
Where was this trove of treasure found?  
See page 14

What happened in this Regimental HQ?  
See page 11

Who loved this much-despised piece of equipment?  
See page 10

How does this Afghanistanc scene tie to the Great War?  
See Page 4

HM Hospital Ship 'Llandovery Castle', sunk by enemy submarines, 27 June 1918 by artist Maurice Randall
Message from the Chairman

It’s a nice way to end summer with another issue—No. 72—of the Listening Post. Extra special thanks to Rob Forbes for finding great content as the volume of contributions from members dropped off during the summer months.

We are now 100 years from some of the most intense activity of the Great War. The CEF began what we now know as the “last hundred days” with the Battle of Amiens on August 8, 1918. This breakthrough battle saw an advance of 20 kilometres and was called “the black day of the German Army” by the German high command. The Canadians then moved to Arras and through September took the Drocourt-Queant Canal, the Canal du Nord, St. Quentin Canal, the Beaurevoir Line and by early October were poised for the Battle of Cambrai.

After the Battle of Belleau Wood in June 1918, the AEF fought in the Aisne-Marne offensive and in mid-September they took the offensive at St. Mihiel. By the end of the month the AEF had launched the Meuse-Argonne offensive, their most important battle of the war.

So, as we near the 100th anniversary of the end of the Great War, there are many important events yet to explore. Decisions made in the years following the end of hostilities on the Western Front are still having a major impact on the world we live in today. We will begin to explore some of the legacy and relevance of the Great War during our 20th annual seminar on the 8, 9 and 10 March 2019. Mark your calendars.

Important event of note for Greater Victoria members:

Shelbourne Memorial Avenue Rededication
Saturday 29 September 2018 at 10:45
Corner of Shelbourne and Elnido/San Juan

This event is the result of years of effort and leadership by branch member Ray Travers and a dedicated committee that included our own Alan MacLeod—who led the design of the interpretive panels to be installed along the avenue. For more information on the event including location maps, please visit:

www.gordonhead.ca/gordonhead/Shelbourne_Memorial_Trees_2.html

The effort many of our members have made, and continue to make, to contribute to the remembering, honouring and learning from the events of the Great War is something we all should be proud of. Thank-you and keep up the good work.

John

Western Front Association
Pacific Coast Branch

The Pacific Coast Branch of The Western Front Association was founded in 1999 and has members from the Provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan; and the States of Washington, Oregon, California, Virginia and Georgia. The worldwide membership in the Western Front Association is over 6,500 in 60 separate Branches in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

The WFA is non-political and does not seek to glorify war. Its principal objective is to perpetuate the memory, courage and comradeship of the people on all sides who served their countries during the Great War in and over France and Belgium, on other fronts, at sea and in their own countries.

Another important objective is to inform and educate the public on the continuing relevance the Great War has on the modern world.

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The Listening Post

This newsletter is produced by the Western Front Association, Pacific Coast Branch. Membership in the WFA-PBC is $30.00 annually and includes subscription to the Listening Post. Submission of pictures and articles can be sent via email to editor@wfapacificcoast.org.
Book Review- Reluctant Warriors

By Scott Usborne, Vice President RUSI-VI


Reluctant Warriors is a new and long overdue reassessment on the value of conscripts to the Canadian Army’s performance in the last months of 1918. The author is retired RCAF Colonel Patrick M. Dennis and he is a man on a mission.

Colonel Dennis’ mission is to redress the commonly accepted wisdom that the contribution of Canada’s conscripts was irrelevant to the success of the Canadian Corps during the One Hundred Days Campaign of 1918. Specifically, the author addresses six myths: conscripts were slackers, shirkers, and malingerers; conscripts were not well trained; only 24,000 conscripts- an insignificant number- saw service at the front; conscripts were unreliable in battle; conscription was not a military necessity; and the Military Service Act, or conscription act, was a failure.

Reluctant Warriors is well argued and Dennis patiently and convincingly demolishes each of these myths with meticulous research. By doing so he changes forever our understanding of the true contribution of Canada’s conscripts and even the importance of conscription itself to Canada’s war effort. Consequently, he is breaking new ground in Canadian history. This is rare enough, but that it is achieved 100 years after the events, by a non-academic is striking testimony to the persistent power of myth, even over Canadian academe. J.L. Granatstein, perhaps Canada’s most prolific and well-known military historian, admits in his foreword to Reluctant Warriors, “I am now forced to admit that I was flatly wrong…” I cannot think of a stronger endorsement for Dennis’ case on conscription.

Colonel Dennis’ scholarship is evident in his chapters on the One Hundred Days Campaign- Canada’s contribution to victory in 1918. Particularly salient is how the author uses war diaries and regimental histories to convey a ‘you are there’ feeling to the fierce fighting of open-warfare. Artillery, machine guns, snipers and airplanes were clearly the backbone of a stiff, but desperate German defence, that took a huge toll in Canadian lives.

The author’s thesis that Canada’s conscripts played a significant part in that final victorious campaign is convincing. The Canadian Corps’ 48 infantry battalions were manned by about 48,000 infantrymen and as 97% of draftees went to the infantry, easily 25% would be conscripts at any time during the One Hundred Days. Only with conscription was Canada able to sustain her front-line strength and maintain the offensive. This closing campaign was certainly no rout of a demoralized enemy, and Canada’s success could not have been achieved with unreliable conscripts. No shirkers were these, but well-trained, and brave soldiers determined to do their duty, the equal of any.

I enjoyed this book very much, it is tightly structured, well written, and well researched, making it easy to read and appreciate the author’s ground-breaking insights. Like many readers of this publication, I have a very full military history library. Every time I purchase a new book, I must discard an existing volume to make a space. That is a difficult chore, as I must carefully weigh the value of an old friend against the value of a newcomer. In the case of this new book by Patrick Dennis however, this is never in doubt… Reluctant Warriors is a keeper.
How did WW1 change the way we treat war injuries today?

Narrated by Saleyha Ahsan, A&E doctor and former army officer

This short video and documents from the BBC is available for all to review the impact of war injuries from the war to modern day medicine.

Between 1914 and 1918, the world’s most powerful industrial nations faced each other on the battlefield. The new weapons of the modern age - shells, trench mortars and machine guns - were unleashed on millions of men, resulting in injuries never seen before in war - and on an unprecedented scale. Almost 25 million soldiers were either killed or wounded.

Medical teams were put under incredible pressure as they struggled to save lives. But war was the mother of invention. A series of medical innovations was developed during World War One, that resulted in the saving of thousands of lives not only in that conflict, but in other wars ever since.

Here, at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine in Birmingham’s Queen Elizabeth Hospital, medical staff are at the cutting edge of military medicine – and they’re still using some techniques developed a century ago. I’m here to find out - how did World War One change the way we treat war injuries today?

http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zs3wpv4

How were soldiers injured in WW1?

- The high number of head wounds early in the war led to the Brodie Helmet being introduced as standard kit in 1915.
- Just 12% of wounds recorded were to the torso. Many soldiers hit here never made it to a hospital, so their injuries were never recorded.
- Leg wounds were the most commonly recorded area of injury; amputation was often necessary.
- Arm injuries were often caused by high explosive artillery shells.
- The mud on the Western Front led one British surgeon to remark, “every gunshot wound... is more or less infected at the moment of its infliction”.
- Standing in water for long periods in the trenches caused trench foot, where infection leads the flesh of the foot to decay and die.
Black Canadians in Service

Like so many others swept up in the excitement and patriotism that the First World War (1914-1918) initially brought on, young Black Canadians were eager to serve King and country. At the time, however, the prejudiced attitudes of many of the people in charge of military enlistment made it very difficult for these men to join the Canadian Army. Despite the barriers, some Black Canadians did manage to join up during the opening years of the war. Black Canadians wanted the chance to do their part on a larger scale, however, and pressured the government to do so.

On July 5, 1916, the No. 2 Construction Battalion was formed in Pictou, Nova Scotia—the first large Black military unit in Canadian history. Recruitment took place across the country and more than 600 men were eventually accepted, most from Nova Scotia, with others coming from New Brunswick, Ontario, the West and even some from the United States. The Black Battalion’s chaplain was Reverend William White, who had also played a leading role getting the unit formed. He was given the rank of Honourary Captain—one of the few Black commissioned officers to serve in the Canadian Army during the war.

The segregated battalion was tasked with non-combat support roles. After initial service in Canada, the battalion boarded the SS Southland bound for Liverpool, England in March 1917. Its members were sent to eastern France later in 1917 where they served honourably with the Canadian Forestry Corps. There they helped provide the lumber required to maintain trenches on the front lines, as well as helped construct roads and railways. After the end of the First World War in November 1918, the men sailed to Halifax in early 1919 to return to civilian life and the unit was officially disbanded in 1920.

In addition to the men of the Black Battalion, an estimated 2,000 Black Canadians, such as James Grant, Roy Fells, Seymour Tyler, Jeremiah Jones and Curly Christian, were determined to get to the front lines and managed to join regular units, going on to give distinguished service that earned some of them medals for bravery.

Black Canadians also made important contributions on the home front. They helped achieve victory by working in factories making the weapons and supplies needed by the soldiers fighting overseas, and by taking part in patriotic activities like raising funds for the war effort.

Three soldiers in a German dugout captured during the Canadian advance east of Arras, France in October 1918.
The war was as stagnant as the French mud when the Canadians were called to the grinding task of pushing the Germans out of the rolling farmland of the Somme, metre by bloody metre.

In their time away from the front lines, in that cold, rainy autumn of 1916, at least 20 Canadian soldiers walked into the woods outside Lanches-Saint-Hilaire, a small French village northwest of the Somme battlefields. There, past the ferns and bushes, they crawled through a small hole, to a place where the bullets and rain could not go.

Inside an old chalk quarry, they wrote their names on the wall, and then returned to the war.

Eventually, time healed the battle-scarred fields and gravestones rose like picket fences to count the fallen; the cave in the woods was largely forgotten as the trees outside grew tall. Romain Beausseaux, 24, a French lumberjack, came upon the quarry by accident. It looked like a foxhole. He crawled inside, and saw “D. Watson” written on the wall. “October 4 1916.”

Gilles Prilaux, archaeologist followed him into the woods on a sunny afternoon a few weeks later. They moved the branches and stones that guarded the entrance, and Prilaux put his hand inside and felt around.

It was dangerous — “because the chalk in our country is sometimes very unstable and can in any moment collapse,” he says.

Prilaux crawled through and scanned the walls of the chalk cave. It is one of many that lie beneath the French fields, a result of quarrying in the 16th and 17th centuries, when chalk was spread on the fields to reduce acidity, and also used as a construction material. This cave was not deep; it was built into a small hill.

Prilaux knew right away that D. Watson was not of a literary bent. As it turned out, he was a soldier of the First World War, a granite cutter from Quebec, with blue eyes, brown hair and a heart tattoo on his left bicep.

“I don’t understand what the Canadians are doing here, at this moment, because the carrière is very difficult to access,” he says, using the French word for quarry.

Lanches-Saint-Hilaire is now home to 135 people. A few years ago, a former mayor put some large stones in front of it to make it difficult to access. Its existence has not been a secret, but it had been mostly forgotten, the names on the wall waiting in a lost-and-found bin for a century.

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There were 30 names in the cave — about 20 of them Canadian, a handful of those legible. Through their service records and obituaries, and with the help of a volunteer genealogist in Alberta, the Star was able to trace the families of two of these men and pass along a message lost for a century.

Prilaux says that in the past 10 years in France, as interest in the centenary of the First World War grows, people have taken a second look at the graffiti on the walls of their town, and underground in caves.

When they left the front lines of the Somme battlefield for a short rest on Oct. 3, the weather was cold and wet, and the men were very tired, but some were drawn to this spot in the woods, some 45 kilometres away from their billets.

Maybe it was a day trip to shake off the war; perhaps it was a need to leave a trace of his existence. It must have felt safe in the dark cavern, away from the bombs, the bullets, the cold, the driving rain. He signed his name with the carbon pencil and returned to the war on Oct. 7, lying in wait, preparing to attack the German-held Regina Trench at dawn the next day.

In the dark morning of Oct. 8, a cold rain fell, and the artillery pounded the enemy for eight minutes, trying to wipe out their machine-gun posts and tear through the barbed wire in no man’s land. When the artillery stopped, Hunter climbed out of the trenches and walked into a blizzard of machine-gun fire alongside his friends.

Official records paint a bleak picture of what came next, when the battalion was “severely handled by the enemy.” Those who made it to the German trenches were “seen no more.” Some men tucked their bodies into shell craters to survive until darkness. No advance was made. When the battalion was relieved, nearly half the men in the charge had been killed or wounded.

Whatever happened to “D. Watson”? He was one of the lucky ones ... Born in Scotland, he immigrated to Canada with his parents, who settled in Quebec. He was a 26-year-old granite cutter and was single, when he enlisted on Nov. 3, 1914. He survived the war and died in 1940 in Montreal — by this time married. No other information is listed about the cause of his death.
The Princess Mary Gift Box

Princess Mary's original intention had been to pay, out of her private allowance, for a personal gift to each soldier and sailor. This was deemed impracticable and a proposal was made that she lend her name to a public fund, which would raise the necessary monies to provide the gift. From the outset the young Princess took a deep personal interest in the work of the Fund and in a letter release by Buckingham Palace, signed by the Princess, she explained the purpose of the Fund.

“I want you now to help me to send a Christmas present from the whole of the nation to every sailor afloat and every soldier at the front. I am sure that we should all be happier to feel that we had helped to send our little token of love and sympathy on Christmas morning, something that would be useful and of permanent value, and the making of which may be the means of providing employment in trades adversely affected by the war. Could there be anything more likely to hearten them in their struggle than a present received straight from home on Christmas Day?

Please will you help me?”

It was anticipated that the majority of eligible recipients would receive an embossed brass box, one ounce of pipe tobacco, twenty cigarettes, a pipe, a tinder lighter, Christmas card and photograph but quite early on the committee in charge received strong representations that an alternative gift should be made available for non-smokers. After some discussion the Committee agreed that non-smokers should receive the brass box, a packet of acid tablets, a khaki writing case containing pencil, paper and envelopes together with the Christmas card and photograph of the Princess.

The Committee was also obliged to consider the tastes of other minority groups and it was recognised that if the dietary rules of various religious groups were to be respected, changes would have to be made in the gifts intended for Indian troops. It was decided that The Gurkhas were to receive the same gift as the British troops; Sikhs the box filled with sugar candy, a tin box of spices and the Christmas card; all other Indian troops, the box with a packet of cigarettes and sugar candy, a tin box of spices and the card. Authorised camp followers, grouped under the title of 'Bhistis' were to receive a tin box of spices and the card.

The smokers' and non-smokers' gifts were both deemed unacceptable by the committee for nurses at the front in France who were instead offered the box, a packet of chocolate and the card.

However, suppliers of the content items had trouble and it was realised that there were still not enough to go round. The Committee resolved the problem by hurriedly buying in an assortment of substitute gifts: bullet pencil cases, tobacco pouches, shaving brushes, combs, pencil cases with packets of postcards, knives, scissors, cigarette cases and purses. Those sailors who should also have received the lighter as part of their gift, were given instead, a handsome bullet pencil in a silver cartridge case which bore Princess Mary's monogram. The ‘pencil bullet’ was not fashioned out of real bullet parts – it was simply a pencil with a rounded white metal end that looked like an unfired round when stored inside a brass tube resembling a cartridge.
case.
Raising money for the scheme proved a great success and on 18 October 1914 the 'Sunday Times' reporting on the splendid response to the initial request for help, published a long list of well-known names of folk who had already donated money. The total eventually subscribed amounted to £162,591 12s 5d, most of this coming from thousands of small gifts sent by ordinary people from all parts of the United Kingdom. In fact, more money was raised than was needed, even after the eligibility for the gift had been extended.
The sum remaining, after all the Fund's liabilities had been discharged, was eventually transferred to Queen Mary’s Maternity Home, founded by the Queen for the benefit of the wives and infants of sailors, soldiers and airmen of the newly formed Royal Air Force.
Some had a considerable wait to receive their boxes, with difficulties distributing them, and with sourcing both the brass and the contents during the ongoing war. Supplies of 45 tons of brass strip, destined to make more boxes, was lost in May 1915 when RMS Lusitania was sunk off Ireland on passage from the USA.
Distribution dragged on even beyond the Armistice in 1918. The final number of boxes produced was over 2.6 million.
Loathed by the Infantry, Loved by the Snipers

Sharon Adams, Legion Magazine

At the end of the Boer War, Canada couldn’t persuade arms-strapped Britain to supply it with Lee-Enfield rifles, or even a licence to manufacture them. How was this fledgling country going to arm its army, police and militia? Scottish industrialist and gun enthusiast Sir Charles Ross stepped forward, proposing to build a factory in Quebec City to manufacture a rifle of his design. The government ordered 12,000 of the rifles for delivery in 1903.

The gun’s straight-pull, bolt-action design promised faster firing than the Lee-Enfield, since a manual quarter-turn of the bolt was not required. Its accuracy and precision won the unflagging support of avid marksman Sam Hughes, Minister of Militia and Defence from 1911 to 1916. Trials revealed problems, including bolts jamming on sustained firing, but Ross promised all would be addressed during manufacturing. Thus began a process of continual redesign.

The first Canadian and Newfoundland troops carried Ross rifles into the war. Snipers loved their accuracy. But they were too finely tooled for the variance in mass-produced British ammunition, and keeping the gun clean was a challenge for the infantry in the mucky trenches of the battlefield.

During the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in March 1915, some rifles jammed. Soft brass in British shells expanded and stuck in the chamber and mud gummed up the works. At Ypres in April, some soldiers used their boots and shovels to loosen jammed bolts. One officer wrote, “It is nothing short of murder to send out men against the enemy with such a weapon.”

Some soldiers discarded their Ross rifles, dubbed “the Canadian club,” and picked up Lee-Enfields from fallen allies, despite orders not to do so.

As one problem was fixed, others arose. Early models were retrofitted with reamed-out chambers to hold larger ammunition, then a manufacturing problem surfaced: parts on new models were being over-tightened at the factory, distorting the chamber. Other fixes included hardening the soft metal of the bolt head and installing a larger bolt stop.

While the jamming rifle shook the infantry’s confidence, snipers loved it. The gun proved deadly accurate in the hands of sharpshooters Henry Louis Norwest, a Metis from Fort Saskatchewan, Alta., and Francis Pegahmagabow, an Ontario Ojibwa. Pegahmagabow was awarded the Military Medal for exploits during battles at Ypres, Festubert and Givenchy. He earned a bar to the medal at Passchendaele and a second bar in the Battle of the Scarpe. A superb scout and deadly marksman, he is credited with killing 378 enemy and capturing 300 more; he is claimed to have the best sniping record of the war on any side. Norwest earned the Military Medal at Vimy Ridge, where his sniping saved many lives, and was awarded a bar in 1918. He is credited with dispatching 115 enemy.

In June 1916, British Field Marshal Douglas Haig ordered Canadian troops to exchange their Ross rifles for Lee-Enfields.
A Curious Will

By late August 1918 the 1/1st Btn, Cambridgeshire Regt, as part of the 35th Bde, 12th Div, were heavily involved in the push east, north of the River Somme. They had already taken part in the heavy fighting at Morlancourt (August 8-9th) & around the Meaulte Rd (August 22nd). After a day of advancing, they reached positions near a hill known as the Maltz Horn Ridge (due to the proximity to the Maltz Horn Farm). With the slope looming across the valley & the Germans holding the summit, it was clear that it would be a tricky attack.

The rapid advances of the last few days, combined with the short pauses & attacks when the retreating Germans halted, highlighted a serious issue for any advancing Btn – where to establish HQs? There was simply no time to dig deep shelters or handpick the perfect location.

After reaching their objective positions along the road north of Maricourt in the afternoon of August 27th, the search for a suitable site for the Btn HQ was made & only 1 option was found - several poorly made old German shelters in the grounds of a nearby ruined brickworks. These shelters are described as being around 8 foot deep, with timbers holding up railway track, over which corrugated tin had been placed as a roof. Concerns about the location & lack of protection were raised by the 2IC & Adj but there were no other nearby positions.

At 4.50am on August 28th, in a pre-dawn attack, the Cambs’ advanced & pushed up the slope. Despite heavy German machine gun fire the Cambridgeshires were able to take and clear the positions along the summit after a short fierce fight, with only light casualties.

During the day, as the men consolidated the positions & kept up fire on the enemy who were around 1500 yards east, several enemy light field guns were brought up, in the open, just out of range of effective small arms fire. These guns soon began shelling the Cambs’ positions.

Despite repeated unanswered calls for British artillery fire on the location of the field guns, they continued their fire uninterrupted for much of the afternoon. At 9pm, the relief by 7/Norfolks was being arranged & their Signalling Officer arrived to make arrangements.

As a parting shot, the guns that had been harassing the Cambs all afternoon fired the last of their shells over the ridge. Either by luck or judgment, these shells crashed down around the Btn HQ. One scoring a direct hit, plunging through the roof with ease before detonating.

In an instant the Cambs Btn HQ was all but wiped out, Lt Col Saint DSO was mortally wounded, the Cambs SO, Lt Driver MC was killed, as was the Norfolks SO, Lt Maddison. Several signallers & runners were killed & others wounded. Amazingly the Cambs’ Adj, Capt Walker MC, survived.

Luckily for the 1/1st Cambs, the loss of their Btn HQ came at a time when they were being relieved & 7/Norfolks took their place in the line. However the unfortunate event shows the vulnerability & difficulty of finding secure locations for Btn HQs when advancing.

With an organised retreating opponent who knew every inch of ground & had plotted the exact locations of all likely positions, along with an ever increasing use of delayed action mines & booby-traps, finding suitable locations for frontline HQs was no easy task.

The Cambs’ loss of their CO & the Btn HQ on August 28th was by no means a unique incident in the closing months of the War. The CWGC lists 63 Lt Cols as buried in France & Belgium from the period of the “100 Days Offensive,” 47 of these were infantry officers.

Lt Geoffrey Maddison, SO of the 7/Norfolks, was from Durham and a former student at Marlborough College & Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Before being commissioned in September 1917 he had served with the Essex Regt & the MGC in England.
View from the frontline at the Somme

Amy Davis, Amateur Photographer Magazine

Perhaps a recurring theme across most war photography is the fact that much of it is captured by outsiders. So often the images we see are taken by journalists or freelancers who have taken themselves to the conflict in order to bring back images to display to the rest of the world. However, it’s not often that we see images actually captured by individuals directly involved in the conflict. Such pictures must surely offer a unique perspective.

At the start of the war in 1914, there were no restrictions on the use of cameras or photography, as Richard explains: ‘I’m sure the Army’s attitude wouldn’t have been entirely positive towards photography, but at that time they were far more excited by what was going on, and the threat of Germany, to worry about cameras.’

What may seem odd, at least to modern sensibilities, is that there were no official photographers sent over to cover the action. ‘It didn’t even occur to them that photography and propaganda in the Great War would be useful,’ says Richard. ‘So there were no images for the British press.’

To satisfy their readers’ desire for imagery, newspapers started to offer money directly to soldiers who had taken their own cameras. The vast majority would have been officers, because of the high cost of camera equipment and film. It soon became clear that good photos could be worth vast sums of money.

An everyday picture of Tommies at the front would get you a few shillings or a couple of pounds. However, if you got a photograph of men under fire, for example, it could be worth a lot: up to £600–£700 per photograph, or £50,000–£100,000 in today’s money.

These pictures started to appear in the British press – uncensored – but the military authorities started to notice. They got extremely upset that there was a lack of control. I think they also felt that men were possibly loading, aiming and shooting their cameras as opposed to their revolvers and rifles.

Eventually, a ban on cameras came via a General Routine Order (GRO) just before Christmas 1914. The problem was that a GRO wasn’t relayed to the men who were about to go to France – only the men already in the field. You had tens of thousands of men coming over from Britain with cameras unaware of this order.’

The result was that in 1915, a more serious ban, a War Office Instruction, was put into place, over a year before the Battle of the Somme began. Initially, some men still flouted the ban, but as the war progressed it became harder to avoid.

Anybody caught with a camera faced a court martial. For an officer, that could mean being kicked out of the Army and being dishonourably discharged. For another rank, it could mean months of hard labour.
As a result, images from the Battle of the Somme are much rarer than photographs from 1914 and 1915, when there were in fact far fewer men. There were up to two million men on the Western Front in 1916, but there are fewer photographs than when there were half a million men in 1915. Fortunately for posterity, enough of them kept cameras.

By 1916, the government had realised that official photography was necessary, but sent just two photographers to the Western Front. Their images aren’t as realistic as unofficial sources.

Although they took fantastic photographs, many of their pictures were staged. It wasn’t that these men weren’t in a frontline trench, but they would go along and say, “OK lads, can you pretend to be cleaning your gun?” and they’d all stand around and make a pose.

You’ve only got two photographers on the Somme. They would have to be very lucky to capture extraordinary moments, whereas if you’ve got enough men with cameras, you will get instances where shell bursts will be right over the top of the trench as one of them clicks his camera.

After the bans, some soldiers continued to risk taking their own pictures. Richard has discovered several accounts of soldiers being punished for taking them.

One officer was sent home; someone from another rank got three months hard labour; and another got Field Punishment Number One, which is being spread-eagled on a gun carriage in front of all your mates. It isn’t painful, just humiliating. The punishment you received depended on the commanding officer.

In order to avoid being caught, soldiers came up with various tactics to conceal cameras and film. If they were caught with a roll of film, they would automatically lose your leave, so if they took pictures home they were very careful about doing so. They relied on film being sent out from home, or from friends who had been out on leave. If you needed another roll, you would have a secret message that you could agree with a family member. For example, “It’s a very indifferent day today”, which they would know meant, “Send me a roll of film.”

Of course, the soldiers who took photographs faced other technical challenges. Most of the soldiers used the Vest Pocket Kodak, which was marketed directly to soldiers just prior and during the early months of the Great War. It was something with retractable bellows, which you would store in your jacket pocket or your haversack, and was easy to use.

It also had rollfilm, so you could just put in the rollfilm and take your photographs. These cameras were small and portable, so that was what most men used.

With a VPK, you had to look down on the viewfinder. For you to take a picture of men going over the top, or in action, you’d have to expose half your body to get the shot. You could literally just lift the camera above the trench top, but you risked the picture being shaky, or taking a picture of the sky. So, the pictures where you actually see men in action, where you see extremely dangerous situations are very rare.
Stahlhelm

You never know what reading old letters will turn up. In the case of a French historian, reading some old letters about German prisoners of war sent one historian into the farmland of France. A collection of equipment was dumped into a hole and covered over and nearly a hundred years later was rediscovered.

One thing you have to keep in mind, is that (as seen on the pics) this dump has been drowned for decades, and so the helmets were preserved from the contact with the air. The digger who found them has apparently enraged many by selling them instead of donating them to a museum.

The Stahlhelm was introduced into regular service during the Verdun campaign in early 1916. The M1916 design had side-mounted horn-like ventilator lugs which were intended to be support for an additional steel brow plate or Stirnpanzer, which only ever saw limited use by snipers and trench raiding parties, as it was too heavy for general use.

The shell came in different sizes, from 60 to 68, with some size 70s reported. Helmet weight varied from 0.98 kg to 1.4 kg, depending on shell size. The suspension, or liner, consisted of a headband with three segmented leather pouches, each holding padding materials, and leather or fabric cords could be adjusted to provide a comfortable fit. The one-piece leather chin strap was attached to the shell by M1891 chinstrap lugs, the same kind used in the Pickelhaube helmet.

The M1916 design provided excellent protection: Reserve Lieutenant Walter Schulze of 8th Company Reserve Infantry Regiment 76 described his combat introduction to the helmet on
the Somme, 29 July 1916:
“... suddenly, with a great clanging thud, I was hit on the forehead and knocked flying onto the floor of the trench... a shrapnel bullet had hit my helmet with great violence, without piercing it, but sufficiently hard to dent it. If I had, as had been usual up until a few days previously, been wearing a cap, then the Regiment would have had one more man killed.”

But the helmet was not without its flaws. The ventilator horns often let cold air in during the winter, requiring the wearer to block the vents with mud or fabric. The large, flared skirt tended to make it difficult for soldiers to hear, distorting surrounding sounds and creating an echo when the wearer spoke.

Originally painted Feldgrau (field grey), the Stahlhelm was often camouflaged by troops in the field using mud, foliage, cloth covers, and paint. Official issue cloth covers in white and grey appeared in late 1916 and early 1917.

Camouflage paint was not formally introduced until July 1918, when German Army Order II, No 91 366, signed by General Erich Ludendorff on 7 July 1918, outlined official standards for helmet camouflage.

The order stipulated that helmets should be painted in several colors, separated by a finger-wide black line. The colors should be relevant to the season, such as using green, brown and ochre in summer.

After the effectiveness of the M1916 design was validated during the 1916 campaigns, incremental improvements were subsequently made. The M1917 version saw improvements to the liner, but was otherwise identical to the original design.
Prevent it!

KEEP
FEET
DRY
AND
CLEAN

Army poster, Health information for US soldiers