man may laugh."[136] Laughter and humor had a specific time, place, and role in the trenches of the Great War. While some laughter was effective as a coping mechanism, and laughing once danger had passed was expected from an ideal soldier, too much laughter could constitute a clear danger to the war effort, leaving some men unfit for duty. By this logic, those 'humorists' who caused too much laughter with their jokes and antics might also be considered a subversive danger to order and the war effort.

The romantic and medieval concepts of ideal soldiering were under constant assault during the Great War on a wide array of fronts. The fully industrialized and total war had changed the nature of war forever, and in doing so changed perceptions of what soldiers ought to be, and what they were in reality. Soldiers used humor to express those changes, integrated it into the ideal soldier tropes, and used it to reject romanticized and medieval expectations that were slowly being dismantled by the quintessentially modern war. Soldiers integrated humor into definitions of how soldiers should behave, often connecting humor to other traits such as good leadership, bravery, gallantry, and one's ability to "stick it." Even while the ideal soldier tropes were being modified by humor, they were also being deconstructed and inverted as well, posing a serious threat to traditional conceptions of soldiers based on medieval tropes. Soldiers frequently rejected many of the overarching characteristics to which they were pressured to conform, using humor to twist and reshape their identities and appearances. Many openly mocked medieval ideals with sarcasm and comparisons between the ideal and the real, and made

[136] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 38.

jokes that embraced the antiheroic. Others chipped away at the dominating ideology with humor that indirectly inverted its tropes by suggesting less ideal characteristics that many soldiers had. As always, humor continued to serve contradictory and illusive roles. A good sense of humor and the ability to smile in the face of death became commendable traits of an "ideal" soldier. But if humor, smiling, and happiness could be integrated into the ideal soldier, humor could also be used to reject that very notion:

> "What were you before you joined the army?"
> "Happy."[137]

[137] *Khaki Komedy,* 35.

THE HOMEFRONT-BATTLEFRONT DIVIDE, GENDER, AND MASCULINE ANXIETY

World War One historians have utilized scientific theories on humor that have identified many of its common forms and functions. A classic humor theory is humor's inclusion/exclusion functioning. Jakub Kazacki and other historians of the First World War have made great use of humor theory in their studies, showing how the careful use of humor can solidify a group and develop desired forms of communication and social relations.[138] It has already been shown how humor could be used to include and exclude different people in the officer-soldier dynamic, and how humor could be used to include everyone in the war effort and morale-building. To function within the military, it has to benefit the larger military process by preventing aggression within ranks and regulating tensions. However, as Kazacki wrote, humor aimed at outside groups tends to create a "hostile disposition" towards those "others."[139]

It is perhaps obvious and not particularly insightful to say that ethnic and national divisions created by the war showed themselves in humor. Of course, British and French soldiers would make fun of the Germans to consolidate morale and foster belonging within their own ranks. What remains? A less frequently talked about but more interesting dynamic is the relationship between the soldiers at the front and the non-combatants at home. Here, jokes could be a *shibboleth* of sorts, excluding those not 'in' on the jokes of the frontlines and showing stark divisions between troops and civilians, homefront and battlefield. But humor also represented a channel of communication between home and front, a way for soldiers to relate their experiences

[138] See Kazecki, *Laughter in the Trenches*, chapter 1; and Kessel and Merzinger, eds, *The Politics of Humour.*
[139] Kazecki, *Laughter in the Trenches*, 24, 95.

to those who would never understand what they went through on the field. Additionally, undergirding the battlefront-homefront divide was a rigid gender divide; the traditional concepts that placed men on the battlefield and women at home were brought to the forefront by the conflict. Humor, with its ability to both subvert and support traditional ideologies, both affirmed and challenged gender roles in a multitude of ways. Humor was central to soldiers' reactions to changing gender norms on account of the war, and frequently reveals their gendered anxiety concerning those changes.

"Those Fool Questions": Humor and the Battlefield-Homefront Divide

To begin, soldiers often found mirth in tales of the antics of their loved ones back home. It seems most soldiers were not particularly aware of or sympathetic to the anxieties of those at home. Many loved ones at home awaited any news of their friends and family who had gone overseas, and rumors spread like wildfire. One soldier of the 69th US division had received word about such rumors, especially concerning false accounts of Father Duffy's death. Duffy, being the leader of a church in New York, was a popular figure in his community. Rumors of his supposed death cropped up frequently at home. The soldier reported this news to Duffy himself: "Father Duffy, if you had $10,000 insurance for every time you were killed you'd never need to work the rest of your life."[140] The chaplain and the soldier got a huge laugh out of the well-meaning but ignorant antics back home but did not show any attempt to understand the latter's legitimate fears and tribulations.

Soldiers' interactions with the homefront, whether in-person or through letters and gifts, frequently created space for humor when the expectations of those at home clashed with the

[140] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 162.

realities of war. A cartoon from *The ANZAC Book* (1916) depicts a soldier holding up a gift from home, a cookbook, and wondering aloud: "Do they think we're on a bloomin' picnic?"[141] (See Figure 3). An inquisitive woman asked a royal defense corps veteran what the letters "R. D. C." meant. "Reformed Drunkards' Corps, ma'am," he replied solemnly. "Dear me," she murmured, "what miracles those recruiting sergeants do perform!"[142] There are at least three layers to this joke. One layer is the suggestion that the RDC is a bunch of revitalized alcoholics; the second is the quip about sergeants and their ability to pull together armies out of such ruffians. But the most important aspect of the joke is who the joke is *on*: the inquisitive woman. Jokes like these target those on the homefront, poking fun at their ignorance of military protocol and the battlefront experience. Humor, in its ability to exclude by targeting certain individuals or groups, showed significant differences and divisions between combatants and non-combatants.

The following jokes, quite similar to each other, showcase this targeting of the ignorant civilian. They might best be categorized as "fool question" jokes:

> THOSE FOOL QUESTIONS
> "Have you been to France?"
> "Yes. Came back last week."
> "Now, I wonder if you saw anything of that young nephew of mine out there—Smith is his name?"[143]

> SURE TO MEET.
> Mrs. Jones: "You know my boy has just joined the army."
> Mrs. Smith: "Oh, then I expect he's met my nephew–he's in the army, too."[144]

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[141] *The ANZAC Book,* 64.
[142] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 127. The RDC in question almost certainly stands for Royal Defense Corps.
[143] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 137.
[144] Compere, *Army Frowns and Smiles,* 75.

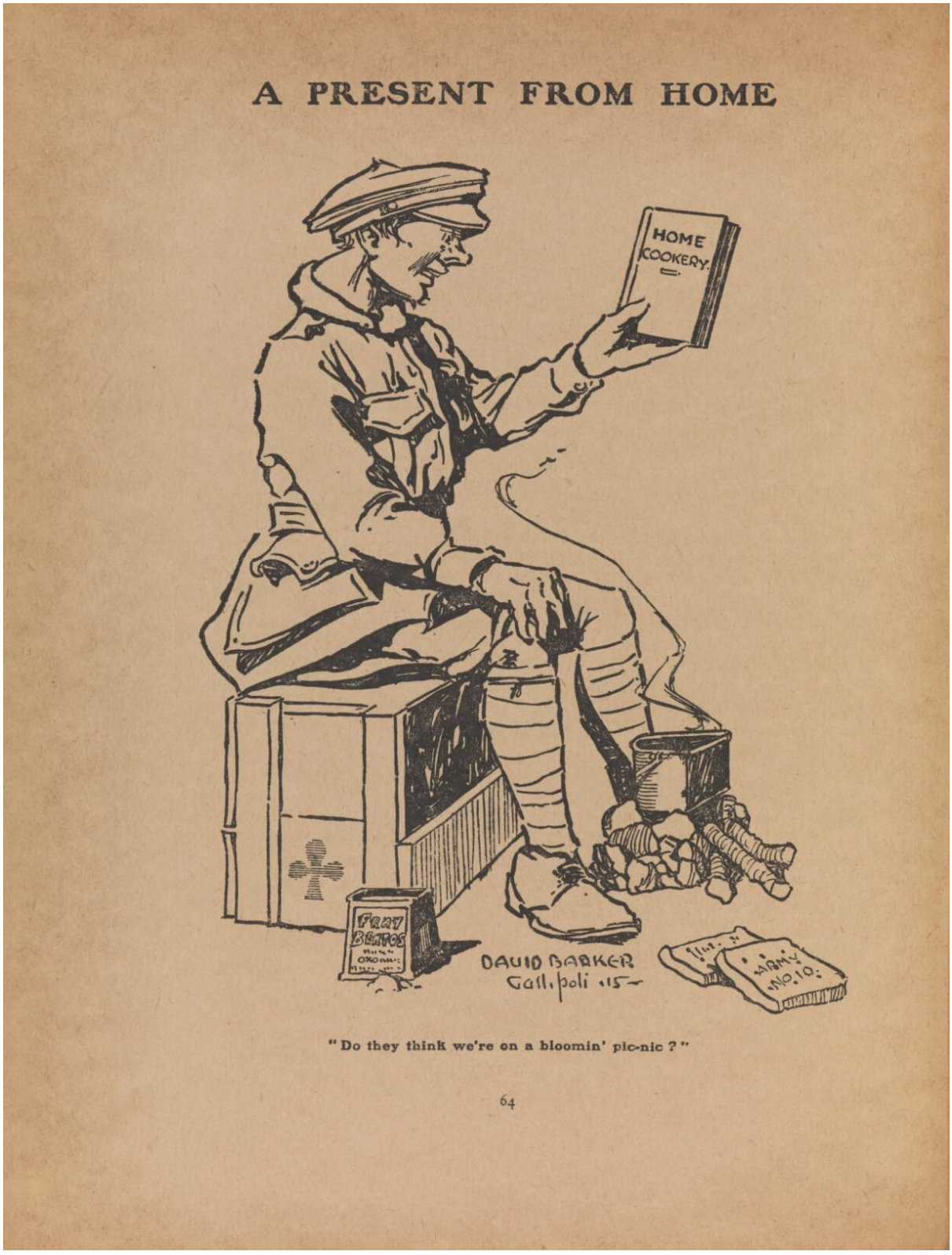

Figure 3. “Do they think we’re on a bloomin’ pic-nic?”

PLEASED IS NO NAME FOR IT.
Doris: "Was your C. O. pleased, Algy, when you told him my idea for beating the Germans on the Western Front?"
Algy: "Pleased! I should jolly well think he was. Why, he laughed for hours!"[145]

All three quips prey upon the humorous naivete of the well-meaning but ultimately unworldly civilians. They are presented together to emphasize the frequency that they appear in postwar joke books and the monotony that created. The first two are nearly identical, poking fun at how civilians don't understand the sheer size of the armies or countries involved in the war. Meanwhile, poor Doris had offered a suggestion on how the allies might defeat the Germans, which Algy reports caused his commanding officer to laugh for hours. The joke does not say what her suggestion or idea was; it does not matter. The joke is that no idea coming from the homefront, from a civilian, and certainly from a woman, would ever have any actual merit on the battlefield. It is also no coincidence that the targets of these jokes usually happen to be women. The homefront-battlefront divide was also starkly defined by gender, with perceptions that men went off to war, and women and children stayed at home. Women end up being the butt of the joke so often because to soldiers they conveniently encapsulate everything about the ignorance of the homefront to what is really happening in France. Sometimes the divide was so strong that women and wives in particular were jokingly cited for reasons men joined up:

ONE WAY OUT.
"You claim no exemption?"
"How'd you guess it?"
"I've seen your wife."[146]

[145] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 140.
[146] *Khaki Komedy,* 14.

Behind much of the wider homefront-battlefront divide was a gender divide, which will be explored more fully in the following section.

Many jokes would express how soldiers felt when they got home, that they had returned to a foreign place they no longer fit into. One joke featured Sam, who, having just been released from service, had been invited to a formal dinner. At the dinner, Sam felt uncomfortable. He gazed disapprovingly at the impressive array of spoons, knives and forks before him and then pushed back his chair. "I'm going," he announced, "too darn much equipment to keep clean."[147] The joke resonates with how soldiers felt alienated from their former lives by their experiences on the front. Sam could not handle the finery of the formal dinner, referred to silverware as "equipment," and sought escape from the situation. Even as soldiers returned home and reconnected with their friends and families, their jokes and humor showed how the war experience had caused a rift between them.

However, the gulf between the battlefield and the homefront could be bridged by humor as well. Many soldiers, in moments of cheerfulness, expressed their wish to be more connected with the homefront in their jokes: "You will note with interest and tell the shirkers they're missing something here. The 'G' came off the big sign east of the station here and we now read: 'The only English love makers in the city.'"[148] This piece shows the divide between home and field using a joke as the focal point of the experience that shirkers and non-combatants were missing out on. The joke claims that those not going to France are missing out on hilarious situations such as this wayward sign. Other stories echo this idea. One Royal Marine recalled seeing a junior artilleryman struggling up a muddy slope carrying water: "We saw him thrown to

[147] Majors, *World War Jokes,* 28.
[148] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 33-34.

the ground as [a] whizz-bang burst but a few feet from him, and we rushed down, certain that he had 'got his.' Imagine our surprise on being greeted by an apparition that had struggled to a sitting posture, liberally plastered with mud, and a wound in the shoulder, who hoarsely chuckled and said: 'If our typist could see me nah!'"[149] The mud-splashed hero's first joke is to wish his typist could just see him, wounded and covered in mud. The implied shock of the civilian typist, who would likely be female and a potential girlfriend, is what the soldier finds funny. But at the same time, the joke builds a bridge between the soldier on the field and the typist at home. The soldier wished for a connection, a shared experience; he wished for the typist, for the homefront, to understand and appreciate what he was going through.

Soldiers used humor and jokes as a way to connect with their families back home and relate their experiences to the homefront. Joke books of collections of funny stories do that in the broadest sense, but more specific instances of this phenomenon can be found frequently in letters home. Father Duffy, with ever a keen eye for humor, recalled one such occasion. Part of a soldier's morning ritual, for officers and privates alike, is stripping clothes to look for lice. This process is jokingly referred to as "reading one's shirt." A man named Holmes had a young boy about the age of four, whom his wife would write about frequently; Holmes wrote to his wife asking her if their son could "read" his shirt, "because his old man can do it." His wife wrote back that while the youthful prodigy "had not all the accomplishments of a soldier," he could hike with any of them.[150] Mr. Holmes used humor to connect with his wife, relate part of his experience back to her, and enquire about how his son's education was coming along. Mrs.

[149] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 34.
[150] Duffy, *Father Duffy's Story,* 181-82.

Holmes responded with some light sarcasm of her own and attempted to draw connections between her son's strengths and her husband's duties.

Finally, the joke books and story collections that make up the core of my sources--*Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers, Khaki Komedy, Quips and Memoirs of the Corps, World War Jokes*--constitute an avenue of connection between the soldiers who wrote and produced them and part of their audience, the homefront. Many of them wanted to present just a glimpse of what it was like on the front, or "over there." Throughout the war, the homefront and the battlefront were mutually supportive, yet culturally they were worlds apart. Humor was one way in which people on either side could attempt to bridge the divide between their experiences. Still an ambiguous force, however, humor could still be used to draw distinctions between the two groups and exclude those outside the experience of war just as easily as it could be used to include. This was especially true when the humor had gendered connotations just beneath the surface. As the next section will show, humor quite frequently disguised gendered fears and anxieties among soldiers.

"Acquiring Wifely Arts": Masculinity, Gender Roles, and Anxiety

The military, economic, and logistical necessities of waging war created spaces where gender roles, positions, and behaviors could be reaffirmed, challenged, or shifted. As discussed above, the homefront-battlefront dichotomy was underlined by gender differences. The war proved to be a perfect opportunity to propagate the idea that men went off to war to fight and die heroically, and women 'did their bit' by maintaining the home and supporting the war effort from afar. Humor was weaponized by states and militaries to reaffirm these general ideas in propaganda. Yet just as the military authority structure could be subverted and supported by

humor, so too could the gender divide. Humor could also be used to challenge and change those same notions, though it did so far less frequently in the joke books and story collections under scrutiny here. The Great War proved to be a tenuous and fluid time for gender norms, with soldiers finding space on the battlefront to express themselves outside their expected modes of sexuality and identity, and women being mobilized at home for a sweeping reassignment of the labor force. [151] Historians have debated the extent the Great War actually shifted gender relations and norms, but at the very least, the perception of massive changes in the gender dynamic was prevalent in the humor soldiers used and recorded.[152] Within this humor expressing gender shifts was a great deal of male anxiety, which is what this section will focus on.

The cornerstone of the strong battlefront-homefront divide was a gender divide, which is consistently revealed by humor. As might be expected, most jokes would use the war to reaffirm men's and women's respective traditional places and roles in society. A woman might contend: "I believe that woman's place in this war is right beside the men on the battle line." But a man would quip back: "And suppose a commander sent a party of six men and six women out in the woods to see if the enemy were in sight, would you call that war? That would be a picnic!"[153] Humor could be a cruel indicator of the winner and end of an argument that deserved more serious discussion. Whoever got the last laugh would be the victor, and their idea would be carried by the joke. Here the joke fights back against the idea that women, too, could fight on the

[151] For examples of works that deal with this, see Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front*; and Alon Rachamimov, "The Disruptive Comforts of Drag: (Trans)Gender Performances among Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914-1920." *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 2 (April 2006): 362-82.
[152] Birgitta Bader-Zaar, "Controversy: War-related Changes in Gender Relations: The Issue of Women's Citizenship," 1914-1918-online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War. Freie Universität Berlin. October 8, 2014. doi: 10.15463/ie1418.10036; and Birgitta Bader-Zaar, Christa Hämmerle, and Oswald Überegger, *Gender and the First World War* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[153] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 73.

front lines, ultimately strengthening the notion of women's sphere being the home and men's sphere being the battlefront.

Some jokes vied back and forth with themselves for the final concluding punchline. During the war, every belligerent nation mobilized women to work in service of the war effort. Unprecedented numbers of women entered offices and factories for the first time. For some, it was a sign of changing gender norms. Carleton B. Case, who collected and edited jokes and stories for *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers* (1919), might have been among those uncomfortable with the change in the gender dynamic. One story starts with someone noting that "it is remarkable that so many women should be working." "Women have always worked," replied a woman, "The principal difference just now is that they are working away from home and getting paid for it."[154] The joke by itself seems to be a rousing victory for female empowerment and an acceptance of the radical changes the war had precipitated. But Case, even while reprinting such a joke, undermined the victory of the joke itself by adding the contradicting title: "BUT IT'S MEN WHO PAY THEM." Case, possibly uncomfortable with the joke's wider implications to the gender hierarchy, felt the need to reassert that men, despite all the recent changes, were still in charge. Even if women were working, men still had the power because men paid the wages. A subversive joke could make it onto a page of a book, yet it itself could be subverted by the editor with another joke. Victories gained through humor were certainly fragile.

Writers of jokes and joke books commented on the changing gender dynamics through humor; underlying many of these jokes is deep anxiety about those very changes. "A lot of girls," one joke explained, "are now getting a business training that will enable them to support a

[154] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 111.

husband after the war."[155] The joke is funny because it is hyperbolic, yet it still hints at the perception of dramatic changes in gender roles in many of the warring nations, as well as implying some level of unease with the situation. Case included a more explicitly anxious funny story, titled "What we may expect now." In other words, the war was over, and times were changing:

> The war was over and the new woman was fully developed. Gone were the petticoats and falderals. Women aimed at being rational in character and dress. In such an after-the-war household Mr. Bigboy was washing out baby's bottle when his wife came down dressed for going out. "Are you going out?" whined Mr. Bigboy. "Yes," said his wife, patting his cheek. "It's the big meeting at the lodge." "Then—then," said the man, and his lips trembled, "if you're not in by 11 o'clock I'll—I'll go home to father."[156]

Either Case or the original writer of the joke pointed to the "new woman" that had developed over the war. This woman was more rational than her earlier versions, not obsessed with frivolous dress. The implication is that she is now more like a rational-thinking man. Now she is the one going out to political meetings at the lodge, leaving the husband at home to clean baby bottles. Chores and childcare, once the sole domain of women, is taken up by the mockingly named Mr. Bigboy. This Mr. Bigboy is a stark contrast to a man in charge of his household. He is cleaning, he is whiny and confused at his wife going out, and his ultimatum to his wife is undercut by his escape plan to return to his father's household. In this joke, the gendered world has been turned upside down. Men like Case might have laughed at it, but behind their laughter was fear that this would become "what we may expect" now that the war was over.

Soldiers looked to the future with apprehension about the war's effects on the gender power dynamic. In one joke, a sailor was scrubbing the deck of a ship when his friend, who was

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[155] Compere, *Army Frowns and Smiles,* 186.
[156] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 89-90.

standing by, piped up: "I wish your wife could see you now." The implications of this quip are significant. It is clear that scrubbing floors, in the mind of the friend, was firmly the domain of women. What would happen if his wife saw him, on his hands and knees, scrubbing the floor? Would she lose respect for him as a husband? As a man? Would she make him scrub her floors as well, now that she sees he is perfectly capable of doing so? Would she expand this to making him share equally in all the menial household chores? Certainly, some or all of these implications were on the mind of the hard-working sailor, for he replied: "Gee, if she could see me now, I'd be out of luck for the rest of my life"[157] His joke might again evoke nervous laughter from men. How fragile typical gender roles seem under the stress of war; for the sailor suggests how if his wife saw him in such a state of gender-role reversal, the dynamic between them would be reversed for the rest of his life.

While it is true that fighting in war was considered to be the pinnacle of masculine action, and traits of an ideal soldier were entwined with ideals of masculinity, not all of military life made soldiers feel manly. Many jokes reflected the emasculation soldiers felt in the drudgery of military life. In one story Case collected, a young soldier named Harold was drafted, and arrived at the camp where he expected to "receive instruction in the manly art of warfare." Much to his chagrin, Harold "was detailed to what is known as K. P. duty ('Kitchen police' duty)." In this he became quite proficient, however, apparently writing back to his mother: "Dear Mother:—I put in this entire Christmas day washing dishes, sweeping floors, making beds and peeling potatoes. When I get home from this camp I'll make some girl a mighty fine wife!"[158] Harold's joke reveals how the nature of his work would prepare him for a future not as a man and husband, but

[157] *Navy Nonsense*, 55.
[158] Case, *Funny Stories Told by The Soldiers,* 111.

as a woman and wife. Case titled the story "Acquiring wifely arts" to contrast the expected "manly art" of warfare. It wasn't just chores that feminized soldiers; other aspects of military life did as well. One joke simply posed: "What perfectly lovely husbands those returning soldiers who have learned to obey orders are going to make."[159] Reminiscent of the soldier who answered "yes, my dear" to an officer's order, this joke compares the dynamic between officers giving orders with a submissive husband bowing to the will of a controlling wife.

Even worse than this, the most damning jokes compared taking orders and obeying officers to the makings of a good wife. As one poem read:

> If you can love an officer without trying
> If you can trust him when you know he's lying …
> Well, happiness is yours–for what there's in it,
> And which is more–my dear, you'll be a wonder– and some girl.[160]

In a direct reversal of the humor that compared officers to wives or mothers, it was now the soldiers at the bottom of the military hierarchy being compared to women. If the former set of jokes served to even the power balance between officers and soldiers, the latter served to widen the gap between them. It was a much easier task to relate lowly recruits to women, as they were both at the bottom of their respective hierarchies; military and gender. Jokes like these suggest how soldiers felt their toils, chores, and order-taking to be emasculating, and also reveal the anxiety they felt about what army life might mean for the relationship between them and women back home.

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[159] Compere, *Army Frowns and Smiles,* 188.
[160] Quartermaster Corps Souvenir Book Committee, *Quips and Memoirs of the Corps, 1917-1918* (Lamoni, IA: Capital Publishers, 1919), 209.

Meanwhile, far away from home and their wives and girlfriends, soldiers were often racked with loneliness and concern about what their partners were doing in their absence. A great number of jokes reveal the deep-seated anxiety soldiers had about the potential of their wives to be unfaithful while they were away at war. A particularly telling joke depicts a captain walking into an orderly room and noticing crêpe hanging on a picture of the sergeant's girlfriend. "Why, what's wrong?" he asked, "has your girl died sergeant?" "Naw," replied the sergeant sadly, "she's just running around with a darn slacker back home."[161] One mock conversation between a returning soldier and his lady went as follows: "I am positive it was only thinking of your love for me that pulled me through," said the soldier. "Yes," replied the woman, "it is such a comfort to know I saved three poor fellows in that way."[162] Soldiers reading jokes like this would likely react with a nervous chuckle. The surprise that the woman in the joke throws at the man can certainly be funny, yet at the same time it is an inversion of the faithful homefront lover trope that soldiers used to cope with their loneliness and distance. Humor such as these jokes would be funny but slightly uncomfortable, as soldiers would be forced to deal with the anxiety of a potentially unfaithful partner.

The reverse situation was also depicted in jokes. One titled "Letters that are warmly sealed" featured an officer giving three ardent love letters, addressed to three different persons, to a censor. It gave the poor censor pause. "Well, what are you waiting for?" demanded the officer. "'Scuse me sir, but I just waited to see you didn't make no mistake about the envelopes."[163] Even here, however, the focus and tone are different. The sympathy of the joke is laid on the unfortunate censor, not on the victims of the infidelity who, being away from the

[161] Dupont, *Yank Talk,* 28.
[162] Majors, *World War Jokes,* 55.
[163] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 99.

front where the joke is taking place, are out of the picture completely. Compared to the previous examples where the sympathy lies with the anxious soldiers being cheated on, jokes like these, which appear less frequently than the former type, find a way to avoid a full exploration of the officer's wrongs because of the absence of the victims, even if he is being implicitly indicted by the joke.

While humor is a neutral tool and can be wielded in support of gendered divisions or against them, in most joke books and story collections in the post-war era humor decidedly took the man's side. Instead of highlighting humor's ability to subvert and support like in previous sections, the jokes presented here shed light on the underlying anxieties soldiers felt about the changing gender dynamics of the war. Soldiers feared the perceived power shift as women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers; they recoiled at the emasculating effects of the drudgery they performed in army life, fearing what their wives would think if they saw them performing such tasks meant for women. Some found other aspects of military life, such as taking orders, to be equally feminizing, blurring the lines between their identities vis-à-vis their wives. And finally, in a separate issue that still relates to anxiety, soldiers used humor to express their apprehension of being away from their wives and girlfriends; many felt a certain loss of control of women's sexuality since they were away from home. Even if the humor in joke books generally took the 'side' of the men in these situations, humor still had a lot to reveal when it came to men's inner fears and insecurities.

NO JOKE: A CASE STUDY ON CRASCREDO'S ESSAYS ON HUMOR

No Joke is a collection of *Punch* cartoons and drawings by G. D. Armour interwoven with various essays by its somewhat cryptic author, Crascredo. Some of his thoughts on humor were discussed above in relation to laughter and the ideal soldier, and now his work is brought into focus for the first time. The cartoons found within include examples that hit on many of the previous themes discussed here. "Breakfast in a Front Line Trench," for example, shows how officers could teach their wards lessons through humor. The sergeant depicted responds to an average Tommy complaining at length about the tough life in the trenches by using chastising humor. His response, "I dunno what some of you blighters would do if you 'ad to rough it," cleverly conveys the message that complaining is discouraged and not productive.[164] It was a way to say "toughen up" or "it could be worse" without the harsh connotations, potentially creating a connection between officer and soldiers through humor (see Figure 4).

The jokes and cartoons in Crascredo's book, however, will not be the focus here. It is the chapters within No Joke that make it stand out from other cartoon collections of the period, and thereby make it deserving of a deeper look. Crascredo, who in actuality was the renowned English artist, huntsman, and veteran Charles W. Simpson, created *No Joke* as part joke book, part memoir, and part collection of essays.[165] Crascredo's chapters function more like individual essays, with topics ranging from humor and official entertainment, to conscientious objectors and pay, to visions of potential world peace.

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[164] Crascredo, *No Joke*, i.

[165] M. L. Biscotti, *Six Centuries of Foxhunting: An Annotated Bibliography* (Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 327-8; and J. Kenneth Callahan, *A Dictionary of Sporting Pen Names* (Peterborough, NH: Callahan & Company, 1995), 42.

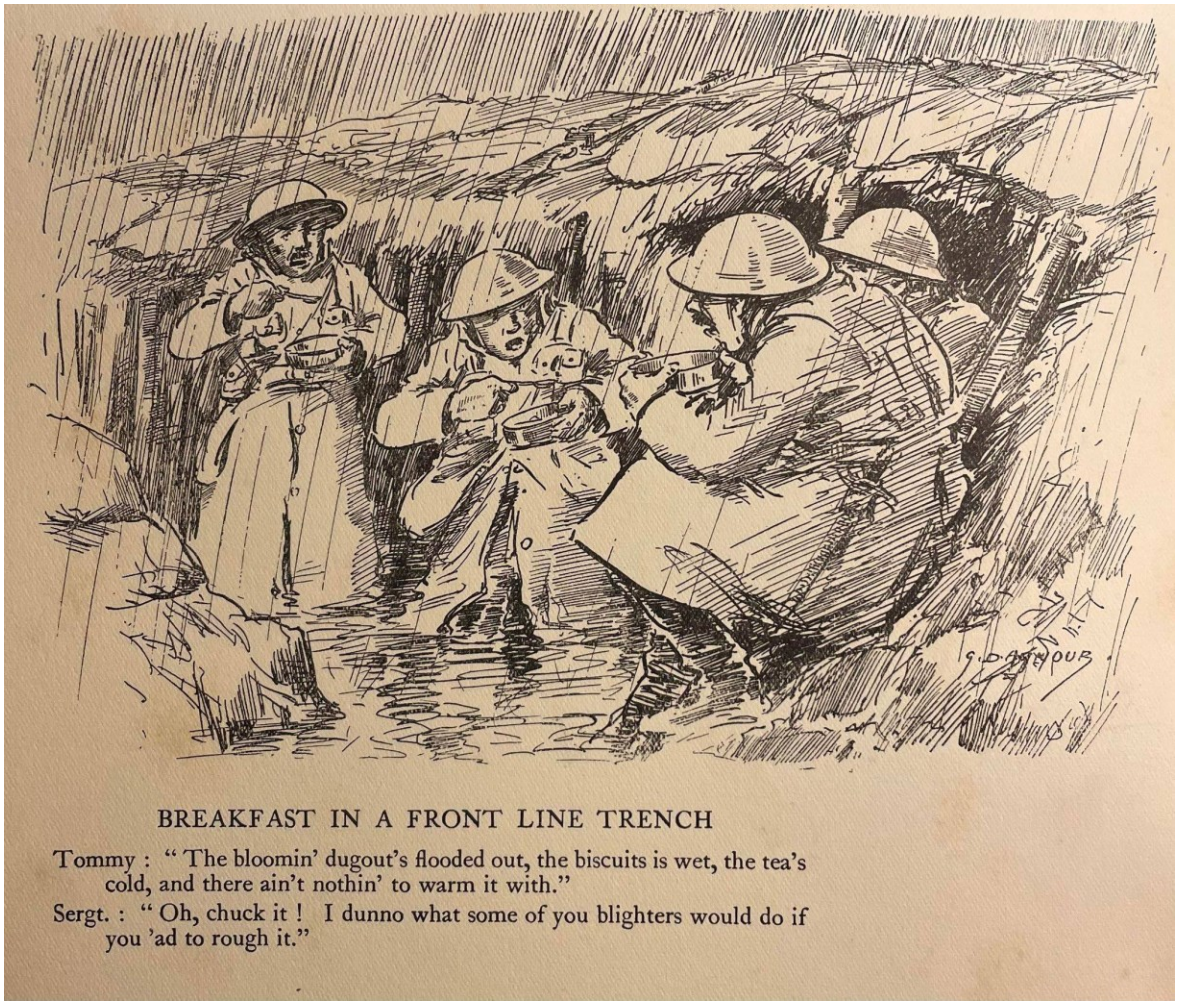

Figure 4. Breakfast in a Front Line Trench

The above cartoon highlighted a bit of humor that shone through a war that, on the whole, was decidedly not funny. That is the main point of *No Joke,* where Crascredo (as I will continue to call him) frames humor as an "interruption of laughter" of war, the "foul and bestial thing." The organization of the book is intentionally disorderly, to mimic how "the unexpected jest would somehow and suddenly obtrude themselves at the most unsuitable moments imaginable" during the war.[166] To Crascredo, humor during the war was all the funnier because of the

[166] Crascredo, *No Joke*, vii.

grimness of the war in which it arose. This contrast, he believed, created a brand of humor specific to the Great War.

Crascredo had several key thoughts on humor as it functioned in the war, weaving in many of the themes previously discussed here. First, he hoped that humor would be a connecting point between the shattered belligerents in the post-war era. "Will Jean and Hans and John ever be able to laugh at the same joke? In war they did not," he mused. But he looked forward to "a peace-time yet to come" where a worldwide *Punch* (here representing humor itself) "will appear simultaneously all across the world, from Shanghai to San Francisco, and Lhasa to London and Fez. Then, if today they cannot always work and will not always play, to-morrow at least they shall laugh, together–John and Jean and Hans, Ivan and all the rest."[167] He might be conflating shared humor with world peace, but it is more likely he is arguing that humor might be a signpost that world peace has been achieved. Beyond this sentimentality though, Crascredo discusses many nuanced ideas about how humor functioned for soldiers as a coping mechanism, how it interacted with authority and military operations, how the topics of humor on the front changed throughout the war, and how humor served as a connecting bridge yet also a divergence between soldiers, authority, and the homefront.

First, as a veteran, Crascredo was well aware of the importance of humor as a coping mechanism on the front, but he also understood that too much humor was a danger to the war effort. "Indeed," he wrote, "we have all known operations of war rendered wholly abortive" by wit and humor.[168] He remembered how humor in public schools, which he understood as "days of unconscious or semi-conscious preparation" for war, "spluttered from boy to boy, capable of

[167] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 5.
[168] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 6.

shaking our extended ranks to mock-battle impotence."[169] He could not remember the specific jokes themselves, but he recalled their importance in rendering boys incapable of fighting. Even though he was talking about boys, this still proved so in the army: "boys, as they say, will be boys, but middle-aged males can be indistinguishable from such."[170] He laughed thinking about how if nations had gone to war with an army corps of humorists, "nobody could have gone on fighting."[171]

Therefore, it was a critical task to reign in the humor; yet also allow certain amounts of it for it to function as a coping mechanism. "Too many jokes would have made war impossible" he concludes, "and so only just enough jokes were permitted by gods of war, just enough to make moments and hours bearable."[172] Crascredo suggests that the "gods of war," perhaps the generals and politicians bent on conducting the war, would be wise to allow just enough humor for soldiers to cope with the stress of war, but not so much that it would undermine the war effort, as he had seen humor do. Importantly, Crascredo frames the use of humor as a coping mechanism and the use of humor to subvert the war effort as directly related to one another. The two functions pushed against and balanced each other, creating a functioning dichotomy. Not enough humor and the war would have been unbearable; too much and it would have been impossible to conduct. Thus, according to Crascredo, humor was simultaneously a vital function of soldiers and also inherently subversive to the war. Due to its fluctuating nature, humor was something that military authority had to interact with to maintain the correct balance for continuing the war.

[169] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 6.
[170] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 7.
[171] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 6.
[172] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 7.

Crascredo details this intersection of military authority and entertainment in later chapters. He first gives us some context on how the common soldier conceptualized the higher military hierarchy. In the broadest sense, those that were lost in the higher ranks of the military ceased to be individuals and became the indeterminate "They," to whom "the British soldier would refer without bitterness but equally without enthusiasm." 'They' and 'Them' covered "a multitude of sinners" in the mind of the average soldier, from low regimental authority to generals. 'They' were conceptualized as well-intentioned, but dim-witted and ultimately out of touch with the common soldier. Perhaps 'They' were the 'gods of war' he referenced earlier. It was seldom personal, Crascredo insists, for when "a spark or body was detached from Authority, taking shape as a general or such, then simple soldiers would nearly always conduct themselves with a decent humility which might verge on admiration." High-ranking officers, those of Authority, who truly wished to forge connections with their men would get off their high horses, and go on foot amongst the soldiers at the front, thereby gaining the hearts of their men and removing from their minds the "obstructive notions" of 'They' and 'Them.' Those in Authority, Crascredo believed, should live in a space of "semi-detachment;" not so close to the soldiers that they lose respect for them, even though they run the risk of being referred to as 'They.'[173]

Whether it was 'They,' 'Authority' or the 'gods of war,' militaries remained obligated to provide humor for their soldiers throughout the war. Crascredo lays out a so-called profundity of war: "If soldiers in wartime must have their little jokes at the expense of Authority, they are not without Entertainment officially provided by Authority itself."[174] This could be read as an if-then statement, meaning that soldiers laughing at jokes at authority are actually consuming only the

[173] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 15-23.
[174] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 51.

entertainment that authority is allowing them to consume. In other words, the little jokes soldiers make are actually what the "gods of war" set in front of them. It could also mean that even while soldiers mock authority, authority simultaneously creates and feeds its own entertainment to the soldiers so that soldiers have less time to come up with their own, original, and possibly more subversive jokes, which might explain the extensive use of humor in official propaganda. "Laugh," said the gods of war, said Authority, "*when I gives you a joke*. At other times, act sensible."[175] As Crascredo understood it, this meant soldiers were to laugh only when it was allowed, and to act like a soldier at other times. But what if soldiers thought something was a joke when it was not? What if Authority gave them a joke without realizing it? What if soldiers failed to laugh at a joke? Those questions are left unanswered.

Crascredo had a keen eye for what he called the "officially promoted relaxations of war." In other words, the ways authority harnessed humor and entertainment during wartime. A soldier was "given his jokes as he was given his rations–to keep him fit."[176] From the perspective of the consumer of such official entertainment, Crascredo recalls fondly the "Concert Parties" and "Troupes for the Troops" designed to bring spiritual relief to the soldiers suffering from anxiety, fear, or boredom. Yet the irony in the official humor put on by the military is that it risks becoming overplayed: "in the army of today, soldiers will sometimes wonder whether the Joker element is not being overdone, whether a soldier's playtime is not being so fully provided for that there are no times left for soldiering."[177] Some soldiers rejected official entertainment altogether, and spent time planning out their spare time with the goal to "get leave off the

[175] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 51.
[176] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 52.
[177] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 52.

entertainment provided."[178] Yet Crascredo did not think this was the majority of soldiers. Most, he believed, still saw the benefit and fun in the entertainment provided by the military; he even regrets not going to some wartime entertainments. On one occasion he gave up his place to go see a war concert, electing to take a nap instead, because it required a four-mile hike over a mountain and through a bog. Unfortunately, his nap was interrupted by rain, he and his possessions were soaked, and his companions returned from the concert in high spirits. "When the army gives you a joke," he thought, "it may be advisable and necessary to go across a mountain range to see it."[179] In the context of total war, common soldiers and civilians interacted with their government and authority on unprecedented levels. Humor was a mutually beneficial transaction between Authority and common soldiers, signaling another way the war was changing how the individual interacted with the impersonal Authority.

As we have seen in chapter two, this marketplace of humor was a prime place for tension to arise between soldiers and Authority. According to Crascredo, conflict between officers and simple soldiers was rare, but soldiers would occasionally overstep the mark with "*cheerful* indiscipline to authority," again showing how humor and wit acted as a safe zone, and perhaps the only safe zone, for such conflict to happen.[180] He gives two examples of such humorous instances. One where a general admonished a private, having never seen someone with so many medals but without even a single stripe of a lance-corporal, to which the private retorted "And I have never before seen a general wearing so many medal-ribbons—*and not a single Active Service one amongst them*."[181] Another soldier told a particularly pompous and domineering

[178] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 52.
[179] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 55.
[180] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 19.
[181] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 19-20.

general to "put a sock in it."[182] Remarkably, especially so in the latter case, the soldiers got away with it unscathed. These soldiers, already at their lowest, were "pushed no further down" by Authority because of the humorous way they snapped back at their superiors.

Additionally, despite the quality of the officially promoted forms of entertainment, they occasionally become a point of conflict and exclusion between soldiers and the homefront. In contrast to the 'company humorists' so admired by their fellow soldiers, the 'grand entertainments' given by real, professional entertainers did not sit well with their audience of soldiers, who from the start demanded to know why the entertainers were not in the army. Their second critique, according to Crascredo, concerned woman actors, who "were not very good in the men's parts they had taken." For soldiers near the front, they could not suspend their disbelief while watching female actors, seeing them as "*only* an actor… something less than a man." Women attempting to 'be a man' would fail in their attempts, according to the soldier. This did not signify their ingratitude, he insisted, but remained to them an obvious criticism. "Entertainment near the Front was best left to the soldiers themselves," he concludes, showing how harshly humor could be used to divide soldiers from the people they were supposedly fighting to protect.[183]

Humor remained a major point of divergence between the homefront and battlefront experiences as the two groups interacted. "To soldiers coming on leave," Crascredo wrote, "it was sometimes sobering and sometimes infuriating to find that there were people still laughing at things found no longer funny at the Front."[184] The disconnect between soldiers and the people left behind was a crucial subject for veterans. Echoing Paul Bäumer's experience on leave in

[182] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 22.
[183] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 55.
[184] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 13.

Remarque's classic novel, Crascredo calls attention to the feelings of alienation that going on leave could create in soldiers, but here specifically looking at humor. Returning from the front, Cranscredo found the humor of the homefront, what he had presumably enjoyed before the war, to be trivial at best and infuriating at worst. "Their home-treasured sayings and laughter" could not be shared by soldiers on leave.[185] Soldiers could now only laugh *at* the homefront, instead of *with* it: "Soldiers from the front laughed as they sat at home" but could not tell everyone why, often distressing the people of the homefront.[186] The humor of the homefront had not changed, it was the soldiers who had.

During the war, Crascredo explains, what soldiers joked about changed dramatically. At first, they laughed at their own incompetence, or that of their neighbor; but that quickly stopped as real incompetence led to unnecessary deaths. They laughed, in a pleasant way, at children who ran behind soldiers, pretending to be soldiers themselves; that laughter died when those children grew up and really did go to war. They laughed at heroic young officers, who desired to hold the line against the whole enemy with just a few men; it was not as funny when those heroes actually did that, dying bravely and foolishly. In the beginning, they laughed at the enemy, made to look comical and foolish; that joke died the soonest, as the enemy was in reality a deadly force.[187]

He recalled an officer attempting to use that humor, long after it had ceased to be funny. "You men," said the officer to some troops, in his best morale-boosting voice, "must remember that your enemy is only the sort of waiter-fellow to whom you used to give six-pence for handing you your hat from a London cloak-room."[188] The joke utterly flopped. No doubt it would have

[185] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 13.
[186] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 13.
[187] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 8.
[188] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 9-10.

landed better if his lower-class, rural audience had ever been to London, or ever had enough money to be throwing it around a cloakroom. The general opinion among his audience was that even "the most knock-kneed of cloak-room attendants is bound to be something of a nuisance when supplied with a rifle, bayonet, sackful of bombs and a creeping barrage," as their enemies always were.[189] This example shows both how officers attempted (poorly) to utilize humor, and how they failed to account for class differences between themselves and their men. Officers tried to employ humor in the service of the war effort, long after it had any effectiveness. The jokes they might have used at the beginning of the war were dead; the humor of soldiers had changed. One by one, the things soldiers found funny at the beginning of the war became 'No Joke.' While it is not stated explicitly, Crascredo is suggesting that 'old humor' was the humor of the homefront; it was that humor that died on the battlefields along with the soldiers, so when soldiers returned from leave, they found themselves disconnected from the jokes of their homefront counterparts.

Yet Crascredo had some hope that before long, "people looking at war pictures will crack their sides with laughter," and connections between veterans and non-veterans will be restored. After all, "already the pictures of prehistoric man, bashing his foe with a club, can be made to appear not unhumorous to us."[190] If the violence of the cavemen could be made humorous, surely the violence of the war could be too. Even before the end of the war, Crascredo attempted and succeeded in using humor to connect with those on the homefront, laying the groundwork for the post-war unification of the homefront-battlefront divide. "There was a jest I sent to my Uncle," he recalls, "and though I do not remember just which jest it was, I do recollect that its humor was

[189] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 10.
[190] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 13-14.

quite exquisite."[191] As he sealed the letter to his uncle, he anticipated the explosive reaction he would have at the jest, just as he and his fellow soldiers were reacting to it.

Later his uncle responded quite unexpectedly: "Thank you for your letter. Your tale was interesting. For I recollect that we were telling exactly the same story when I was with Roberts in Pretoria, eighteen years ago."[192] The joke Crascredo sent to his uncle became a connection point, though admittedly that connection was limited to former soldiers like his uncle. War humor, he concludes from this, was simply old jokes in disguise. From Königgrätz to Waterloo, Cannae to Thermopylae, he wrote, "the funny things in war cannot have varied much."[193] This echoes the preface of *500 of the Cockney War Stories,* where a story by Sir Ian Hamilton about his time in Afghanistan in 1879 showed that "there is no break in continuity of a great tradition, that the spirits of laughter and high adventure are immortal in the make-up of the British soldier."[194] Limited connections could be made between the homefront and battlefront, especially between former soldiers.

Crascredo did not know with certainty if civilians would be able to 'get' the humor of the front, or enjoy the 'official entertainment' put on by the and for the soldiers on the front. He asks whether they were actually worth going to and whether they were actually funny. Would anyone from home even find these entertaining? At the time, he explains, "they seemed to be marvels of thrill, pathos, wit, harmony, and all the other things which in song and sketch they were meant to be."[195] If you could turn the clock back, he wondered, and walk back into a soldier concert,

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[191] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 12. Again we see how the exact nature of the joke is not important, but the presence of humor is.
[192] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 12-13. Reference to 1st Earl Frederick Roberts and the Second Boer War/South African War (11 October 1899 – 31 May 1902).
[193] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 13.
[194] *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories,* 5.
[195] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 55.

would even he still enjoy it, all these years later? He did not know. But he did know that the audience made those entertainments unique to that time and place. The audience, the soldiers, "was always an essential part of those soldier shows," unlike the audience at a London theater, for example. "That audience," he affirms multiple times, "cannot be restored." Nor should it, necessarily. He would prefer to "remember only that they laughed, care-free, at those concert parties, and were happy and jolly and gay."[196] Humor, he knew, was specific to the time and place it was created. Soldiers like Crascredo tried to use humor to connect with those on the homefront. Sometimes it worked in unexpected ways, such as the joke he sent his uncle, and other times humor was a point of divergence.

Despite the trouble he had using humor to connect with others, Crascredo's most important point in relation to these ideas is his anti-war message, which was key in his mind to ultimately reconnecting soldiers and the homefront (just as he hoped it would connect Jean and John and Hans). Just as what soldiers joked about changed during the war, Crascredo hoped that in the peacetime era, the way people joked about war would change. That does not mean war would be joked about directly, because "war itself will remain no joke. But," he added, "we may hope that the very thought of *making* war will come to seem inexpressibly ludicrous."[197] In other words, war itself would never be funny, but the idea that countries would go to war after the horrible experience of the Great War would become ridiculous. By doing so he fits humor into the "war to end all war" paradigm that H. G. Wells began in 1914 with *The War That Will End War* and became one of the most popular idealistic catchphrases and a popular moniker for the conflict.[198] "The Problem of Peace," he said, "is to provide alternatives to the Fires of War," and

[196] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 56-57.
[197] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 14.
[198] H. G. Wells, *The War that Will End War* (New York: Duffield and Company, 1914).

to make sure that the Great War was truly the last war, tremendous effort would be required from everyone. To get it all done in any amount of time would be "No Joke."[199] Humor, he believed, would be the ultimate signal of connection between soldiers and civilians, and between former enemies, when world peace was finally achieved. For when that day comes, "the Old Soldier will laugh with the rest of you and the best of you." And even if people were not able to laugh at the 'Old Soldier' and his jokes, the soldier would not mind. "It will not much matter to old soldiers," he believed, if their soldiering jokes no longer seem funny to "a world that sees war as ridiculous."[200] If what people joked about could change, then it was reasonable to look forward to a time when everyone, veteran and non-veteran alike, British and German and French, could unite in opposition to war itself using humor.

Crascredo's *No Joke* stands out among the many joke books and story collections for his nuanced essays on humor itself along the way. Its uniqueness demands dedicated analysis, and overall, it pulls together many of the major themes and topics of this project. Crascredo understood humor as a coping mechanism better than most, and dove into the complexities of how it interacted with the wider war effort as a dichotomy between coping and undermining. This was especially clear in unfortunate interactions between officers and soldiers that were mediated by humor. And because of the dichotomy, he paid attention to when and how the military structure interfaced with humor, supplying some forms of entertainment while also regulating discipline. Meanwhile, he also saw how humor divided the homefront from combatants; yet had hope that humor directed at warfare itself would be the ultimate connecting point between civilian and soldier, and perhaps even between former enemies. Humor fit into

[199] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 133.
[200] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 14.

Crascredo's optimistic if ultimately misplaced visions of post-war world peace, as a potential sign that the Great War had truly ended war forever.

CONCLUSIONS

If humor was used to remember and understand the Great War by the soldiers who fought in it, then it should also be used by the historians who study the war a century later. Soldiers left us with ample material to do so; the small but significant postwar wave of joke books and story collections built off trench newspapers and the humor of the soldiers. Humor has a lot to offer historians of the Great War, above and beyond its use as a coping mechanism, a theme that has preoccupied many historians interested in the subject so far. It has almost become obligatory to begin discussions of humor in war with its ability to help soldiers cope, yet there are far more interesting and perhaps more significant avenues of humor's forms and functions to explore. Humor can be used as a framework to understand interpersonal and group relations. This has been shown with officer-soldier dynamics, where humor acted in a space between subversion and support, as a mediator and an underminer; it also reveals class differences and tensions boiling underneath soldier-officer interactions.

Humor also frames the homefront-battlefront divide, revealing both how soldiers used humor to separate themselves from those at home, and also as a way to relate their experiences to them. Humor can be used to show ordinary people's interactions with wider hierarchies, ideologies, and authority structures, such as common soldiers and gender relations, which underlined the battlefront-homefront divide. But also shows how soldiers understood and dealt with the expectations thrust on them by the medieval and romantic ideals of soldiering, which shaped they thought about and interacted with military authority as a whole. Humor remains a neutral and ambiguous force in these relationships and interactions; it does not take a "side," but rather serves as a tool to be used or a safe zone to be entered by anyone in these relationships to

either create connections or divisions. Finally, Crascredo fits humor into the anti-war sentimentality and the 'war to end all war' paradigm, showing how salient a rhetorical tool it could be for soldiers in understanding the war and what came after.

I make no claim to completeness with this thesis, even in the study of joke books and story collections. There are many sources similar to mine still out there to be found, and perhaps more hidden gems like *No Joke*. Many of the subjects presented here deserve their own in-depth study, even the topic of humor as a coping mechanism might have more to offer to future writers. Deeper studies on humor's intersection with gender, masculinity, and anxiety are sorely needed, and I hope that this might be a jumping-off point for future endeavors. A better look at class differences, and how humor simultaneously created and bridged class divides within armies is also needed; I have barely scratched the surface. The medieval and romantic ideal soldier tropes need more of their own dedicated studies, even before bringing in humor.

Race, ethnicity, and racist humor in joke books, a subject I did not touch on at all, is also deserving of its own study, with my sources and others. Separate projects could be done for humor in British sources that attack the Irish, the Scottish, or colonial troops; and Black servicemen feature prominently in American sources, occasionally with a sympathetic and appreciative tone but often written in degrading ways. Comparative works looking at how European humor differed from American humor (or how it was perceived to) would also be welcome, in addition to a great need for looks at humor of the Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian Empires during the conflict, including and beyond the famous *The Good Soldier Švejk* by Jaroslav Hašek. In sum, humor in the Great War is still an open field ripe for cultivation, from

types of sources to historical themes. Historians have their work cut out for them. To borrow the words of Crascredo, "to get it all done," at some point in the near future, "would be No Joke."[201]

[201] Crascredo, *No Joke*, 135.

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