Bayerische Landeszentrale
für politische Bildungsarbeit

Meeting in No Man's Land

British and German memories of World War One

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Preface

THE BAVARIAN REGIONAL CENTRE
FOR POLITICAL EDUCATION

In Flanders' fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place: and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders' fields.
Take up our quarrel with the foe;
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high,
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders' Fields.

John McCrae, 1915

In Great Britain, as in many English-speaking countries, *Remembrance Day* is observed on 11 November every year. On this day, these countries are awash with stylised red poppies made out of paper, pinned to people's clothing or affixed to cars. Taking inspiration from the poem on the left, which was penned by Canadian officer John McCrae in 1915 in remembrance of a fallen comrade, the poppy came to be a symbol for the thousands upon thousands of soldiers who died on the Western Front (*flanders fields*) and was later used to also commemorate those lost in the Second World War and all other wars.

Germany has its own day of commemoration, the Volkstrauertag, which is held on the second-to-last Sunday before the first day of Advent. There are church memorial services and wreaths are laid at war memorials in remembrance of the fallen soldiers and all victims of war and violence.

Between 2014 and 2018, these memorial services marked 100 years since the First World War. This period of remembrance and personal family stories gave rise to a quite special German-British project. In 2016, the descendants of German and British soldiers, who had fought on opposing sides in the First World War, came together to share their own family stories, bringing with them objects and photos connected to the grandfathers or great-grandfathers they had lost. The entire meeting was filmed and documented.

Attendees from both Britain and Germany remained in touch and from this meeting bloomed long-lasting friendships.

The participants, many of them advanced in years, frequently had very striking, realistic images of their late relatives or of individual scenes from their lives "in their heads" thanks to snapshots captured in individual photographs, stories or anecdotes that had been told time and again, love letters or mail from the front and personal effects like bags, badges, trunks and more. The purpose of this publication is to bring these images to life. The artistic layout of this book reflects just how diverse the participants' memories are and we took the conscious decision to use different graphic artists for each individual story so as to capture the individuality of each recollection. What brings all of these different snapshots together is the act of shared memory and remembrance, crossing the generational and national divide. Arranged into a chain of sorts, these varied stories create a book of shared memory. The title "Meeting in No Man's Land" is a reference to the "Christmas Truce" of 1914, a spontaneous ceasefire that occurred around Christmas time in the midst of the war as British, German and French soldiers ventured out into the "No Man's Land" between the trenches to meet one another, exchange small gifts, play football and show one another photos of their families – a friendly, festive encounter, after which the war would continue.

In times like these, as war once again looms large over Europe, our hope at the Regional Centre for Political Education is that this publication will raise awareness of the inter-generational trauma that war creates.

Rupert Grübl, Monika Franz, Christina Gibbs

Preface

COORDINATION
ELFRIEDE PAULI

Told through words and pictures, the family stories that follow represent the continuation of a project that began ten years ago in London. In 2009, the coordinator had the opportunity to take part in the international job-shadowing programme "Health and Healthcare", funded by the Robert Bosch Stiftung. The host institute for this programme was Age Exchange in Blackheath Village, Greater London. *Age Exchange* is known for its work in fields such as reminiscence. In 2012, a German-British project on the First World War was launched in partnership with the Artistic Director of this institute, David Savill.

"In 2016, a project brought together 23 Brits and Germans who shared their families' memories of the First World War through stories of parents and grandparents, keepsakes, letters and photographs. Having arrived as the descendants of former enemies, we left four days later as friends. Our meeting in *No Man's Land* was held in memory of the First World War of 1914-1918 and to advocate for peace in the present," explained Linde Harttmann, one of the participants.

This meeting resulted in a documentary entitled "*Meeting in No Man's Land*" by Ivan Riches, produced by David Savill, with music by Eliot Lloyd Short (see info box).

Recalling the filming of this documentary brings up touching, moving, tearful and entertaining memories. What

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Watch the "*Meeting in No Man's Land*" documentary here:

English version:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-tOvjVihEfA

German Version:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi24efiaZnI

I particularly remember is the emotions that the discussions elicited.

Watching the film, you can't just see the pauses, which the participants sometimes used to regain their composure, you can actually feel them. While in the faces of those listening, you can see how much they themselves are affected, how they are able to empathise and put themselves in the shoes of their erstwhile opponents.

Inspired by the graphic novel published by the Bavarian Regional Centre for Political Education entitled "The Handmaid's Tale" and based on the book of the same name by Margaret Atwood, an idea formed that there was more that could be done with the family stories in this project. Vivid illustrations and a mix of text and images seemed a particularly good choice for an undertaking like this. Can printed texts and images have a similar impact to a documentary? Can they be equally moving? Can personal experiences on the front and at home be presented alongside historical events in a way that makes history tangible?

What began as an idea became a reality in close cooperation between the project participants in both Britain and Germany and the Bavarian Regional Centre for Political Education in Munich. Short texts were prepared, condensing the family stories in order to leave space for images that might give readers food for thought.

We had collected a rich diversity of texts and memories and so the design of the collection needed to be equally varied.

Eight graphic artists were given the task of illustrating small individual scenes from stories which they themselves chose. These incredibly realistic illustrations were complemented by symbolic images.

Abbildung:
Suse Schweizer

The reactions the participants had to the images that had been drawn from their stories also differed enormously: "I only remember my grandmother as an older woman. This picture of the young girl at the piano is incredibly touching." The feedback and comments we received were largely positive. In some instances, small alterations had to be made in order to better capture the period between 1914 and 1918 or to take into account how descendants saw these scenes in their minds.

Once again, this raised the question of the legacy left behind by these events which we as the generations that follow carry with us to this day. The descendants had the answers. Some of the texts are prefaced by personal insights which show clearly how the lengthy task of processing a family's stories also gives us a greater understanding of the present.

With "*Meeting in No Man's Land*", we hope to appeal to a variety of different groups and to provide reading material and topics for discussion for generations to come.

As we worked on our project on the First World War, images and details came to us from the war in Ukraine. Just a short while ago, no-one could have imagined such events taking place in Europe.

Peace and democracy are not gifts that we can take for granted. They are loaned to us and must be constantly nurtured if they are to survive.

There is a quote from Les Mills, one of the participants of the project, that sum up these ideas rather aptly:

> *"We need to understand and accept our common and differing humanity, that we all live at the same address, Planet Earth, and that we have so much more in common with each other as individual people, rather than nationals from nations who can be divided and made to wage war."*

Elfriede Pauli
Raubling, February 2023

Preface

BY
DAVID SAVILL

The story of how "Meeting in No Man's Land" came about is complex and full of many ups and downs. As the UK's leading charity specialising in reminiscence work we were heavily involved in 2014 with a London-wide project marking the Centenary of the outbreak of The First World War. Our project "Children of The Great War" worked with partner museums, universities, care homes for older people, Football Clubs, and libraries and schools. To centres across London we invited the UK public to attend and share with us their family history of The First World War. At these many open days we interviewed the decendants of those who fought in the military, or served as nurses etc. We digitised the letters, photos and diaries they brought with them central to their ancestor's war story. The project resulted in a touring exhibition and a major intergenerational theatre production.

But from very early on I became concerned along with others close to our project that in the many 100s of centenary projects taking part across the UK, none it appeared, reached out to Germany to explore working together on an anniversary project. My worry was that many UK projects were focused on victory, on national remembrance rather than the impact the War had on families and individuals at the time and on their children and grandchildren across the generations.

It was a chance encounter with Elfriede Pauli that changed everything. Elfriede was committed to creating a project that would bring British and German descendants (the children of former enemies) together to share their family history and the impact the parents'/grandparents' experience had had on them. It is a long story as to how we all worked to make this extraordinary and totally unique "Meeting in No Man's Land" a reality.

The meeting of our 23 British and German descendants over four days in the Spring of 2016 in Bavaria was, without doubt, one of the most moving, emotional and life affirming experiences I have witnessed in my work, one full of hope, reconciliation, and love.

Because when we dare, each of us, to reach out and simply talk as equals about how war affected and continues to affect our families, we see what we have in common, we share the suffering from within our families and we find through that a great release, compassion and friendship. These friendships formed through "Meeting in No Man's Land", the British and German participants share to this day, through: letters, phone calls, emails, gifts sent through the post, and through remembering to support each other through the pain of the Covid Pandemic, and the many challenges Europe faces today.

David Savill
Artistic Director, Age Exchange, February 2023

Distant past?

Encounters between British and German family stories

PART I BY
JÜRGEN MÜLLER-HOHAGEN

This chapter presents a psychological perspective on the enormous impact our own personal condition has on whether we perceive the past as close or very distant. It is a process that involves a great many obstacles, including repression and denial. This is even more true with regards to war. Memory is hugely dependent on social conditions. But overcoming these hurdles and opening ourselves up to the past can have unexpected consequences and can even bring us close to people we felt distant from – and who perhaps live the other side of the border.

Different perspectives on the Nazi period and the Second World War

It was early 1983. We had moved here from Munich a few months earlier. The lease on our flat had been terminated because the owner wanted to move in. After some nervous searching, we found something suitable and vaguely affordable. But here of all places? That was the question we asked with some trepidation before deciding, "Well in that case, let's learn more about that period of history." The town which our new home was located in has a very special name: Dachau.

Certain things felt different now that we were in this place. The "distant past" suddenly seemed all too close. I still remember sitting down to dinner on one particular evening on 30 January 1983. Fifty years to the date after Hitler seized power, we were much more acutely aware of this day now that we were here. It felt much closer to us here than it ever had in Munich. Speaking of Munich: it was only now, in Dachau, that we realised just how little we had heard about Munich's Nazi past during our time there. This was especially apparent when reading the regional news in the local Süddeutsche Zeitung. "That period" came up regularly here in Dachau. In our beloved Munich, on the other hand, the fact that the city had once boasted the "honorary title" of "Capital of the Movement" (translator's note: the Nazi movement) had always been little more than a dusty old fact somewhere in the back of our minds, a history that had long since ceased to be important.

Here in Dachau, I resolved to also do a bit more self-reflection when it came to "that history". I began, as has now become customary for me, by taking a look at my immediate family, comprised of so-called *Mitläufer*, the "passive followers" whose attitudes towards national socialism ranged from enthusiastic to reserved. But there was nothing much new for me to learn there.

Things were markedly different in my professional life. I began to also address histories of the war and the Nazis among my clients' families. Not systematically, just any time I picked up on indications of such. The result was astonishing. Every backstory imaginable suddenly became visible and often proved pivotal to gaining a more thorough understanding of the difficulties children and families were currently facing. One day, I heard the story of a grandfather who had survived Auschwitz, the next it was the tale of one who had been a guard at the very same camp. Bombings, resistance,

denunciation, people fleeing and being displaced, looking the other way or enthusiastically pledging their allegiance, all of it was "suddenly" taking place right here in my practice!

And I was beginning to see, more and more, how the consequences of such experiences transcend generations. At the time, this was still a novel concept for the general public and also for us as practitioners. It was not an issue that had ever been addressed, either during my studies or in my training as a qualified therapist. People were aware of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's 1967 book *The Inability to Mourn*, but it had remained largely irrelevant with regards to praxis. And while I would discover later on that there had been one or two papers published on the psychological consequences of war and the Nazi period, these were few and far between.

The gap between then and now was no longer so pronounced.

Suppression, silence, denying – and lying

Suppression is an action taken against unbearable or unpleasant thoughts and impulses from within. Denial, on the other hand, relates more to one's perception of the outside world, allowing gaps to appear, perhaps blind spots, and creating a sense of taboo. Suppressions means "You shouldn't feel ‚it'"; denial means "You shouldn't see ‚it'". These are ordinary human processes which help us protect ourselves mentally against things that could be harmful.

In the case of the Nazi period and the Second World War, the horrors suffered by those who faced persecution were largely sealed away for decades afterwards. The other side of this, namely that millions of "compatriots" were involved in creating those very same horrors, receives far too little attention even today – at least in cases where it might be too close to home. Conversely, the memory of the many terrifying experiences the German population went through as a result of bombings or being displaced and forced to flee is very much present nowadays.

That the issue of guilt is largely swept under the carpet in such contexts can be traced back to the great lie, on which the Third Reich was based from the very beginning. The most awful lie of them all being race theory and the division of people into ‚Herrenmenschen' (the ‚master race') and ‚Untermenschen'. This all went way beyond what one might consider "normal" lying and for that reason, my wife I and coined the term "strukturellen Lügenhaftigkeit"[1] or "structural prevarication".

To this day, continuities in this prevarication and indeed in perpetration and culpability as a whole are largely hidden away in the individual and collective consciousness. "Grandpa wasn't a Nazi".[2] As a result of this, there is a risk that the important narrative of trauma will in fact be misused in order to deny these connections. Through all of this, we keep the past away from us, out of reach.

A gaping hole in Germany's culture of remembrance

The famous speech given by the President of West Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker, on 8 May 1985 marked a major shift in the way, in which Germany deals with the Nazi period and

1 Jürgen und Ingeborg Müller-Hohagen: Wagnis Solidarität. Zeugnisse des Widerstehens angesichts der NS-Gewalt [Taking a Gamble on Solidarity. Testimonies of Resistance in the Face of Nazi Violence], Gießen 2015, pp. 191-200.

2 See Harald Welzer/Sabine Moller/Karoline Tschugall: "Opa war kein Nazi." Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis ["Grandpa Wasn't a Nazi". National Socialism and the Holocaust in Family Memory], Frankfurt 2002.

the Second World War. The speech also helped spur me on in my own efforts. I was part of a larger movement. When I subsequently published my first book[3] in 1988, the initial astonishment which the subject elicited ("Strange, we'd never thought of that before"!) was followed by lots of feedback, suggestions and invitations to give talks or write papers.

These days, there is at least a basic consensus among broad swathes of our society that the Nazi period and the Second World War has had and will continue to have an enormous impact in all respects. There is, of course, much that will continue to be denied, repressed and not spoken about but the spell was broken long ago and Germany is considered a world leader when it comes to its culture of remembrance, and not without reason. And when it comes to my field, many therapists now draw on family histories from this era without a second thought when trying to identify the root causes of their clients' issues.

I would personally never have imagined that in this area of psychology, specifically, there could still be such a gaping hole as the one that I was blind to until I took part in the "*Meeting in No Man's Land*" project. The First World War had never played a role in either my work or the work of any of my colleagues, as far as I am aware. There was of course the boom in books and TV shows about the First World War which started in 2013 but this simply helped bring our historical knowledge up-to-date.

But for us personally? Could family memories of that period still be relevant today? In my work, I had occasionally heard things about grandparents of grandparents, the enormous poverty they experienced at the start of the 20th century or after the war, for example. But they had only ever been secondary issues. Distant past.

Meeting in No Man's Land

I had spent many years building up a talk, seminar and education format on the psychological consequences of the Second World War and the Nazi period under the title "Die langen Schatten des Krieges" ("The Long Shadow of the War") in partnership with Karin Wimmer-Billeter at the (Catholic) Munich Adult Education Centre and Melanie Sommer at the Evangelical Education Centre.

Then, in 2015, Elfriede Pauli from Rosenheim approached us to ask us whether we might also take into account family memories of the First World War. Fast forward a few months and we had used our experiences on this project to expand our format into: The Long Shadow of the Wars. A meeting with the British architects of the project was held in Rosenheim in 2016 to discuss preparations. On the very first morning, all of us – British and German alike – brought out keepsakes from our families to show one another and talk about. I remember how moved I was by David Savill talking about his grandmother who had been so glued to her elder brother as a child – only to lose him in the war. I saw pictures of both of them. My emotions flowed through David to his grandmother, as a child, to her pain and then to the brother, gone too soon, one of "our" enemies, now reflected in David's story. The photos brought me closer to him as someone who was loved, someone who was struck down in the prime of his youth, as we say, by this wretched war. It had been a wonderful gathering from the very get-go, but I think this was the point, at which a huge door opened inside me. The others

3 Jürgen Müller-Hohagen: Verleugnet, verdrängt, verschwiegen. Die seelischen Auswirkungen der Nazizeit [Silence, Suppression, Denial. The Psychological Impact of the Nazi Period], Munich 1988 (new and revised version, Munich 2005).

reported similar feelings from the very start of our meeting. Of course some people had reservations, even if they didn't always voice them.

It was also at this very first meeting that we learnt that the First World War is a much bigger part of the conversation in the UK than the Second World War. More soldiers were lost during the First World War. It also marked the beginning of the end of the British Empire. "Why did we get involved in that war in the first place?" is a controversial and much-discussed question. When it comes to the Second World War, however, the answer is obvious: "*Hitler had to be stopped!*"

In Germany, on the other hand, I feel that we only ever consider the First World War through the lens of the Second World War and the Nazi period with all its horrific crimes, if at all. The culture of remembrance that has developed in Germany over the last few decades focuses quite categorically on the more recent period. Everything else is historical background.

So this discussion revealed a very important difference between our two countries, resulting in each side becoming more and more interested in the other.

The main meeting in April 2016 was so intense that it is impossible to put it into words here. Instead, I recommend watching the free documentary that came out of those encounters.[4]

4 *Meeting in No Man's Land.*
English version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zt0vjVihE-fA&feature=youtu.be [Stand: 07.11.2022].
German version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi24efiaZ-nI&feature=youtu.be [Stand: 07.11.2022].

Space for communication externally and internally

Psychotherapy as I practise it gives clients a space for communication where they can develop on those issues they are aware of and then, increasingly, those issues which they were not previously aware of or which they had pushed aside. It is a complex process of dialogue, during which things often come to light which neither side would have expected going in. Painful memories, in particular, cannot simply be "recalled". It requires responsive communication and a caring environment where clients can generally express themselves without fear of reprisal. The importance of getting to experience such spaces for communication being built from the ground up time and again is one of the most fascinating parts of my therapeutic work.

And this importance extends far beyond the "therapist's office". We need all kinds of social spaces if we are to remember. In Germany, in particular, where there is so much that families never spoke about, this is enormously important. One example is that nowadays, Dachau can quite rightly call itself a "place of learning". Or the aforementioned education centres in Munich and the wonderful reminiscence work that *Age Exchange* does in London, and the numerous historical societies and activities taking place in various countries.

In short: remembering cannot simply be done "behind closed doors". It requires mutually evolving interest among groups, activities, institutions and, not least of all, society as a whole.[5] This sort of space for communication is exactly what "*Meeting in No Man's Land*" created. There are a number of scenes in the documentary and stories in this book – from both the British and the German side – which demonstrate

5 For details, see Jürgen und Ingeborg Müller-Hohagen: Dialog statt Trauma [Dialogue, not Trauma]. Hamburg 2021.

this in quite moving terms.

We were in fact able to create just such a space before we even met in-person. In reflecting on what I could contribute as a participant, an entirely new thought occurred to me. I compared my two grandfathers in view of the fact that one of them spent four years as a soldier in the First World War (not in the trenches on account of his age), while the other was required to continue working at the steel factory as an engineer. Both came from similar social backgrounds and had a similar education, both were a good thirty years old when the War broke out – but there the similarities end in quite dramatic fashion. And yet, despite all of this work on the impact of history, I had never paused to think about these sorts of connections!

Friendships

Anxieties, minor reservations, perhaps even prejudices "evaporated" over the course of our meetings. How on earth was that possible among people who had never met one another before and whose forebears had been on opposing sides of such an awful war? Certainly, a fundamental piece of the puzzle was the creation of, to borrow a phrase from Maria Montessori, a "prepared environment".

This process covered everything from logistics to content. Both sides, Brits and Germans, working hand in hand. But does that really explain everything?

Looking at the keepsakes that each side had brought with them, the explanations that went with them, hearing the quiver in someone's voice, even watching tears flows, all of this had brought us tremendously close to one another. We developed a sense of togetherness that transcended the former front lines and built beautiful bridges between the past and the present.

At the same time, it was important that there was space for differences. This was particularly apparent during the visit to a war memorial in Rosenheim. Many of us Germans tend to recoil in horror from these sites which we feel glorify war. Which is hardly surprising, especially in light of the country's Nazi past. Things are different in the UK. By intertwining our burgeoning sense of community while at the same time allowing for differences, we developed a spirit of friendship in the course of just a few days. Between us as individuals and among the group as a whole.

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This article is continued on p. 88.

The First World War:
an overview

BY
CHRISTINA GIBBS

Described by George F. Kennan as the "great seminal catastrophe"[1] of the 20th century, the First World War lasted for four years between 1914 and 1918 and was fought across Europe, Africa, Western and East Asia and on the world's oceans between the German Empire and its allies (the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria), or the so-called Central Powers, on the one hand, and the so-called Entente Powers, on the other, comprising Great Britain, France, Russia and its allies (Belgium, Italy, Japan, Romania, Serbia), with the USA joining in 1917.

Causes

The causes of this war, which in total cost roughly 17 million people around the world their lives, are many and varied, and have been the subject of highly controversial discussion among historians over the past one-hundred years.[2] What began as a race for the best places "in the sun" during the era of colonialism grew into an arms race – predominantly involving Great Britain and the German Empire – at the turn of the century thanks to advances in industrialisation. The personal rivalries between the monarchs of these countries – Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and King George V of England who, like Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, were the grandsons of Queen Victoria and, therefore, direct cousins – also did a great deal to fuel this race. The German regent had come to the throne as a young man, following the premature death of his father, and prevailed over the old "pilot" Otto von Bismarck, the Chancellor of the German Empire who had to be "dropped" from the ship in order to allow the Kaiser a "free hand" to conduct his politics, through which he sought to realise his dreams of great power.[3] Potentially volatile situations were a regular feature of the early 20th century and it seemed as if a Great War between the European powers was "on the horizon" (e.g. the so-called "Agadir Crisis" of 1911 when a German gunboat named "Panther" set sail for Morocco to protect alleged German territorial claims in Morocco). The imperialist aspirations of the German Empire brought two former enemies closer together in France and Great Britain who signed an "*Entente cordiale*" (a friendly agreement) in 1904 which was later joined by Russia to create a "Triple Entente". Under its capricious and temperamental leader, who liked to cast himself as an absolute sovereign in the image of great ancestors like Frederick the Great of Prussia, but who at times ignored political realities and necessities, the German Empire aligned itself more closely with Austro-Hungary which was battling separatist aspirations across large swathes of its multi-ethnic state.

1 George F. Kennan: The Decline of Bismarck's European Order. Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890, Princeton 1979, p. 3.

2 Triggered by the 1961 publication of the book "Germany's Aims in the First World War" by German historian Fritz Fischer, the so-called Fischer Controversy led to arguments over the causes of and responsibility for the First World War. Largely involving historians, though also some politicians, the debate reached its apogee in the 1960s and 1970s. See, for example, Annika Mombauer: Julikrise und Kriegsschuld. Thesen und Stand der Forschung [The July Crisis and War Guilt. Theories and Review of the Literature], in: APuZ 16/17 (2014), https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/182558/julikrise-und-kriegsschuld-thesen-und-stand-der-forschung [Accessed: 02/02/2023].

3 See, for example, John C.G. Röhl: Wilhelm II. [Wilhelm II], Munich 2013.

Karte:
Peter Palm, Berlin

Timeline

When the successor to the Austrian throne was killed by a Serbian assassin in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, Wilhelm II gave the Austrian Kaiser, Franz Joseph I, a "blank cheque" when it came to German support for Austro-Hungary in this matter.

In other words, he guaranteed the Habsburgs the full support of the German Empire. This triggered an unfortunate chain reaction known as the July Crisis. First, Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia after the latter failed to satisfy an ultimatum which contained demands from the Austrians that the assassination be fully investigated. Russia had previously assured Serbia of support and so now it was the Tsar's turn to declare war on Austro-Hungary. Germany felt obliged to honour its "blank cheque" and declared war on Russia. This, in turn, brought the German Empire into the conflict, on one side, and France and Great Britain, on the other. War broke out in Europe on 4 August 1914 and would quickly spread around vast swathes of the world, not least the various colonial territories held by the European Great Powers. It has been argued that Europe "sleepwalked" into war in the summer of 1914 (Christopher Clark),[4]a war which would claim the lives of millions. The occasionally cited "Spirit of 1914" (sometimes also known as the "August Experience"), during which a majority of the German population supposedly experienced a sense of euphoria over the war, was almost certainly more propaganda than actual enthusiasm and quickly dissipated as people began to mourn the first victims of the conflict.

The German war of aggression in the West quickly descended into trench warfare, with the fronts moving by mere metres over the course of several years. Down in the trenches, hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides endured a meagre and dangerous existence under appalling conditions and constant fire from the "enemy" who was huddled in his own trench just a few metres away. In this "war of attrition", new weapons caused never-before-seen injuries and devastation, with chemical weapons decimating entire forests and tracts of land and causing burns to people and animals. To this day, places such as Verdun or the River Marne are considered symbolic of the killing and the gruesome deaths.

The German Empire was fighting the war on two fronts, one in the West and one in the East (see map), which militarily speaking boxed it further and further into a corner. Defeat in the East was initially avoided, largely as a result of the political upheavals in Russia (the October Revolution of 1917) and the subsequent capitulation of the Tsar. The German Empire enforced tough conditions on Russia with regards to this capitulation in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

However, as a result of multiple "hunger winters", the population on the "home front" in the German Empire was becoming increasingly weak. On top of that, they were mourning the fallen or seriously injured soldiers and consequently support for the war steadily declined, with more and more people believing it to be a pointless conflict. During this time, women took on duties which had previously been almost exclusively the preserve of men. They kept society and the economy back home running by working as tram drivers, conductors, postal workers, factory workers, builders, telephone operators, electricians and more, and in doing so helped advance the cause of emancipation.[5] Thousands upon thousands of letters that were sent to and from the front during this period have survived to this day, providing

4 Christopher Clark: The Sleepwalkers, London 2012.

5 See, for example,. Wolfgang Kruse: Frauenarbeit und Geschlechterverhältnisse [Women's Labour and Gender Relations], in: APuZ 16/17 (2014), https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/182558/juli-krise-und-kriegsschuld-thesen-und-stand-der-forschung [Accessed: 01/02/2023].

emotional insights into the private experiences, anxieties, worries and ups and downs of the soldiers, and also giving us graphic descriptions of the awful conditions on the front and the everyday lives of soldiers in the trenches. These often stand in stark contrast to the official proclamations made regarding the war which were frequently influenced by propaganda.[6] By April 1917, the USA had entered the war on the side of the Entente Powers. They had previously been pursuing an isolationist policy which focused on the USA only (a so-called Monroe Doctrine). America's entry into the war was precipitated not in the least by the U-boat campaign being pursued by the German navy which threatened not only enemy warships, but also commercial vessels and maritime trade routes.

The USA's intervention is considered a turning point in the war as it provided the Allied Powers with fresh troops, materials and provisions – something the German Empire and its allies did not have access to. As 1918 dragged on, the German army fell on hard times that would only get worse and it soon became clear to the Supreme Army Command (the Oberste Heeresleitung), under Field Marshal General Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff, that this war was now unwinnable. This culminated in what was known at the time as "Dies ater", "The Black Day of the German Army", when Allied troops broke through the Western front in the Battle of Amiens on 8 August 1918. Yet, the fighting continued. Major upheavals in Germany in the autumn of 1918 led to the abdication of the Kaiser and the end of the monarchy: after the so-called Kiel Mutiny, in which sailors refused to sail out for one last major maritime battle which they had no hope of winning, workers' and soldiers' councils were set up all across Germany based on the Soviet model and the country bore witness to revolutionary uprisings, culminating in the abdication of the Kaiser on 9 November 1918 and the end of the German monarchy. Kurt Eisener had already proclaimed a Republic in Bavaria on 7 November 1918.

The Supreme Army Command responded by arranging for the signing of an armistice on 11 November 1918. However, this armistice was signed by politicians, not military men, which later contributed to the so-called "stab-in-the-back myth". Often fuelled by anti-Semitic resentment, the myth was that the German army remained undefeated "in the field" and that it had effectively been "stabbed in the back" by the politicians (later denounced as the "November Criminals") who had negotiated and signed the armistice.

Aftermath

The First World War formally came to an end with the signing of the five treaties of the Paris Peace Conference between 1919 and 1920. For the German Empire, the most significant of these five accords was the Treaty of Versailles. The impact of this Treaty was enormous, especially for the newly established Weimar Republic: Germany lost a significant portion of its territory and population and the costly reparations, in particular, plunged the economy into crisis while military restrictions and Article 231 of the Treaty, the so-called "War Guilt Clause" which placed sole guilt for the First World War at the feet of the German Empire and which was used to justify the high costs and strict conditions, were considered unfair. The Treaty was consequently rejected by large parts of the population as a "Schandfrieden", an "ignoble peace", especially

6 A vast collection of soldiers' letters can be found online, e.g. in the German Digital Library: www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/searchresults?isThumbnailFiltered=true&query=Feldpostbriefe [Accessed: 01/02/2023].

as it had been hoped, albeit in vain, that the peace negotiations were going to take into account US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points which included the right of nations to self-determination. Over the next fourteen years or so, a range of other factors (including major economic issues like runaway inflation, soaring unemployment, party-political manoeuvring and a rupturing of the political landscape which made reaching a consensus almost impossible, weaknesses in the Weimar Constitution despite this being considered a great democratic achievement, misgivings over democracy among the so-called Old Elites, and a justice system that frequently "turned a blind eye to the right", to name just a few) would ultimately frustrate the longer-term establishment of democracy in Germany, a process that was ended by the Nazis in 1933. Then in 1939, the Second World War was launched.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

https://www.bpb.de/themen/erster-weltkrieg-weimar/ersterweltkrieg/

https://www.dhm.de/lemo/kapitel/erster-weltkrieg

FURTHER READING

Volker Berghahn: Der Erste Weltkrieg [The First World War], Munich 2020

Nicolas Dehais: Memoria 1914-1918. Graphic novel, pub. Bavarian Regional Centre for Political Education, Munich 2017

Günther Kronenbitter/Markus Pöhlmann (Coord.): Bayern und der Erste Weltkrieg [Bavaria and the First World War], pub. Bavarian Regional Centre for Political Education, Munich 2017

Peter März: Der Erste Weltkrieg [The First World War], pub. Bavarian Regional Centre for Political Education, Munich 2008

Herfried Münkler: Kriegssplitter. Die Evolution der Gewalt im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert [Splinters of War. The Evolution of Violence in the 20th and 21st Centuries]. Special edition for the Bavarian Regional Centre for Political, Munich 2015

ibid.: Der große Krieg. Die Welt 1914-1918 [The Great War. The World 1914-1918], Reinbek 2015

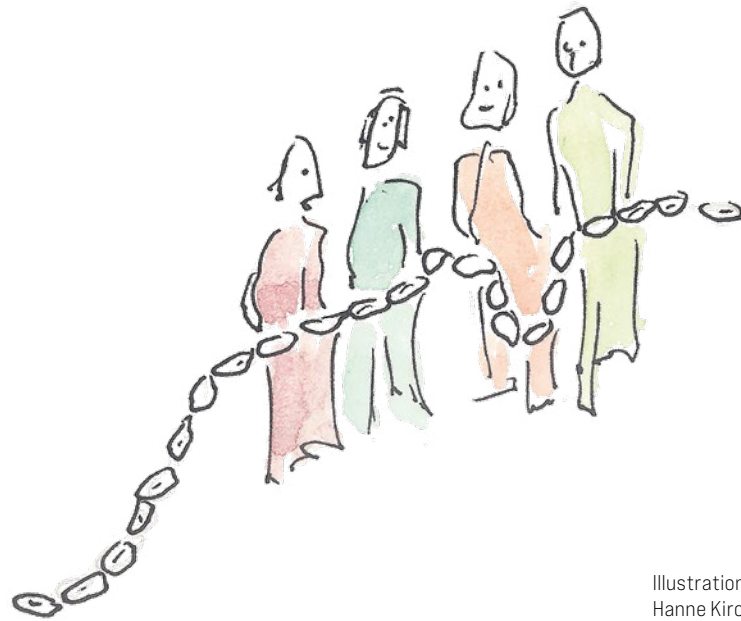
The memory chain 14/18

BY
HANNE KIRCHER

Work was underway on the "Meeting in No Man's Land" project on the First World War, with an aim to produce creative elements as a way of making the experiences on the different sides of the theatres of war visible and tangible. But how can you commemorate the deaths of more than 17 million people from some 40 different countries?

An idea was born of creating a chain made up of elements reminiscent of soldiers' dog tags to symbolise what it was that connected all of those involved, whether friend or foe, whether fighting against or alongside one another. Each tag bears a name and a family and was to display the names of the family's forebears.

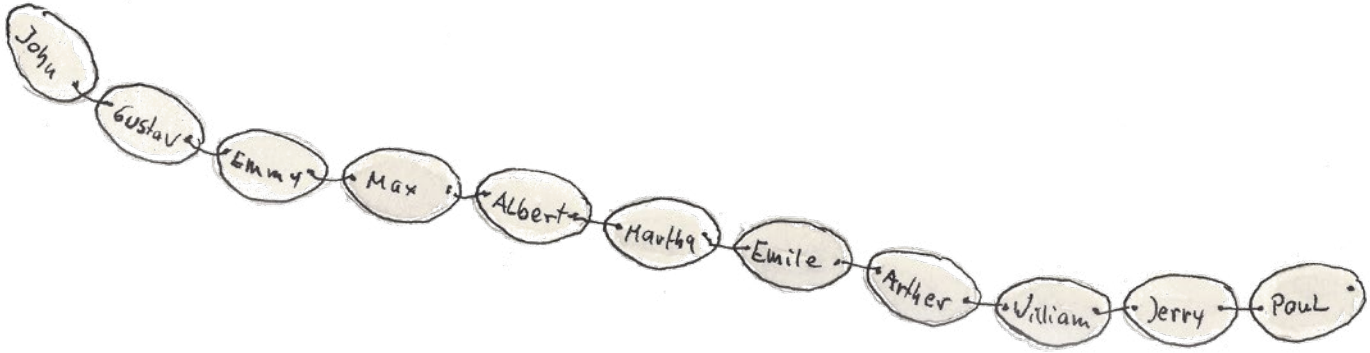
We put the chain together as a group at the end of the four-day meeting. Our British and German seniors, the organisation teams from both sides of The Channel and pupils from the Dominikus-Zimmermann High School in Landsberg labelled the round and oval metal tags with the names of their family members, which they had researched ahead of time, before linking them all together: names of men, women, children, soldiers, civilians, those who were lost and those who returned home.



The result was a quite individual chain, as each name had a real-world connection and at the same time stood for the memory of a person and their fate.

Seeing the participants hold the chain in their hands as a group was a particularly touching moment. You could feel the sense of connection and the emotions behind the thoughts that people were giving voice to: thoughts of turning to face the past, of those who came before us and of their suffering, and reflections on how their legacy impacts those who came after.

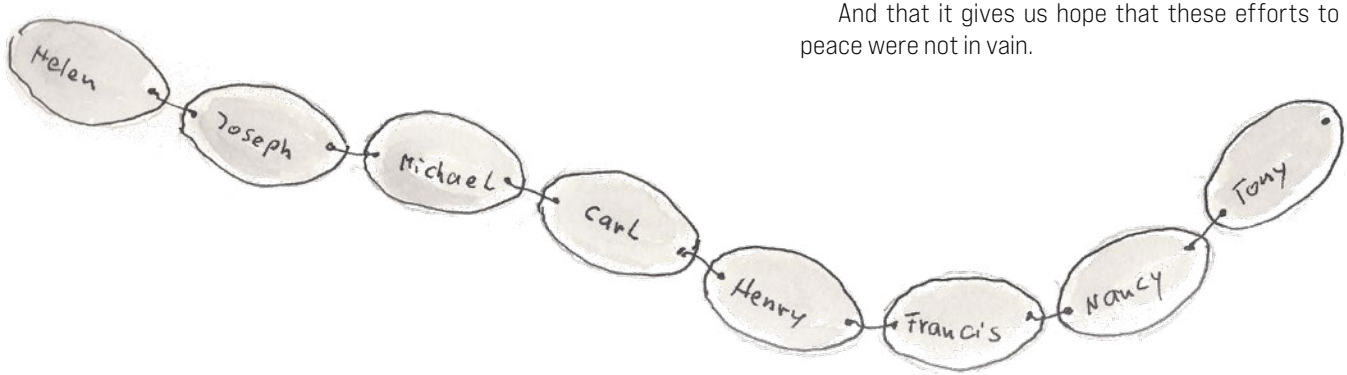
Illustrations:
Hanne Kirchner



The young people who joined us had researched the First World War ahead of the event and had spoken to everyone. It was they, in particular – the next generation and the generation after that – who spoke of how deeply they had been affected when discussing the project, not least in the sense that they did not want their children or their grandchildren to have to write their names on similar plaques.

What this shows us is that this chain – the tangible part of this project – has the ability to bring the awful events of that period to life, even all these years later.

And that it gives us hope that these efforts to achieve peace were not in vain.

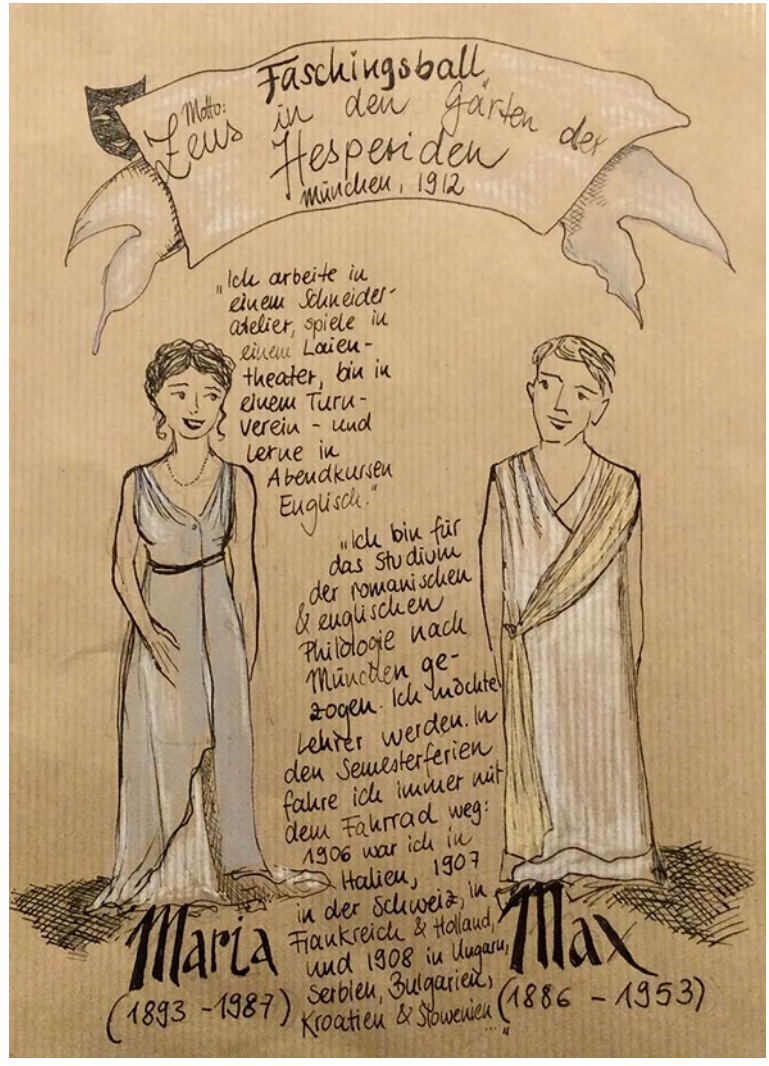


Family Stories

From my grandparents‘ life story: the start and end of the war

[TEXT] **ANGELIKA MAYER**
[ILLUSTRATION] **ANGELINA HECKMANN, ANGELIKA MAYER**

Researching my grandparents‘ lives during and after the First World War brought me closer to them on a personal level and shed some light on one or two of their peculiarities. I realised how traumatised this generation was as a result of the war, how few avenues they had for processing the awful experiences they had been through and how heavily this burden weighed on my parents‘ generation. And now, the trauma of the Second World War is affecting my generation, too. But there are ways of addressing these issues more consciously.



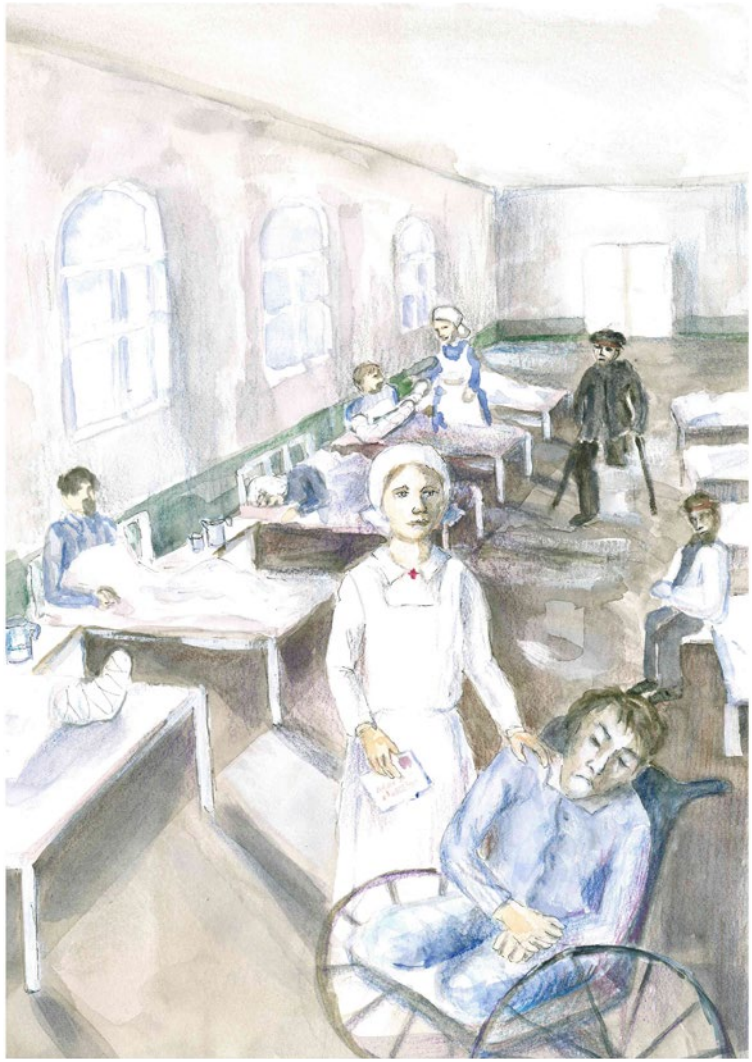
My grandparents met in 1912. At my request, my grandmother wrote a set of memoirs, in which she described the situation at the outbreak of the war in 1914.

"Five days after war was declared, Max and I knew that he would be going away. It was 31 July and some friends had invited us over. As we cycled home, we saw the posters in Nymphenburg declaring the outbreak of war. In the evening, there were enthusiastic demonstrations in front of Wittelsbacher Palais where the King lived. Max told me from the barracks (he had been called up by then) that the troops were leaving on 6 August. I cycled over there and rode with him all the way to Laim, me on my bike and him on a horse. In Laim, the Corps of Signals, which he had been assigned to, was loaded onto the train heading west.

That marked the start of what was expected to be a brief war but which would ultimately drag on for four years. Four years of fearing for my fiancée, of hunger, of waiting for a sign, of relief any time a letter from the front arrived with news.

Personally, I didn't even think twice about signing up as a volunteer with the Red Cross. We were trained up in the space of a few weeks and I was sent to work at the Men's Athletics Association which had turned its entire facility into a military hospital. We didn't receive any pay, of course. We arranged our own clothing and food and for a long time we paid for our own travel costs, too. The beds were set up in the large men's gymnasium, as well as in the women's section and in the gallery. This was where I looked after the wounded, under the supervision of the nuns. We had to get used to injuries and pain and to the different ways, in which patients dealt with them.

After the peace negotiations, Max and I were living in Munich when revolution broke out. From the window of my



parents‘ flat, we were able to watch the crowds of people returning along Schwanthalerstraße after a gathering in Theresienwiese.

In the evening, we went to the square in front of the central train station and listened to the stirring speeches of the revolutionaries, delivered from the backs of trucks. It was over now. What would the future bring?“

I do enjoy reading my father's letters

[TEXT] **RUTH GAYFER**
[ILLUSTRATION] **FEDERICA CIOTTI**

My father was gassed in October 1918, an experience from which he never fully recovered. He died aged 37 (when I was four years old) leaving my mother a widow for the last 64 years of her life. The project has enabled me to make friends in Germany – including one of my own age – sharing and comparing experiences. This has helped me to reflect on the profound lifelong experiences of war. So many families, mothers in particular, were often left to cope alone with everything. In such uncertain and unstable times in the world it is really important to pass on crucial lessons about the appalling impacts of war on the future generations. The project has been an important way to help me to do this with my children and grandchildren.

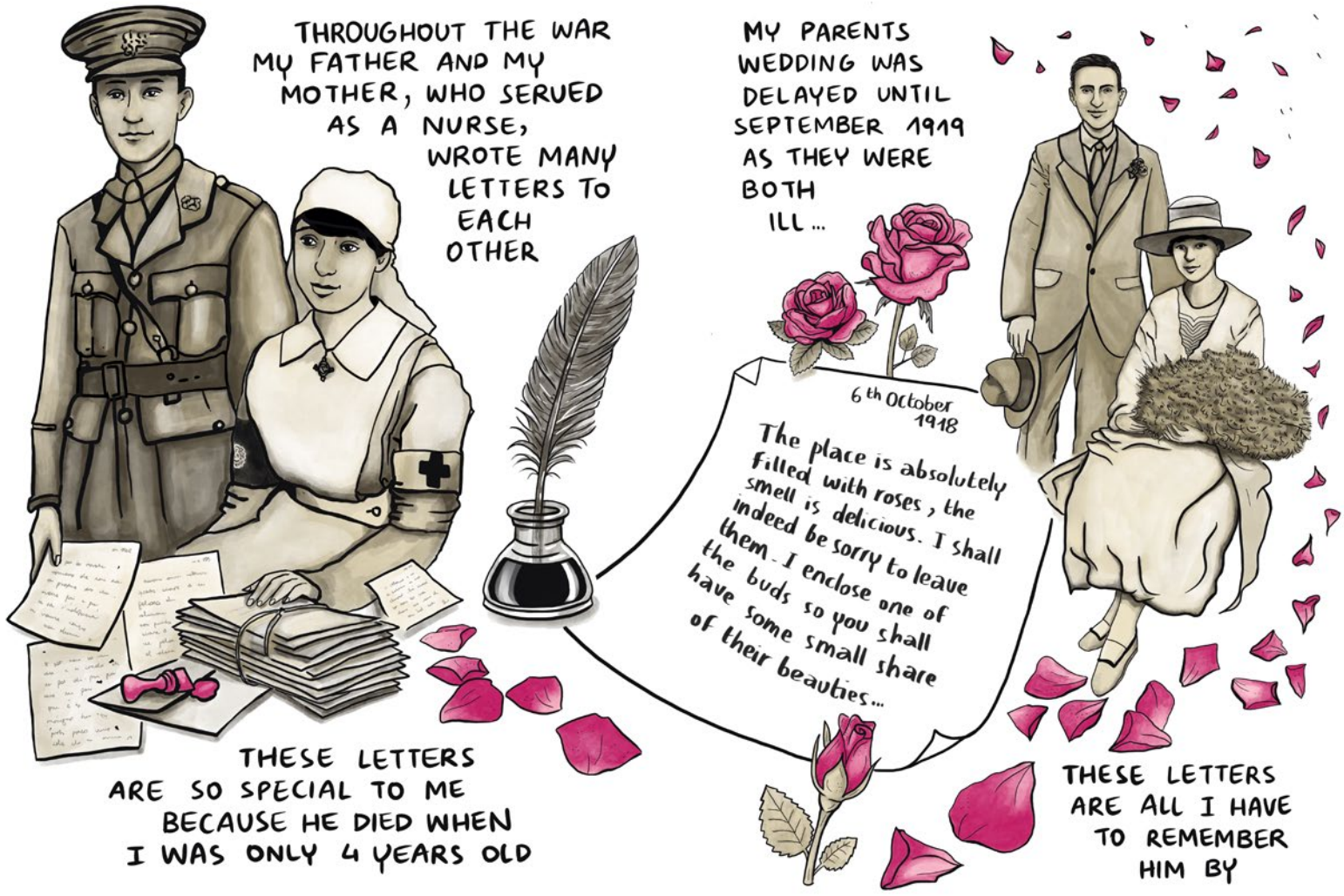
My Father served in the British Army throughout the First World War, serving on the Western Front. Throughout the war my Father and Mother who served as a nurse, wrote many letters to each other. These letters between them are so special to me because he died when I was only four years old. They are all I have to remember him by.

My Father Edwin Oliver was born in Hull on 6 February 1898. He won a junior scholarship to Hymers College in 1910. He was a member of the 4th East Yorkshire Territorials and was called up at the beginning of The First World War. He was sent to France in 1915 and took part in the 2nd Battle of Ypres in April of that year. Two officers of his regiment were killed and he was reported "Missing in Action" but somehow managed to make his way back to his regiment some days after an attack. He remained in France fighting until January 1916, when he was wounded and sent back to England. (There is hardly any information and few letters from this period.)

In 1917 he stayed at Jesus College, Cambridge, to study for a commission. He was back in France again in January 1918. He was wounded again and in hospital and then on leave, but was again back at the front in May 1918.

Here is an extract from a letter he sent to my mother from the 6th October 1918:

"I'm still in the same dugout, though we are going forward today. The place is absolutely filled with lovely roses, the smell of them is delicious. I shall indeed be sorry to leave them. I enclose you one of the buds so you shall have some small share of their beauties, though I fear it will be dead before it reaches you. This time in the line has been the best I've had. I've got a very good lot of men, always happy and altogether we get on very nicely. There are some rough cards and their language wouldn't exactly suit a drawing room, but


THROUGHOUT THE WAR MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER, WHO SERVED AS A NURSE, WROTE MANY LETTERS TO EACH OTHER
THESE LETTERS ARE SO SPECIAL TO ME BECAUSE HE DIED WHEN I WAS ONLY 4 YEARS OLD
MY PARENTS WEDDING WAS DELAYED UNTIL SEPTEMBER 1919 AS THEY WERE BOTH ILL...
6th October 1918
The place is absolutely filled with roses, the smell is delicious. I shall indeed be sorry to leave them. I enclose one of the buds so you shall have some small share of their beauties...
THESE LETTERS ARE ALL I HAVE TO REMEMBER HIM BY

they'll do anything and when you know you can rely on your men, that's a great help".

Later that month he was caught in a gas attack which badly affected his eyes and lungs. He was sent to hospital in France and then back to England. He was demobbed from the army in January 1919. My parents' wedding was delayed until September 1919 as they were both ill.

It was believed that the gas affected his eyes and his lungs and he died in hospital in 1934 at the age of just 36. I was four when he died. He had been ill in hospital so I have only a few real memories of him as a child. I do remember that he loved reading me stories.

I do enjoy reading my father's letters – he was always so interesting – and cheerful!

Lest we forget those who came before us!

[TEXT] **FRANZISKA RAMM**
[ILLUSTRATION] **ALEXANDER VON KNORRE**

This project has enabled me to learn about my husband's grandparents as loving parents to his mother, Mathilde. His grandmother, in particular, experienced a great sense of unity during the war, both within her family and in the wider village. Everyone was on the lookout for how they could help one another and how they could do their bit for the general welfare of the community. They mourned the fallen soldiers together. That is true community – and also sets an example for me.

Alois Franz was a soldier in France during the First World War. He suffered a wound to his foot in October 1914, as a result of which he spent some time in a military hospital in Munich. In 1915, he began working as a cook in the hospital kitchen. Once he had made a full recovery, he was re-deployed back to France.

His wife, Fanny, took care of their four small children who were born in 1908, 1909, 1910 and 1911. She ran a guesthouse called "Zur Eisenbahn" (The Railway Inn) and a butcher's shop in Endorf, and even worked at the abattoir where she had to slaughter animals.

Alois returned to Munich in 1918 and in March 1918, he and Fanny welcomed their fifth child, Mathilde. Fanny died on 28 December 1918. Mathilde was my mother-in-law. She kept 14 letters and five postcards from the front for her children and left them to me.

These letters offer an insight into everyday concerns, trials and tribulations on the home front, as well as hardships on the front line and in the hospital. Through this exchange, they share their worries and their hardships. It is striking how much love and respect the couple show for one another in these letters.

Letter of 15 June 1915 from Fanny to Alois Franz,
7th Field Artillery Regiment II,
First Munich Battery, Max II Barracks

Dear Lois, daddy dearest!
I am finally getting around to sharing a bit of news with you: I received your letter this afternoon and am returning your most heartfelt wishes. Am truly happy for you that you have an easier service now and that your foot is getting better. But do not despair, dear Lois, keep on being so brave and it will all be over.

How much longer will this awful bloodshed carry on? Can we ever hope to pray for peace? Dear Lois, I had no trouble with the calf, got 202 pounds out of him and earned 17 Marks. That would be perfectly enough for me, if I only had more courage to go shopping. I slaughtered the Eckl cow yesterday, went well. Weighed 460 pounds, the skin 90 pounds. But oh, my dear Lois, the cow was also with young, 2 calves, 25th week. Always a shame for such a majestic cow, financially speaking.

The children are in rude health, while I myself am quite well. Will do all I can to send your things tomorrow. Will also put your neck satchel in the parcel, can I trust the money will be safe?

Then please check the post more often, dear Lois! I will put everything in the neck satchel for you. Do not worry yourself overly much about us, everything is well here at home. Just need an assortment of bottles from the brewery once there is peace! – Think that is everything of interest for you.

A thousand kisses from the children,
best wishes from Elise and Mathilde (sisters).

All my most heartfelt wishes,
Your dear Fanny, we'll meet again!

Letter from the front from Alois Franz
7th Field Artillery Regiment II, Max II Munich,
Dießen, to Fanny, Munich, 30 June 1915

My dear family and children!
Must tell you quickly about my service. I have now also left my last post. When I returned from the hospital, I was assigned as driver to the captain, nothing to do but accept it, nowt to be done. My feet simply cannot withstand anything anymore. Am now a driver, 2 beautiful horses and a beautiful carriage. It is going to be more bad news in regards to leave, will do my very best. Dear Fanny, I was so utterly distraught this time, was to be sent to the Infantry Ammunition Column as early as yesterday. Went to the field office to register because of my foot, was able to return again without issue. Now, dear Fanny, my foot must just hold out, you understand, I can keep going for longer again in this post. 283 men will be leaving over the next week, I would most certainly be among them if it were not for my foot.

My dearest Fanny, it is not for nowt I have been in such an awful crisis, so many different things have happened to me. I could not hold out any longer today, dear Fanny, had to telephone you and also send you a letter right away; I feel lighter

again in myself whenever I have spoken with my darling wife. Do not make the parcel too big, in case I do indeed get leave earlier. Dear Fanny, you were certainly lucky with the calf, I wish you that with all my heart, this joy, but the cow from Eckl has turned out a little more expensive, I overestimated her weight slightly and she was also still pregnant. In return, she should give me rather lovely meat.

Thank you my dearest Fanny for your letter and for your note regarding the post, stay healthy and make sure you recover your strength, take care of yourself and eat more, won't you dear Fanny?

Wanted to buy you a potted plant but guess what type, what colour?

Sending you my heartfelt wishes and a kiss from your dear Lois. All my love to my children, Elise and Mathilde.

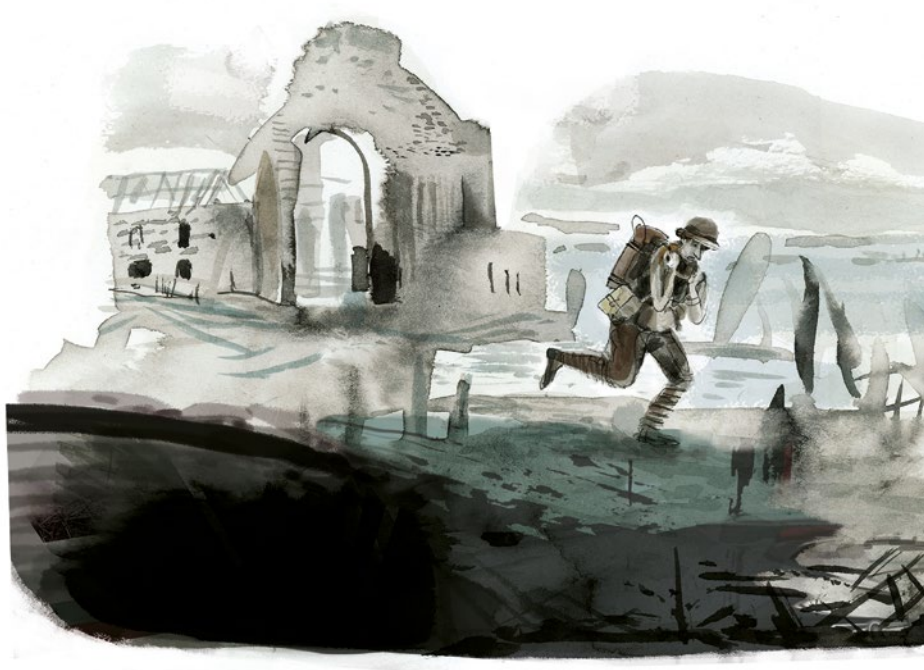
Until we meet again!

My father‘s account of the war

[TEXT] **LINDE HARTTMANN**
[ILLUSTRATION] **SUSE SCHWEIZER**

The "*No Man's Land*" marked the first time in my adult life that I had engaged with my father's documents, pictures and stories, as I engaged with the family memories of the other German and British participants. At all of these meetings, 100 years of history and spatial, national distances were swept away and I felt surprisingly close to the father I had lost long ago.

Despite all the grief, this was also extremely uplifting. The meetings made it painfully clear to me, once more, just how absurd, how awful and how inhumane war is. There are no winners, only losers. It leaves nothing in its wake but suffering.



"I had to run," my father said. "Run for my comrades in the trenches, run for my life." He was called up in 1916 at the age of 19 and was sent to the front in Flanders. He regularly told me tales of the war when I was a child and wanted to hear true stories.

Because he was small and very fleet of foot, it was his job to bring food to his comrades on the front line. He had a canister strapped to his back that he could wear like a rucksack. He had to run across open ground that being shelled by the English. He ran in a zig-zag so as not to give his attackers a clear shot and because the ground was pockmarked with holes and ditches from all the explosions and munitions.

Transporting the food under the cover of darkness was impossible, the runners would have ended up stumbling around from one hole to the next.

My father frequently had to haul soup or tea in these canisters, carrying them to the front where his comrades were waiting in the

trenches eagerly. There were often long periods of time, during which they couldn't make any food runs because the shelling was too heavy. "The worst part for those at the front was the thirst," my father explained. "Sometimes a piece of shrapnel would burst through my canister just a few metres from the end and the hot tea, soup or water would run down my legs. The disappointment and dismay in the eyes and in the voices of the men waiting for me, it was awful. And for me it meant turning around, picking up a new delivery and running for my life through enemy gunfire once again..."

On one occasion, a piece of shrapnel missed my father's canister and instead hit him in the leg. He landed in the military hospital and for the rest of his life, his passport listed as one of his distinguishing features, "Scar on right thigh".

My grandfather, John Henry Cooper, his life and his experience as a soldier in the First World War

[TEXT] **CHRIS COOPER**
[ILLUSTRATION] **ANGELINA HECKMANN**

A new perspective!
The comparison of my own problems and traumas, with those faced by my grandfather in the First World War, has enabled me to see them in a new light. Their power over me has been reduced and thus I have been given the courage to face and overcome them.

Of course, we weren't soldiers so we had to be trained. It was hard but eventually we went to France in November 1915.

Our first big battle was on the Somme in July 1916. That was terrible and I don't know how I survived. Later on I was affected by poison gas and again I was lucky.

In October 1918 we had to attack across a river. There was four of us right at the front of the attack and when we got to the river we found there was no bridge. So we just took the planks of wood that were there, jumped in and we became the bridge so that the lads could get across. The Germans were shooting at us as well! All four of us got the Military Medal for that.

When I retired I took up gardening. It felt good to create things instead of destroying them. I went back to the battlefields in 1966 with a big group of old soldiers because that was the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of the Somme. We were happy that we had survived to old age but sad as well that so many did not.

War, choreographed by unscrupulous, power-hungry aggressors

[TEXT] **MARIANNE MIEBACH**
[ILLUSTRATION] **MARIE GEISSLER**

> My father's letters from the front once more brought home to me in emphatic terms the horror and the pointlessness of war. I have always been greatly touched by the great warmth and love of his parents, siblings and friends that is clearly evident in the letters. Even though I sadly never met them, I have held a deep affection for my grandparents ever since.

My father, Ferdinand Moser, was born in 1895. After being trained as a lieutenant, he served in the First World War on the Italian and other eastern fronts, during which time he was injured. He received regular letters from his mother and father, his sisters and from many friends back home, as well as from soldiers he had befriended who were serving on other fronts. He kept these letters and I found them among his belongings after he died. The majority are postcards but there are also letters from the front. They talk about food shortages and failing supplies, but also address the events of the war itself. When the war ended, my father returned to his family.

28 February 1916,
Sender: Ida Moser (mother)
"We are delighted that after such a long journey you have arrived safely and in good spirits. It is good you have received the cigarettes. There is not an ounce of tobacco to be found anywhere in Gmunden (author's note: town in Austria). If Nelly (author's note: sister) gets hold of some, she will send it to you right away.

5 March 1916,
Sender: Hans Moser (uncle)
"Edi is with the Ski Battalion in Krimml, Salzburg. He is doing well so far but it is very tough going. Karl Wagner has been transferred to Russian Poland. Hofegger Paul has left Steiermark for Bolzano to join the telephone department. Smokers in Linz are in a crisis. You can't get cigarettes, Virginia or smoking tobacco anywhere now. My tobacconist is currently on holiday."

13 April 1916,
Sender: Ida Moser (sister)
"I sent you a few cards and also the cigarettes in March, right after you had asked for them. So it is not my fault, it is an awfully long way, most likely everything is getting lost. Did you hear that Schraml Richard received a Silver Medal for Bravery? And poor Mr Hamann died in a hospital down where you are of food poisoning (preserves), can you imagine?

6 September 1916,
Sender: Emilie Witzani

"On Sunday, I took a lovely boat ride to Neuhaus with my cousin, sadly there is never any entertainment as we are really wanting for men. Hopefully the war will be over soon, then we can catch up on the things we have missed because our youth is passing so quickly that soon we will be nothing but old bags."

8 September 1916,
Sender: Ida Moser (sister)

"Have you received the Nussbusserl biscuits, we sent them on the 1st for your birthday, candles too. There was a celebration in town yesterday: 20,000 Romanians captured, [...]. 400 officers, 400 guns, all with eyes shining with joy. Everyone was so happy, yes it was the Germans and the Bulgarians. Wonderful, isn't it."

19 September 1916,
Sender: Ida Moser (sister)

"Congratulations! Your uniform is being taken to the tailor's today, so do not worry yourself. If only you would be given leave, that is what we would most welcome."

1. January 1917,
Sender: Martha Watzl
"I presume that you have not received my card of 20/12/16 and the small parcel which I posted on 19/12/16. I sent you a small artificial Christmas tree for the festive season. It has probably been lost. I am sorry because I thought that it would surely be in your possession by Christmas Eve."

2. January 1917,
Sender: Schraml
"Many congratulations on your promotion to lieutenant which I have just read about in the official gazette, issue 230. You will be getting a tidy sum of money now."

The events of the war shaped how my family sees the world

[TEXT] **CHRISTEL BERGER**
[ILLUSTRATION] **ANGELINA HECKMANN*, CHRISTEL BERGER**

> I was always scared of war, even as a young girl, as my home city of Cologne had been almost completely razed to the ground during the Second World War. I can still see the city in my mind as a pile of rubble and row after row of destroyed houses. As a young woman, I spent a great deal of time wondering whether I wished to bring a child into this world. I am older now and have two wonderful children and a very small grandchild, but unfortunately that fear from my childhood has come back, triggered by the current situation where war has returned to Europe. Engaging with the First World War and working on our project has made me much more attuned to peace work.

Philipp Boley was a trained baker and ran a patisserie with his parents and four sisters and also a small farm with a few cows, goats and chickens.

The bakery's goods were delivered to the surrounding villages in a horse-drawn cart.

* Angelina Heckmann provided the illustrations of her great-grandfather Waldemar Schulz.

Philipp Boley and Maria Christine Bremm were wed on 8 June 1914. Their first child, Felix, died during birth on 1 April 1915. Their second child, Christine, was born on 12 March 1916. Philipp did not see his daughter for the first time until after the war.

Philipp was deployed to Russia in 1915.

Philipp painted beautiful postcards decorated with flowers, moss and lichen which he sent to his wife and sisters back home. The accompanying texts are never very long, just wishes from Philipp:

"Best wishes from Berezina Forest (Belarus), from Philipp, 1915."

The soldiers in Russia had scant supplies.

My grandfather travelled by horse and cart. There were no motorised vehicles, hardly any roads either. I think he made arrangements with the local people as he could speak a few words of Russian. He returned from the war unharmed and took over the family business.

Philipp was a vehement opponent of war throughout his entire life and was always vigilant and well-informed.

Later, during the Nazi period, he would often listen to British news. Since he opposed Hitler, as was reported, he was issued with several criminal complaints and had more than a few

run-ins with the Nazis. It was for that reason that our family did not receive ration stamps.

In the final weeks of the Second World War, he hid one Polish and one Russian forced labourer who would otherwise have almost certainly been shot trying to escape... .

Perhaps Grandpa Philipp himself had received help during the First World War and could therefore empathise with these men on the run all those years later.

Sworn to secrecy

[TEXT] **ALUN EDWARDS**
[ILLUSTRATION] **FEDERICA CIOTTI**

We remember those who sacrificed their lives during the wars, and many of my family are named on those war memorials. The project gave me a chance to think about those who survived the First World War (some physically or mentally scarred) but are not honoured in the same way. For example, my children would not exist without the survival of their great-great-grandfathers.

Sworn to secrecy

In May 1917 when 18-year-old Walter Powell was stationed in North Wales as a driver of army TNT trucks he got involved in something he didn't think very much about at the time.

While on parade Walter and seven others were chosen by the corporal and marched off to the stores. There the quartermaster was "very fussy" about 'poshing' them up, with great attention given as to the fit of the uniforms. That night the were taken to a separate room in their barracks and were sworn to secrecy.

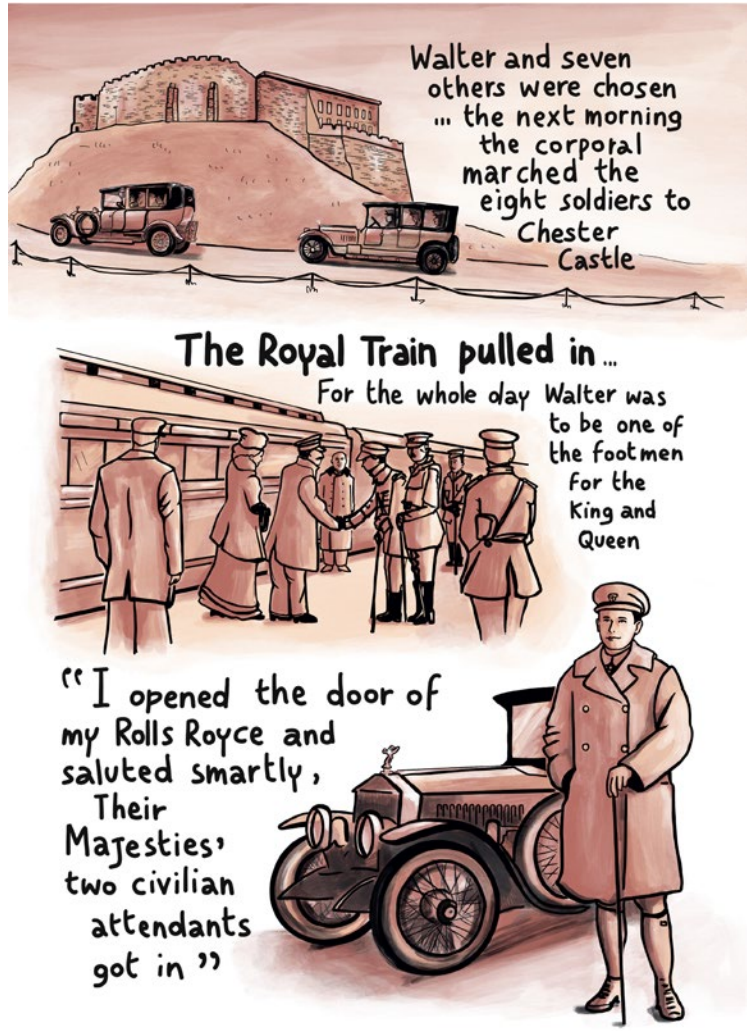
The next morning the corporal marched the eight soldiers to Chester Castle, where Daimler and Rolls-Royce cars turned up with very smart drivers. Each of them assigned to a car, Walter found himself in one of the first. They drove to the station where there was a great toing and froing of the railway staff and many police as The Royal Train pulled in. For the whole day Walter was to be one of the footmen for the King and Queen!

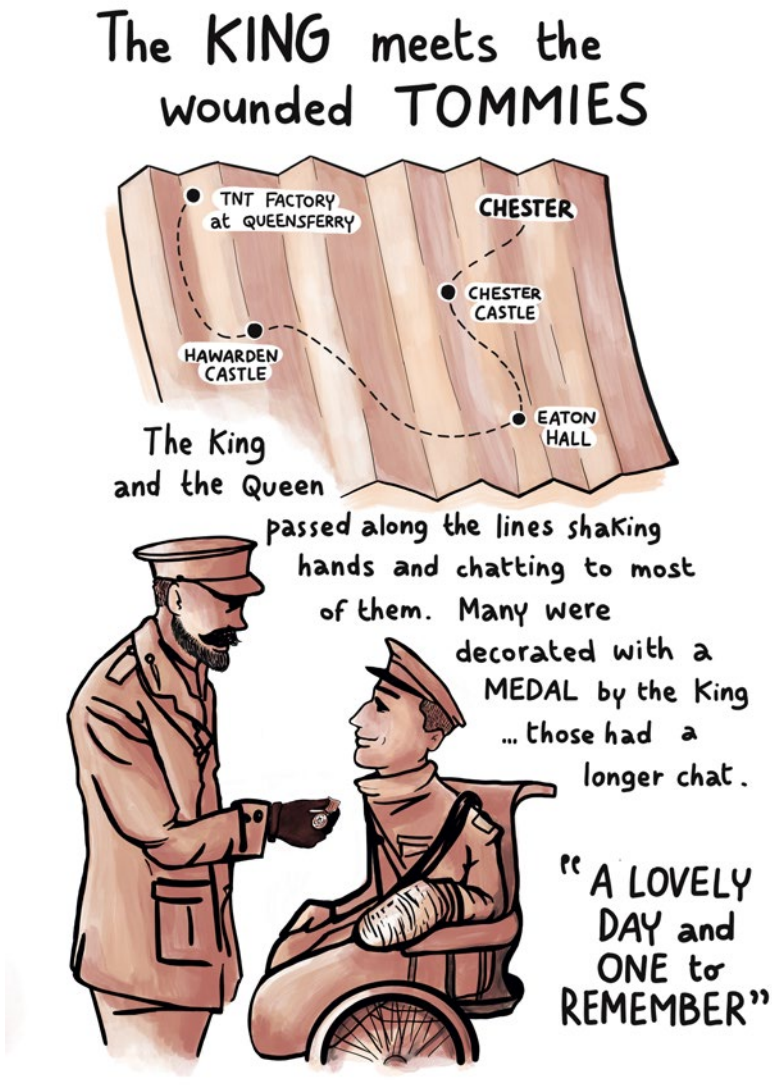
When King George V and Queen Mary (and Prince Arthur, the son of Queen Victoria) walked from the train there was a great deal of talking and handshaking and then they climbed into the first car.

He opened the door to the Rolls-Royce and saluted smartly, Their Majesties' two civilian attendants got in.

The King meets the wounded Tommies

They travelled in convoy to Chester, to Chester Castle and to Eaton Hall, and to Hawarden Castle, with detectives and 'Red Tabs' galore and civic dignitaries in the other cars. At each stop, the cars parked in a semicircle. Many wounded Tommies were lined up in a half-moon row either seated in bath-chairs or on crutches. The King and Queen plus all the others got out of the cars, and Their Majesties passed all along





the lines, shaking hands and chatting to most of them. Then many were decorated with a medal by the King – those had a longer chat. Some of the men were without a leg, or an arm, or had a head wound.

Afterwards they drove the King and Queen to the large TNT Factory at Queensferry in North Wales and they were shown around the factory where most of the munition workers were women.

They were brought a nice assortment of refreshments from the canteen. When Their Majesties came out the footmen were lined up and the King inspected the eight of them – spoke to one or two and had a smile for our corporal and then back in the cars and straight off to the Station where the King and Queen got into the Royal Train and off to a shipyard to launch a warship near Liverpool. They all returned to the barracks and said goodbye to their lovely Rolls-Royces and drivers.

A lovely day and one for Walter to remember.

The loss of a soldier daddy

[TEXT] **HILARY PAYNE**
[ILLUSTRATION] **ANGELINA HECKMANN**

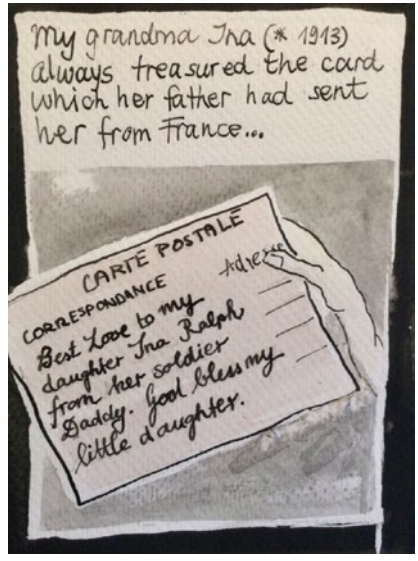
The project has connected me to many family stories both in the UK and Germany from the First World War and made me reflect on the shared human experience of war and its long lasting effects on families in both countries. It has linked me more closely to my grandmother and great-grandmother (who are no longer living) by bringing their stories to life and helping me to imagine the reality of what happened to them. For me, it was important to tell the stories of ordinary people whose lives were not visible in any other way than through this project. I have experienced a real solidarity and closeness with the descendants of people who were on the opposite side from my great grandfather in the First World War. There is something very powerful about that – something that our ancestors 100 years ago could not have imagined.

My great-grandfather George Ralph, a farrier, was 40 years old when he died of anterior poliomyelitis in France in April 1916. He had been a driver with the 4th Horse Transport Company of the Royal Army Service Corps. George was one of approximately two million soldiers to die of disease in World War One.

Back home in Chorley, Lancashire, his wife Ann was living with her three young daughters and was seven months' pregnant with a fourth child when she heard that George had died.

The story is that Ann went blind with the shock, perhaps from suffering a stroke. Over time, she was unable to look after all her daughters, so the two middle ones, one of whom was my grandmother Ina, were sent to live at Preston Workhouse. Afterwards, they worked in a cotton mill from the age of eight.

My grandmother Ina, born in 1913, always treasured the card, which her father had sent her from France, with the words, "Best love to my daughter Ina Ralph, from her soldier daddy. God bless my little daughter". Throughout her life she wanted to visit her father's grave, and finally made the journey when she was 81.



Her younger sister Eva, born two months after the death of her father, wrote many poems during the course of her life, and sometimes reflected on her lost childhood. "To grow old when young, is a sad thing in life. No pleasures are there, just sorrow, and strife. How can you talk of your problems each day? And confide in your mum in a nice, friendly way? Not when there is sickness, it just isn't done. You grieve, and you worry and miss all the fun."

Wounded, concussed, gassed and missing in action

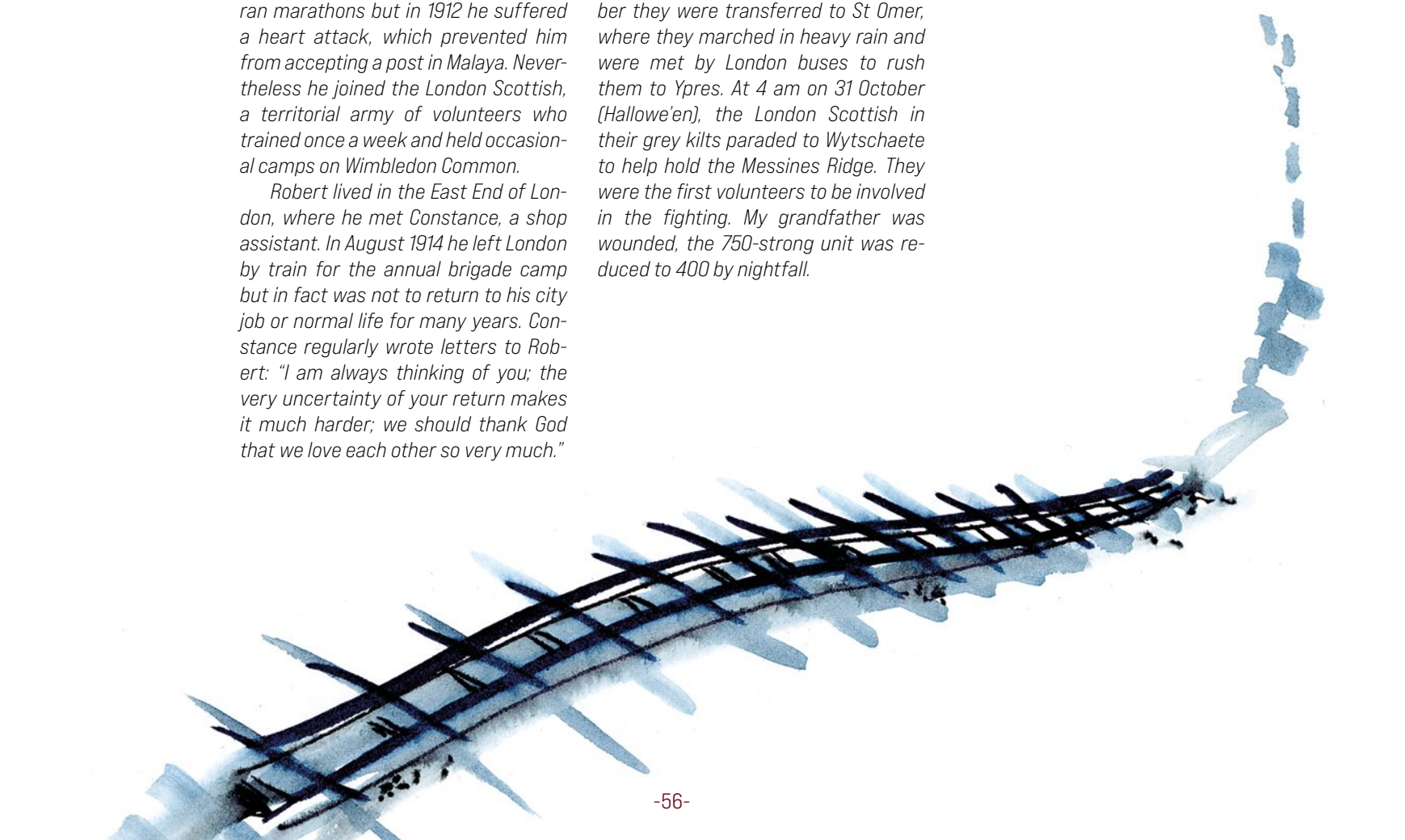
[TEXT] **ROSEMARY LEVER**
[ILLUSTRATION] **SUSE SCHWEIZER**

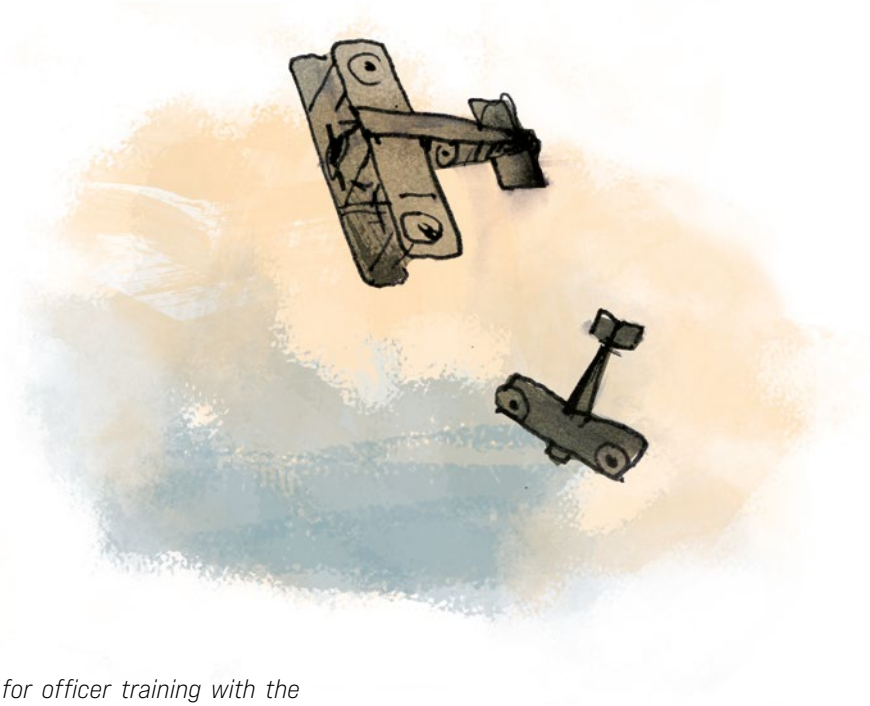
My grandfather's medals, love letters and poetry had sat untouched in a box for years. Now I had reason to examine these wartime mementoes. Over time, and in particular because of my involvement with the project in Bavaria, I have become much more aware of the dilemmas my grandparents faced as a result of war. For the first time I had empathy for their situation: our adult-child relationship has evolved into an adult-adult one. Now I can feel and understand their emotions.

My grandfather, Robert Law, was born in Glasgow in 1889. He left school when he was 12 and worked as an office boy before moving to London to train as an accountant. He was a keen athlete who ran marathons but in 1912 he suffered a heart attack, which prevented him from accepting a post in Malaya. Nevertheless he joined the London Scottish, a territorial army of volunteers who trained once a week and held occasional camps on Wimbledon Common.

Robert lived in the East End of London, where he met Constance, a shop assistant. In August 1914 he left London by train for the annual brigade camp but in fact was not to return to his city job or normal life for many years. Constance regularly wrote letters to Robert: "I am always thinking of you; the very uncertainty of your return makes it much harder; we should thank God that we love each other so very much."

In September 1914 Robert travelled from Southampton to Le Havre on an Argentinian cattle ship, the SS Winifredian, followed by a 17-hour trip in a cattle truck to Le Mans. In October they were transferred to St Omer, where they marched in heavy rain and were met by London buses to rush them to Ypres. At 4 am on 31 October (Hallowe'en), the London Scottish in their grey kilts paraded to Wytschaete to help hold the Messines Ridge. They were the first volunteers to be involved in the fighting. My grandfather was wounded, the 750-strong unit was reduced to 400 by nightfall.





My grandfather was wounded again at the Battle of Loos on 25 September 1915 – a bullet entered his shoulder, near the spine, and travelled down to the hip bone where it was extracted.

Robert married Constance in London on 15 November 1915. In total Robert served 1 year and 17 days in the Territorial Force in France. In April 1916 Robert was convalescing in Jersey, having been gassed, and his wife was allowed to visit him, a trip which necessitated a passport. After this he was sent for officer training with the Durham Light Infantry in Oxford and York and eventually to the fledgling Royal Flying Corp where he served eight months as a photographer and navigator. Robert crash landed twice due to engine failure and suffered a concussion. Once he was missing for three weeks – a very worrying time for his wife, my grandmother, who in 1949 wrote to a friend in America: "But he did come back alive so we have been lucky".

"Oh for a smile dear Love from thee
'Twould banish all my sorrow
And make my sleep unwakeful be
Dreaming until the morrow"

"Oh for one kiss (that's what I miss)
'Twould make me dwell in joy"

"Oh for one fond embrace
To cheer this drooping heart
Oh that my chest your breast did grace
never more to part"

Brothers in arms

[TEXT] **PETER COMPTON**
[ILLUSTRATION] **MARIE GEISSLER**

I remember as a child learning about Archduke Ferdinand and reading the quote from Sir Edward Grey: 'The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime'. It seems dreadfully apt again now, especially considering the war in Ukraine.

Peter Compton came to Clapham Library with several stories, by primarily those of his uncles Rex and Guy Compton.

Rex' and Guy's father, and Peter's grandfather, was a tea importer and the boys went to the Bancroft's School just up the road from where they lived in South Woodford, Essex. Guy volunteered for the 11th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment, one of the three "Lowther's Lambs" Pals Battalions, where he served alongside Edmund Blunden and is quoted in Blunden's Undertones of War. Rex joined as a Private in the 5th Battalion Essex Regiment,

leaving school to do so, later transferring to the 10th Essex. In 1917, when they both had died within two days of each other, Guy was 23 and Rex 21, and both had received their commissions as officers.[1]

It happened that by August 1917 both regiments ended up near Inverness Copse just outside Ypres on the Menin Road. Rex received word that his brother was nearby and set off to see him. But by the time he got there on 12 August, he discovered that Guy had been killed. Peter believes that experience deeply affected the next decision Rex made when he returned to the Essex Regiment.

Peter feels the desire, to avenge Guy's death, perhaps drove Rex to being "dead keen" to lead an attack on a pill box in Inverness Copse. Therefore a few days later, Compton led his men into No Man's Land under the cover of darkness to prepare for the attack but at 4:05 am the attack was cancelled. A runner was sent to Compton, but he returned saying that Compton had ignored the orders and, having called for volunteers, he and his men rose from their shell holes and attacked the pill box. They were soon ravaged by the Germans, who realised that this was an isolated assault, without depth or support.

There is little doubt that grief over the death of his brother caused Compton to seek vengeance through the pill box attack, causing his death. His men's loyalty to him cost their lives too. He is remembered on Panel 39 of The Menin Gate Memorial. Guy is remembered on Panel 20.

Among the objects Peter brought was an extraordinary collection of letters from Rex to his mother, telegrams about the boys' deaths and some poignant pictures of the two brothers.

1 *See also: Rex Compton: Redbridge and the First World War (redbridgefirstworldwar.org.uk), and Guy Compton, Redbridge and the First World War (redbridgefirstworldwar.org.uk) [Stand: 01.02.2023].*

Its value lies in all that it stands for and not in its actual worth

[TEXT] **MARTIN SPAFFORD**
[ILLUSTRATION] **NORA KÜHNHAUSEN**

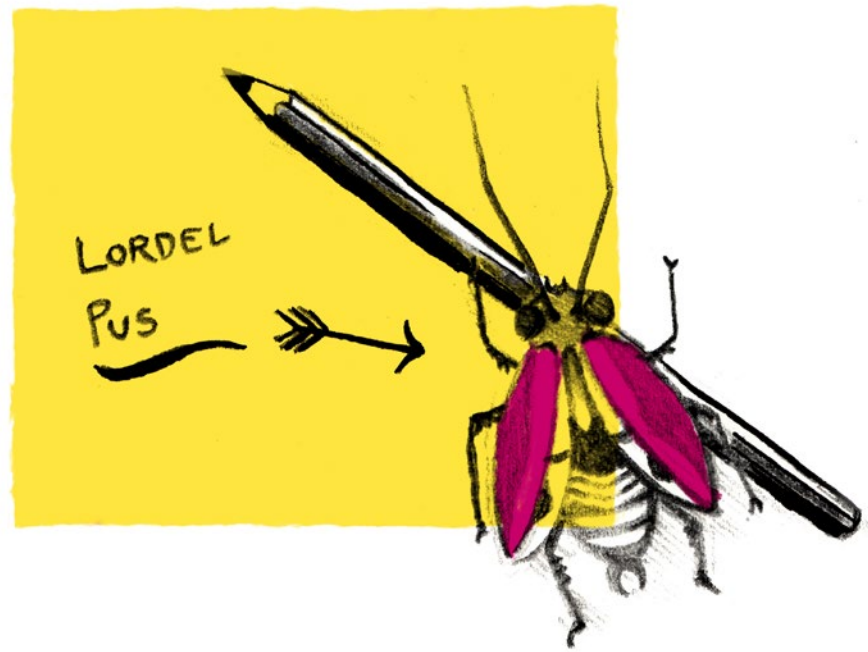
In August 1914 the cafes were busy in the streets of Sarajevo and Belgrade: then, suddenly, everything changed. Four years later war and the resulting disease will have killed between 50 and 100 million people across the world. These human stories from Germany and Britain resonate in their families still. In February 2022 the streets were busy in the squares of Kyiv and Kharkiv: then, suddenly everything changed. "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." – The words of Spanish philosopher George Santayana in 1905.

My grandmother, Nancy Garnett, was born in 1892 in Buxton, Derbyshire, to the family of a fairly wealthy cotton merchant. Her closest friend was her dearly loved younger brother Jerry.

Like many girls and young women of her class and time, she kept scrapbooks. One of them was a book of her adventures in Germany and France where she went for 'finishing school'. It is full of messages in German and French from the people she met along the way shortly before the war. She would always say to me that she 'shook the hand of the Kaiser'.

When war broke out she was nearly 22 and it changed her life. She volunteered for the Red Cross hospital in Buxton as an auxiliary nurse.

She started her 'War Books'. The first War Book is full of excitement and it begins with newspaper clippings



about 'brave little Belgium' – and then they are replaced by actual Belgian wounded soldiers in the hospital wards. The book has their photographs, their messages and, in some cases, long accounts in French and Flemish of the battles they fought against the advancing German army.

In turn, they are replaced by British soldiers from the trenches, and their characters jump out of the pages of these War Books with their photographs, their poems and their jokey comments.

A journey through these War Books offers a glimpse of so many different people and a sense of the fondness that grew between these men of the trenches and their young nurse. But there was a dark side for Nancy because her brother Gerry died of enteric fever in the Gallipoli battle against the Turkish army.

One of Nancy's patients was Sergeant Strickland and two pages of her second War Book are devoted to him. His suggested a deepening friendship between them. He also wrote a poem in which he complained that the Canadian soldiers always got the Buxton girls before the British soldiers! What was Nancy's and Strickland's friendship like? I've often wondered what kind of relationship they had.

Sergeant William Strickland

Just before he was discharged from hospital, he gave her something very special to him. She kept it until her old age and she later gave it to me. It is a damaged crucifix.

With the crucifix is a letter in Strickland's handwriting. It says:

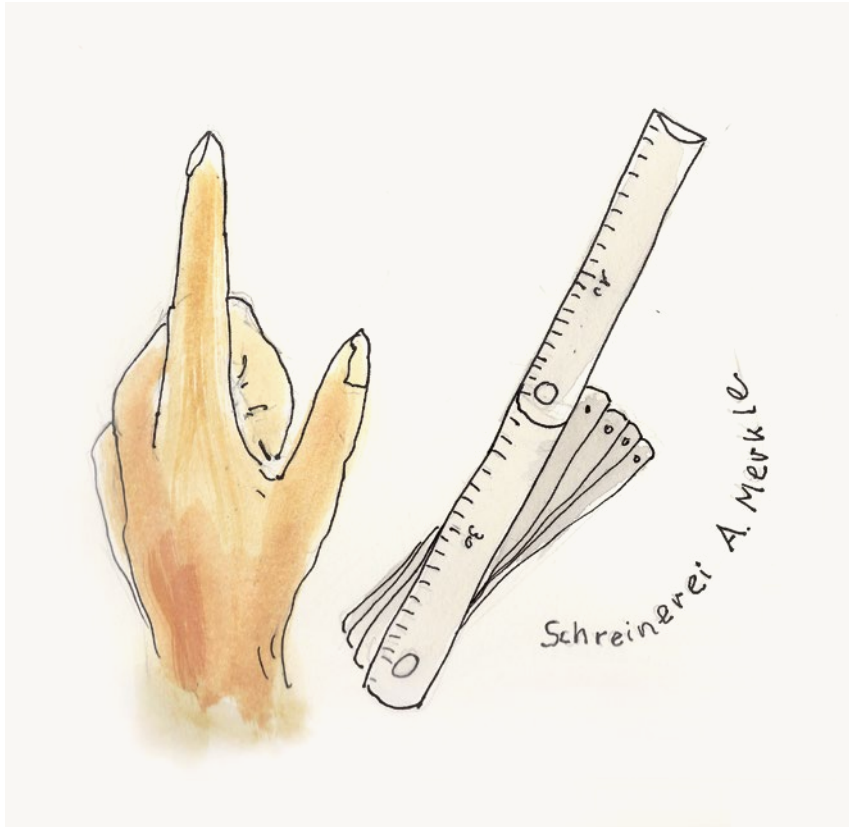
"This crucifix came from a house in Pozières, Somme, France in the British retirement of March 1918. My division, the 24th, were then holding the line at Chaulnes after retreating from the Cambria St. Quentin sector on the 21st of March. We were fighting on the retreat right through in action all the time. ... As we passed through Pozières the Germans were bombarding the town heavily. A shell went through a house and wrecked the back portion of the building. I and a friend went into the house to see if anybody was there. Upstairs where the shell entered, everything was in ruins and on one side a portion of the wall was still standing. On this part of the wall hung the crucifix just chipped as you see it now. I have seen this sort of things so many times – buildings and churches wrecked but crucifixes and figures of Christ untouched. We regard it as an omen but I brought it along with me as a souvenir. Its value lies in all that it stands for and not in its actual worth."

The crucifix has made a journey of a hundred years from a village in France, on the wall of some family, to a hospital ward in the north of England and now to us. My grandmother kept it. For Sgt Strickland it was a symbol of all that he had seen and what the war meant for all of them.

How a small box changed my perspective and opened up my heart

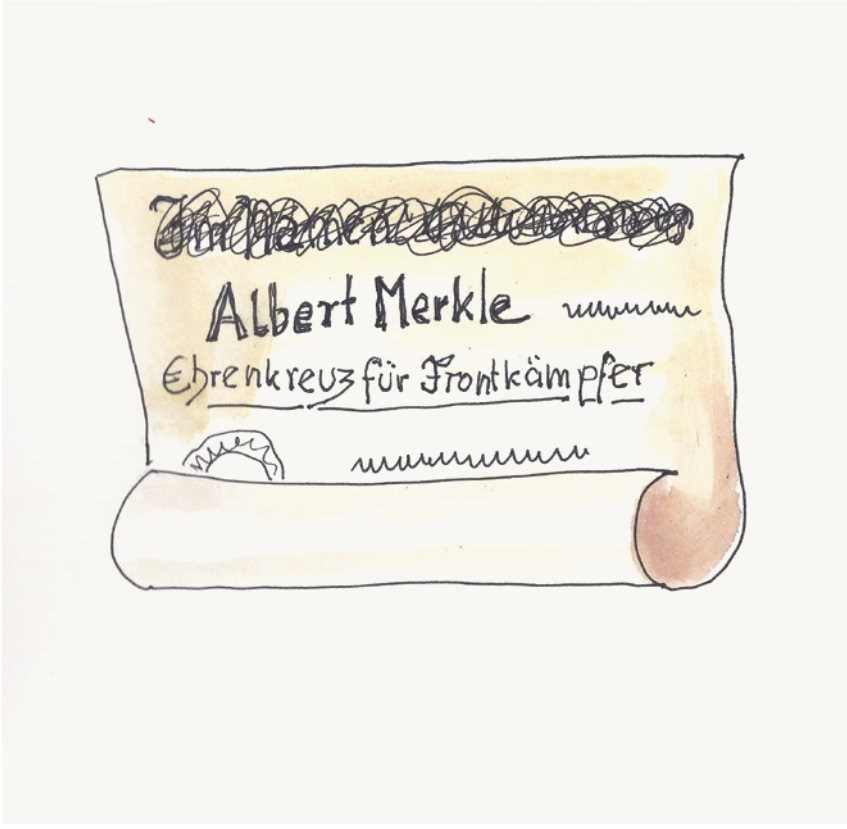
[TEXT] **HANNE KIRCHER**
[ILLUSTRATION] **HANNE KIRCHER**

Not only did the *"Meeting in No Man's Land"* open up a new window on the past for me, it also changed who I am and how I act today. As an artist, I am constantly looking for traces and I try to express my thoughts and discoveries creatively in a number of different ways. These developments led me to draw the picture of the figure taking cover which undoubtedly portrays a part of myself.



My grandfather, Albert Merkle, my mother's father, was born on 20 October 1882 and died on 15 July 1951.

I remember him as a very strict man who scarcely noticed me as a young girl. When I was four, we moved into my grandparents' house with a large joinery. I was just nine years old when grandpa died.



Fast forward to 2015 and our "*Meeting in No Man's Land*" project and I wanted to know whether he was also involved in the First World War and if he was, where he was stationed. I no longer had anyone I could ask and besides, where should I look? And what should I be looking for? There was still an attic room in his old joinery. It was there, in amongst the chaotic clutter, that I suddenly stumbled upon this old cigarette case containing an "Honour Cross for Front-Line Veterans" and a dedication. Overlooked by everyone – even grandpa himself?

This discovery encouraged me to do more research: at the Ebersbach City Archive, in the city's book of honours, in chronicles of associations like the volunteer fire service, I found numerous records acknowledging his efforts as a man who took responsibility for the community and wasn't afraid to voice his opinion publicly. In addition to the "Honour Cross for Front-Line Veterans", he was also awarded the "Württemberg Medal of Military Service".

So this was the man I had hidden from in fear as a child.

Today, all these years later, my view has changed, my perspectives broadened. Now, I have discovered that there were many different sides to my grandpa's life; now, I feel enormous respect and affection for him. At the same time, I can feel how this gives me strength.

The little cigarette case has symbolically found its way to my heart. To my grandpa, I say, "Thank you for this energy. Your Hanne".

Music, the great healer

[TEXT] **DIANA SAVILL**
[ILLUSTRATION] **NORA KÜHNHAUSEN**

In 2016, I was fortunate to be one of a group of British people who met with German descendants of soldiers who fought in World War I. This allowed me to think and talk about my Grandfather, 'Grampy' James Webb, who survived four battles in that terrible war. This encouraged me to write a novel, set in 1943, and based on my family and their friends in rural North Devon. It is called 'Just Making Do' and shows how people coped with the problems of the war with courage and kindness. I was a girl at the time. The world today seems smaller and we are all neighbours.

My Grandfather, known to me as Grampy, was born James Webb in the Union Workhouse near Bishopstoke, in Hampshire in 1887. His parents, Alice Spreadbury and Walter Webb, were not married at the time but later married and went on to have two more sons, Walter and Albert and a daughter, Lyn.

In 1904, James joined the Hampshire Regiment, having given his age as eighteen although he was only seventeen. He had various postings abroad before the outbreak of the war in 1914, when on 22 August, he left with The British Expeditionary Force for France where within days he was engaged in the retreat at the Battle of Mons. He also fought at the Battle of the Marne and The First Battle of Ypres, where the outnumbered British Expeditionary Force fought to hold the huge German Army from reaching the channel ports. The British did not have machine guns, as was reported by German sources, but were crack shots with their Enfield Rifles, being able to fire and reload them at speed.

On the 1st of December, James was wounded by a sniper's shot to the top of his head, having been saved from death by his cap badge which was dented as a result. He was evacuated to Birkenhead Hospital and by 1 April 1915 he had recovered and was back on the front line as the Second Battle of Ypres

started on 22 April. The German Army used gas for the first time, inflicting major casualties. On 19 May, near Mousetrap Farm, James was seriously wounded when he was shot through his left thigh, and eventually, showing some improvement, he was taken to England by ship to recover at the Wharncliffe Hospital in Sheffield. In November 1915 he married my grandmother, Florence Knott, and in the following year he was discharged from active duty at age thirty.

His two brothers also served with the Hampshire Regiment but had been posted to Egypt, where they were later killed in action, Albert, (known as Archie) in April and Walter (known as John) in November 1917.

That is the brief history of Grampy's active service but what was the outcome for him? Like so many others who had survived the horrors of the war, he never talked about it. In fact, he didn't talk much at all. James, Florrie and their two children, Margaret, (my mother) and Alan moved to Barnstaple in North Devon, where James took a job working on the railway, inspecting the points and checking the line in the peaceful countryside near his home. They rented a small, terraced house, owned by the railway, and he tended an allotment nearby, but not too enthusiastically, having dug too many trenches during the war.

His great love was to listen to classical music on his beloved radio, tweaking and tuning it between various stations and driving my grandmother for respite to our little house in the next street. I loved to listen to the music with him as he found his favourite classical pieces coming from whatever station he could find. Handel. Dvorak, Beethoven; they were all friends to him and because I spent a lot of time at my grandparents' house, they became friends to me as well. My enduring memory is of seeing Grampy sitting in his armchair, which I still have, alongside his radio with his eyes closed and happy in his own musical world.

In the face of war: when time and space intertwine

[TEXT] **JÜRGEN MÜLLER-HOHAGEN**
[ILLUSTRATION] **HANNE KIRCHER**

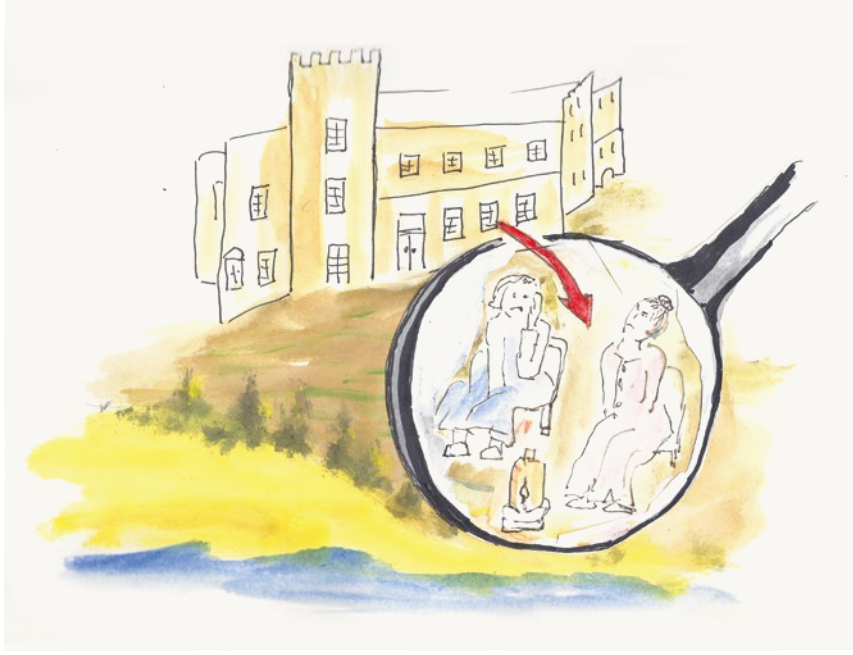
With so many touching encounters, this project prompted me to reflect more deeply on my own family's connections to the First World War. In doing so, I learned so much about my Aunt Hermine, it was as if I had known her personally. She is part of my inner family and I now feel a very strong connection to her. And so close to the distant past.

As a child, I was always interested in stories of Aunt Hermine. They were part of the tales my grandparents, Gerhard and Martha, would tell me about their own lives. I learned that in the distant past, before the First World War, my grandfather had travelled to visit her, going back again later with his wife and son, my father. I still remember the name of the place – Land's End. That was where Aunt Hermine lived – in a small castle, of all places. That fact really stayed with me.

Born and raised in Dortmund, Hermine, my grandpa's aunt, had fallen in love with a young Englishman who had come to visit her father. That man was Thomas Pill from Perranporth in Cornwall. They married in 1886 and moved into the modest Droskyn Castle.

"A castle in Cornwall" – like something from a Rosamunde Pilcher novel, the image stuck with me for decades but I never gave it much thought. That was until my sister travelled to Cornwall in 2009 where she discovered some important information in a local museum. She sent me copies which I found very moving. It turned out, however, that this house had been converted into a block of flats shortly before Aunt Hermine arrived. Before that, it was a fish factory.

According to the museum, upon returning from their honeymoon on 1 January 1887, the local community held a celebration in honour of the couple, with lots of fireworks. Later on, when looking through old photo albums, I also discovered that Aunt Hermine was among the guests at my grandparents' wedding in 1912.



Aunt Hermine's husband died in 1906, leaving her to live alone with her mother-in-law in this house by the sea which, while nestled in romantic surroundings, was cold and draughty during wet and windy weather and had only fireplaces to heat it and kerosene lamps to light it, according to museum documents. In 1914, she retired to a likely more comfortable house out of town.

Museum documents show that Aunt Hermine probably had to report to the police every week during the war. One revealing comment reports that she very much kept to herself during this time and it appears she rarely left the house, consigning herself to "voluntary internment". She was on the board of the tennis club but apparently did not attend any meetings between 1914 and 1925. Thomas Pill had donated the land, on which the tennis club was established, in 1896 and acted as chair until his death..

By the time the war broke out, Aunt Hermine had been living there for almost three decades and had undoubtedly been a British citizen for some time. She was a member of one of the most distinguished families in the area, respected and renowned for her social engagement and generosity. According to one report, however, this reputation had to contend with the emotions of those who had lost sons in the war. I find myself incredibly moved by how wars can sever social ties, even this far removed from the battlefields.

Had the London première of the documentary "*Meeting in No Man's Land*" not been on 8 July 2016, I likely would have never made the trip to Perranporth, despite my increased interest. As it happened, however, I planned to go there from the very beginning.

And so I arrived in London, feeling rather at sixes and sevens. Before checking into the hotel, I headed for the ticket counter at Paddington station. I asked for a return ticket to Truro for the following day, as early as possible. As if through a fog, I heard the man behind the counter says, "7:06, that's rush hour so the ticket costs nearly twice as much as if you go two hours later. Are you sure you want to go then?" "Oh," I reply, somewhat hesitantly, "I only want to go there for the day, so I wouldn't get much time there." The man gives me a quizzical look.

So I add, "My great-great aunt used to live there, you see." "Oh," says the man on the other side. "So it's a surprise visit?" I'm confused. Did I not say "*great grand aunt*". clearly enough? I'm no spring chicken myself so there's really no way my great-great aunt could still be alive! What's gotten into this man? Is his maths that bad?

"No, she died in 1930. But she spent the whole of the war down there, she was very isolated. I just want to go and visit." "Yeah, in the war, yeah, my Dad fought, too. In China. And in Burma."

Again, I am completely thrown: what on earth was the father of this Englishman doing in China? In the First World War? Ah, he must mean the Second World War. It's only now that I notice that the man looks Indian. So his father was stationed in South Asia. Of course. But what a lot of confusion in such a short space of time: First World War, Second World War, rush hour 2016, London, Cornwall, surprise visit, India, China...

I end up buying the 7:06 ticket, despite this being rush hour, and we say our friendly goodbyes. It helps to shed a bit of light on this intertwining of time and space. And now, I feel so much closer to Aunt Hermine.

The "guilty" grandfather
The confused grandmother

[TEXT] **DIETRICH FILSINGER**
[ILLUSTRATION] **ANGELINA HECKMANN**

I am still plagued by problems with authority that stem from the excessive demands made of my grandfather: should I carry out instructions faithfully or will "following orders" lead me to ruin? In my job, for example, I have a tough time standing up for myself when I again find myself with far too much work on my desk. My grandmother was for the most part emotionally unavailable. That "hole" remains a source of pain to this day, especially as my other grandmother died before I was born.

I knew my grandfather Gustav (1892-1969); he died when I was eleven. After serving in Russia, he came to France in 1916 where he was promoted to lieutenant. He had no prior military training but he had been a teacher and, so the thinking went, he understood something about education and managing people. Which is crucial for an officer.

He found himself on the front where he remained until 1918, crammed into the narrow trenches with his soldiers. His comrades were dying one after the other but there was a constant stream of fresh soldiers from back home. Gustav was only 23 years old but for the new recruits, who were aged between 17 and 19 years old and were completely overwhelmed by the situation, he was their "senior", their teacher, their role model, their father figure. It was his job to make the war make sense, acting almost as the Kaiser's representative in the trenches. His actual objective was to maintain perseverance, morale and discipline. Whenever he had to order his troops to go over the top, the soldiers were not allowed to question the order or show fear.

Having to send so many soldiers to their death, soldiers who trusted him and who had been entrusted to his care, took a huge psychological toll. The longer the war dragged on, the more pointless it seemed. Even victory would not have justified the misery that had been wrought. After the war ended in defeat, there was no therapy, no understanding, no interest in his needs. Just aggressive disinterest. Left alone, he carried that guilt with him for the rest of his life. This triggered issues like depression and continues to have an impact on his descendants to this day.

I knew my grandmother Berta (1904-1978); she died when I was 19. Her greatest passion in life was the piano. She was something of a "Wunderkind" in her youth and later studied music. Her father, Carl was captain of the reserves before the First World War and when the conflict started, he was responsible for recruiting soldiers in the town of Wiesloch where they lived. He then took command of a company that was deployed to Belgium during the war. There were many military hospitals in nearby Heidelberg, housing many war wounded. Berta put on piano concerts for the injured in the town hall in 1916.

These events were incredibly upsetting for Berta. On the one hand, it was obvious that because of her artistic talents and as the daughter of a renowned local captain, she had no choice but to play for the wounded soldiers. She was also proud that she could support her father in "the great German cause". On the other hand, she was confronted with the faces and bodies of the wounded, some of which were horribly disfigured, and with their longing gazes. These men wanted to reclaim the reckless abandon they had lost, to get their "normal" lives back, just for a moment. This young girl and this music – she mostly played romantic pieces by Chopin – were the ideal remedy. For the twelve-year-old Berta, it was too much and she was unable to process these experiences.

After the war, which had ended in defeat and so many deaths, her father became depressed. The once proud captain could no longer explain the world to his daughter. I knew Berta as a withdrawn and very quiet person who busied herself with books and art. She largely left the task of raising her children to her mother (my great-grandmother).

War, fathers and sons

[TEXT] **ALLAN AND WILLIAM MARSON**
[ILLUSTRATION] **HANNE KIRCHER**

Involvement in the project was a very powerful and positive experience for both my father, and for me. For my father, it was two things. First, it was the culmination of a 20-year process of reconciliation with the memory of his own father. And it also allowed an old man, nearing the end of his days, to be his best again. As for me the project delivered a couple of very powerful outcomes. First, it gave me the opportunity to be the associate of my frail, old father on a project where he was the principal, where he was centre-stage, and passionately engaged. Second, just as my grandfather's war experience helped my father to understand his behaviour as a father and husband, so the conversation I had with my father in a bar in Bad Endorf, helps me to understand my father's childhood in Glasgow, and his sometimes reticent behaviour as a father to me, and to my sister. The experiences that Dad and I shared helped to conclude and cement a wonderful healing across three generations of the men in our family. As someone interested in history, it has given me a very personal lesson in the multigenerational consequences of war.

The personality of Captain Stuart, the commanding officer of my paternal grandfather's platoon in the 7th battalion, Cameron Highlanders, always loomed large over both my father's, and my own understanding of the sacrifices involved in the Great War. This was despite, or more probably, because of his death in a burst of enemy machine-gun fire on 23 April 1917 in the early stages of the Second Battle of Ypres. Both my father, William Stuart Marson, and I, Allan Stuart Marson, bore his name in his memory.

To my grandfather, William, Captain Stuart epitomised many noble virtues. He was courageous in battle, as evidenced by his medals and by mention of action in dispatches. To his soldiers, many of them teenagers, including William, he was a caring, compassionate leader. If not a father figure, certainly an adored older brother.

He was 28 years old when he died, having spent the last three years of his life in combat in Flanders. My father recounted how, after being hit by the machine-gun burst that would kill him, his concern was for his soldiers, and my grandfather in particular, who had also been hit.

My grandfather carried his war memories with him until he died in 1984, mostly in silence. I think the experiences of 1914-1917, which he endured between the ages of 19 and 21, scarred him. He would have seen many friends die, as any examination of the activity of his battalion can confirm. He struggled to

accept the authority of anyone in the workplace who had not served. His was an unhappy marriage, and my father and his sisters grew up in a tense and volatile home.

Above all this trauma, and bitterness, and anger, there stood the memory of a young man who faced the enormous challenges of his place and time, and, although he died aged 28 back in 1917, came to represent in our family, the possibility of rising above circumstance, and the importance of always acting with courage, and compassion no matter what difficulties you face.

Dad and I retraced the footsteps of my grandfather on a trip to the Western Front in 2014. The high point was a visit to Captain Stuart's grave in the Faubourg d'Amiens cemetery. My own father died in 2017.

From soldier to showman

[TEXT] **DELIA HAMSHARE**
[ILLUSTRATION] **NORA KÜHNHAUSEN**

When I was invited to take part in the project I was delighted. The concept of meeting people and sharing family memories of the Great War is, I believe, a good way of coming to terms with history. What I did not expect was just how interesting and often moving the stories were, along with the pleasure from newly-made friendships. The overall feeling of the event for me was that the group was doing something very worthwhile, which following generations, when they read our stories, might appreciate.

My grandfather was born in Edinburgh in 1888. His mother was Irish and his father, a teacher of languages, was Dutch. He passed on the aptitude for languages to my grandfather – Joseph was fluent in English, Dutch, French and German.

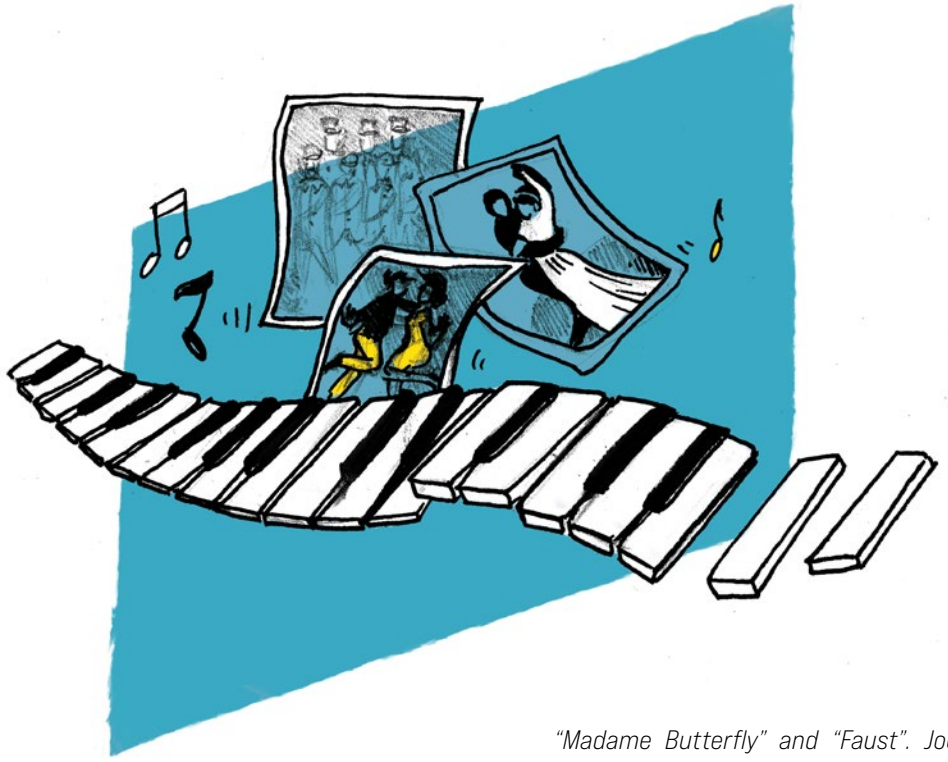
Joseph's father died when Joseph was 15. When he left school, his mother wanted him to become a solicitor, so he joined an office. But he wasn't happy and left to join an end-of-the-pier variety company.

This was the start of his career in entertainment which lasted until his retirement, apart from the years in the First World War, when he was a Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery.

Joe (as he liked to be called) was a picture-house manager in Sunderland when the War started. He enlisted in November 1914, one month after my mother was born. By 1915 he was in France, manning field guns.

Because he was fluent in French, he was popular with the officers. He was often sent to nearby farms and villages to buy wines, cheeses etc. He also acted as an interpreter when needed.

During the War he was promoted to acting bombardier. Unfortunately, he was wounded when a shell burst near his gun and he was hit by flying shrapnel. The bone above his left wrist was shattered. He was sent back to England to recover and his war service ended.



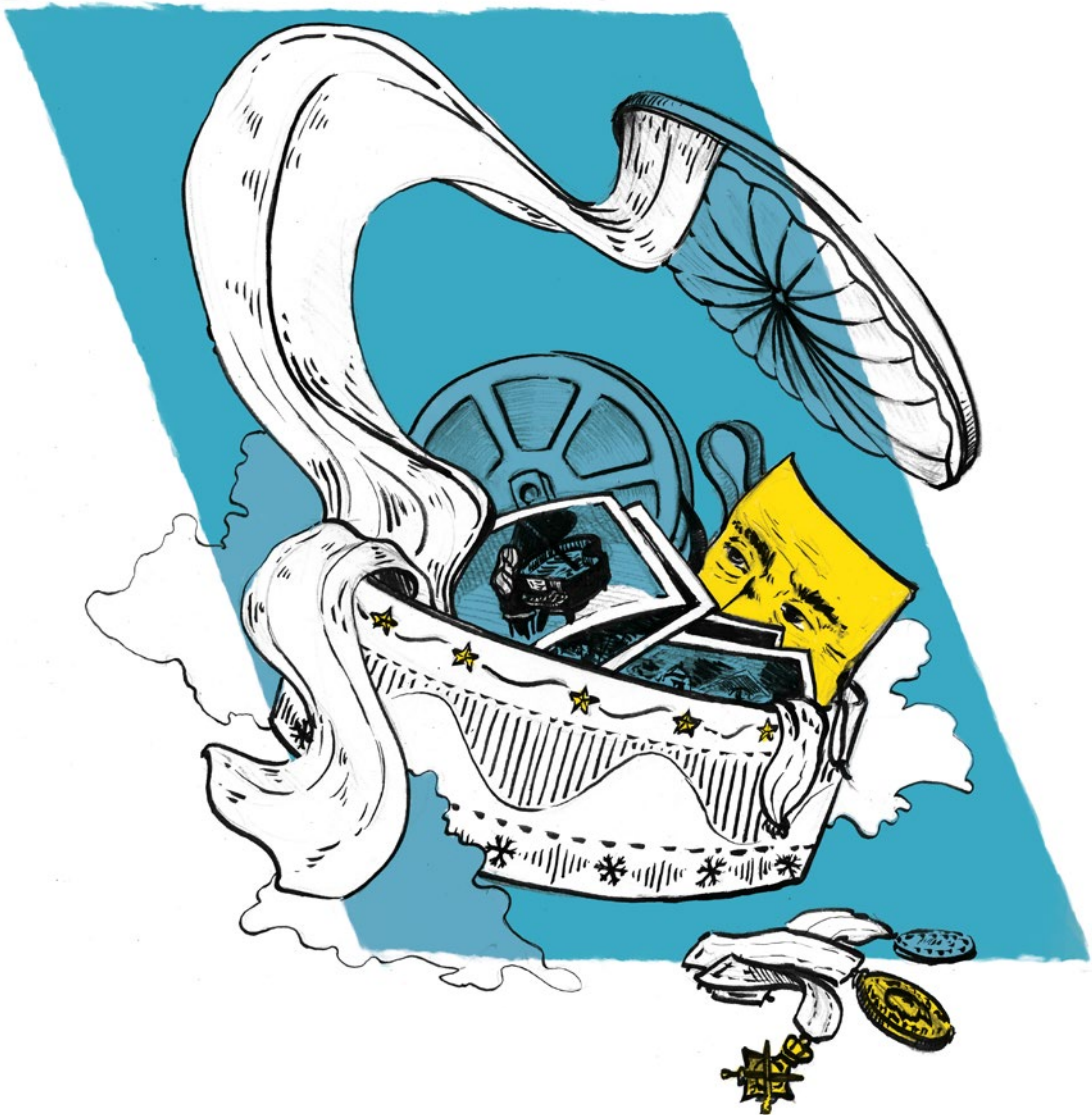
At home, he had a wife and daughters to support. His injury made it difficult for him to do anything that needed two hands. With his wife, my grandmother Maisie, he joined a theatre company that toured the country, in productions such as "Merry England", "Madame Butterfly" and "Faust". Joe sometimes played villains, Maisie was in the chorus, and also played piano at rehearsals. My mother and her younger sister were looked after in Scotland by Joe's mother.

In 1923 the family was reunited when my grandfather returned to managing cinemas. His first job was in York, followed by cinemas in Birmingham, London and then, in 1938, in Dover. In the latter location he managed the Odeon cinema until his retirement in 1953.

But that was not the end of his career in entertainment. He was recalled to become a relief manager for the Odeon cinemas in southeast Kent. This, however, was at the time cinemas were closing or converting to bingo halls. Joe became the assistant manager for Top Rank Bingo, Dover. He retired in 1967, aged 79 and he died two years later.

I was six years old when I went to live with my grandparents. Joe never talked about his childhood or the war. It was my grandmother who showed me his medals – kept in his Christmas tin. She told me stories of their life as we looked at old photos. Maisie had played the piano for silent films and in Dover she was the pianist at the Working Man's Club and a local dancing school.

I now have the medals, the tin and the photos. I love to look at them, think about the past and remember happy times. Maisie would play the piano in the front room, while my grandfather and I would sing the old songs. My grandparents would also dance "ragtime style", just as they had when they were young!



A cry for peace

[TEXT] **LES MILLS**
[ILLUSTRATION] **SUSE SCHWEIZER**

Working with the group awoke within me the broader concept of the misery inflicted upon all sides by war; it is not a neatly defined line twixt 'us' and 'them', the suffering is universal and goes way beyond the battlefield. Family-wise we have always known and been proud of our grandparents' bravery; the history surrounding the reason for this bravery, in my view, has become increasingly questionable. My perspective on current events, with a new war in Europe currently being fought, puts an irony on the sentiment "We Will Remember". Yes, we will remember, once again, that war does not provide lasting solutions to conflict resolution. It is time for our species to evolve.

When I, along with other British descendants of First World War soldiers, met with German descendants, I brought photographs to show them of my grandfathers and uncles who fought in the War. Their photographs were all as one to me because I wanted to meet our German friends and express my determination that, together we ensure our own descendants don't do this again!

'I have an underlying anger' is my declaration over the history to which these people were subjected.

I remember my grandfather. (Clarence Mills). I saw him once in the shower, when I was about seven or eight years old, and I remember seeing on the back of his calf a nasty scar, then another on his buttocks, and yet another on his shoulder.

As a young boy, I thought 'ugh', but now I understand it was where he had been strafed with machine-gun bullets." (Grandad Clarence Mills, fought hard in the machine gun corps, particularly at Passchendaele).

On his 100th birthday, he eventually died aged 103, I asked Grandpa Wagstaff, what happened to him on the 1st of July at the Somme. He replied, 'well when the whistles blew, Lieutenant Robinson went up the ladder first, with a revolver in his hand, and Grandpa was second up the ladder behind him'. They both made it to the top when a shell landed in front of them and blew both of them back into the trench."

They both survived, though Lieutenant Robinson was severely wounded. Grandpa shifted himself from beneath the wounded Lieutenant and, then did not think to stay there, but instead just got back up the ladder. Whereupon he found most of the regiment heaped up dead on top of the battlements, this is the bit one reads in history books where most of our casualties took place in the first five minutes of the assault. (and maybe the five vital minutes which continue his blood line and my writing today). After Grandpa Wagstaff died, I asked his son, my Uncle Doug, for more on this subject and he wrote to me in March 2014, "The first phase of the battle of the Somme was aborted when the first day losses were so horrendous. My Dad found himself in a hopeless position, walking forward with only a few of his company left. Half a dozen or so dropped into a shell hole, later joined by an officer who informed them that the battle was over, return to the line when darkness falls. Ok, but since the morning of the attack, and indeed since

making it across nomansland, which was a feat in itself historically and numerically; we lost about 20,000 dead plus another 40,000 severely wounded, about 60,000 British bodies laying over this field that Grandpa and his half a dozen mates then had to crawl back through, I walked the no mans land on the Somme battlefield myself in 2011, it must be a good mile, and if someone is going to subject you to concentrated machine-gun crossfire, as Grandad Clarence would be able to tell you all about, then your chances of getting to the other side are, as the figures recount, pretty much nil! But the old bugger made it to the other side, only to be told by an officer that the attack was over, go home when it gets dark. They must have been paddling through blood and entrails and bits of bodies all the way home, and I can try to imagine what it must have been like, but only fail to do so; the smell!"

As I write this account, five years on from our "Meeting in No Man's Land", I feel, now more than ever, the need for humanity to evolve from this conflict resolution process called war. War does not resolve anything, it merely ensures that unresolved issues will re-emerge and for which future generations will

die. We need to understand and accept our common and differing humanity, that we all live at the same address, Planet Earth, and that we have so much more in common with each other as individual people, rather than as nationals from nations, who can be divided and made to wage war. I hope this message is conveyed. While writing this text, I had a dream last night. I asked Grandpa Wagstaff whether he regretted what he had been part of. He dodged the question, replying;

"We thought we were going to be invaded, I did what I thought was my duty". I found it a very harrowing experience simply writing down what he wrote, including, "The worst day of my life!" The poor buggers, all of them.

Conclusion

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INFO

Dear Reader,

We invite you to send us your thoughts about this project or to share your personal memories and stories of WWI.

We look forward to hearing from you:
landeszentrale@blz.bayern.de

Distant past?

Encounters between British and German family stories

PART II BY
JÜRGEN MÜLLER-HOHAGEN

Love in the time of war – reflecting on the past from the present

Our film premièred in London on 8 July 2016. It was an incredibly moving event for all of us.

Outside of this event, however, a shadow loomed large: the Brexit referendum which had taken place on 23 June. The United Kingdom was to leave the European Union. We couldn't quite believe it, it was so contrary to the spirit of what we had gone through as a group. After all, the devastation that the First World War wrought was the result of earlier divisions in Europe. And now there was going to be another great divide? Tears flowed once again.

But we weren't going to let this separate us – quite the opposite. Our friendships and our community spirit intensified. This book is just one example of that.

Brexit is not a war. That such a war could again be waged in Europe seemed to us, as it did to most of our peers, truly unimaginable. And yet, as we put the finishing touches to this book, the awful Russian war of aggression against Ukraine continues. Our group is not the only one to have been thoroughly rocked by these events.

There are also parallels between the current war and the First World War in the way in which the countries involved are in fact so closely connected. Ukraine and Russia were described as “brothers” – just as there were close bonds between Germany and Great Britain before the First World War. Bonds that stretched all the way to the royal families, in fact. Then came these awful wars. Is Freud’s concept of a fundamental death drive as a defining feature of human nature to be proven right once and for all? He conceived of this theory after his experiences in the First World War which was shocking and sobering for him, too. Are we really incapable of overcoming this drive? In spite of everything, the aim of our project remains to offer hope. It took its name from the meeting between British and German soldiers between the trenches around Christmas 1914. After which, the war continued. Many more followed since – some are still with us. Nevertheless, we believe in the power of human interaction, dialogue and love, the effects of which can be felt across decades.

I want to give an example that rings true of others from our group, too. As mentioned earlier, I was deeply moved by the story David Savill told at our initial meeting of his grandmother who as a child suffered the loss of her dear brother who died in the war. As I was writing this text, it occurred to me that I couldn’t remember how old they both were at the time. So I asked David. But instead of just a few dates, I got a family story that spans generations. It is the story of a love that has continued to this day and that has also “taken hold” of me, both when I first heard it and all the more so now. That is why it belongs here. As a fitting end to this book..

”My grandmother (or Nana, as we called her) was named Florrie. Her full name was Florence Austin. In the attached photo, she is sitting in the middle of the front row, wearing a sailor suit like her sister May, which was common at the time and undoubtedly meant to appear patriotic. Nana was born in 1906 in Angel Islington, London. The attached photo is the only one ever taken of the entire family. [...] We believe that the photo was taken on the occasion of Nana’s oldest brother William’s departure to the front (in early spring 1916). It must have been an extremely difficult time for the family. We know that the father in the photo, also named William, tried to go instead of his son but was deemed too old and went to France to train troops as a sergeant major. Nana’s mother is sitting in the front row. We know she adored her eldest son and loved him dearly.

On 10th July 1916, during the Battle of Ypres, William Austin and his best friend were killed by a shell. The family was traumatised. When I was very young, maybe six or seven, Nana told me a very frightening story about her mother. It was the day William was killed over in Belgium. Nana was playing in the same room (she was almost ten). Louisa suddenly turned around and said, looking into the empty space, “William, what have you done that you come home to me covered in blood?” Of course, William wasn’t there, but his mother possibly saw

him at the very moment he died. This memory stayed with my grandmother and with me. She loved her brother very much, as did the whole family. He was funny and kind; we have his letters and know he was just a normal boy who wanted to train as an electrician. After the war, we believe it was in 1923, my grandmother and her mother travelled to Ypres to lay flowers on William's grave. It was the only time they travelled abroad.

Nana often spoke of him and the childhood games they all played in the street. She sang all the old street songs they used to sing together and described the house and the area where they grew up. This wartime story had a strange twist because after William fell, his father was sent to Salisbury Plain to take care of German prisoners of war. He described them as being "like his sons."

My grandmother died in 1996, shortly after I met my wife Jenny and moved to the Angel Islington neighbourhood in London, where the family had lived during the First World War and where my grandmother was born. We believe my children attended the same school as William. A year after Nana's death, we travelled to Ypres and found William's grave. It was a very moving experience for my father. We had promised Nana before she died that we would go back and find William's grave. Two years after Nana's death, my son was born. [...] We named him William, in honour of Nana's brother and to keep his memory alive.

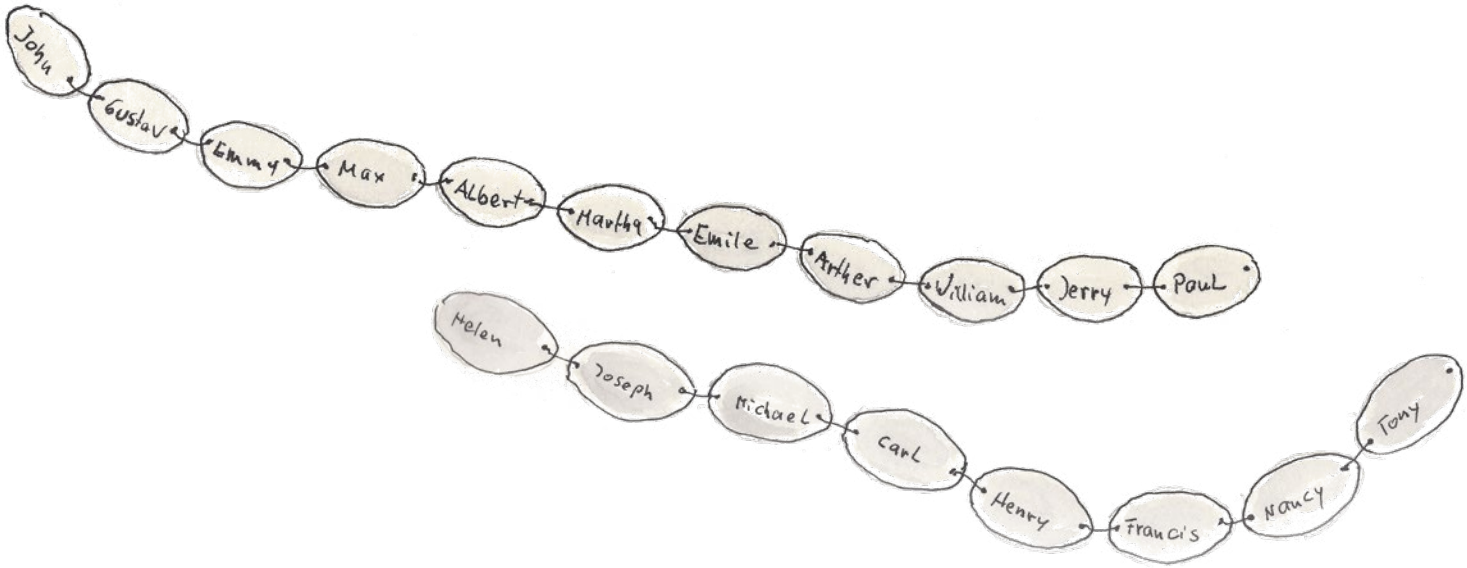
Just like the other stories in this book and in the documentary, there is so much love contained in this brief account, such a connection. In some circumstances, this love and these connections can continue to grow across generations.

From the very beginning, I was deeply moved by this story of little Florrie and her dear brother, William, who died on 10 July 1916, aged just eighteen. This tale was also an important building block for our growing friendship within the group.

At the same time, however, the point of all of the stories in this book is not to simply be put to one side with just a twinge of emotion and their messages of forming bonds, understanding, love. No, these moving experiences only matter if we also remember the horror, the loss, the pain and all the awful things that war entails – and continue remembering for generations to come. This remains true of the current wars and will continue to resonate for years to come.

As David mentioned to me in another e-mail, every time she spoke about the war, Nana Florrie would always say, quite succinctly:

"It was a waste, a terrible waste and that's the truth of it."


John
Gustav
Emmy
Max
Albert
Martha
Emile
Arthur
William
Jerry
Paul
Helen
Joseph
Michael
Carl
Henry
Francis
Nancy
Tony

Appendix

The Authors and their Ancestors

CHRISTEL BERGER

Christel
Berger
(*1951)

Grandfather
Philipp Boley
(1886-1966)

Christel Berger
with her grandfather,
1950er Jahre

ANGELIKA MAYER

Angelika
Mayer
(*1948)

Grandmother
Maria Wagner
(1893-1997)

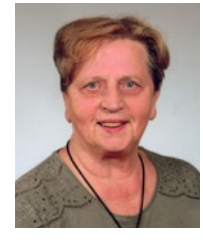
Grandfather
Dr. Max Wagner
(1886-1953)

LINDE HARTTMANN

Linde
Harttmann
(*1937)

Father
Hans Bihl
(1897-1979)

FRANZISKA RAMM



Franziska
Ramm
(*1947)

Husband's
grandmother,
Fanny Franz
(1886-1918)

Husband's
grandfather,
Alois Franz
(1877-1937)

MARIANNE MIEBACH

Marianne
Miebach
(*1942)

Father
Ferdinand Moser
(1895-1971)

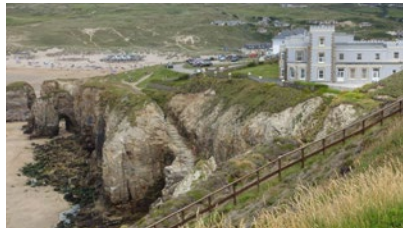
HANNE KIRCHER

Hanne
Kircher

Grandfather
Albert Merkle
(1882-1951)

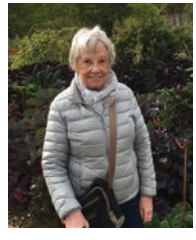
JÜRGEN MÜLLER-HOHAGEN

Jürgen
Müller-Hohagen
(*1946)



Great-great Aunt Hermine (1860-1930).
Photo of her Cornwall residence where
she lived from 1886 until at least 1914.

DIANA SAVILL



Diana
Savill
(*1936)

Grandfather
("Grampy")
James Webb
(1887-1964)

CHRIS COOPER

Chris Cooper (*1954)

Grandfather John Cooper (1894-1970)

ALLAN STUART MARSON

Allan Stuart Marson (*1964)

Father William Stuart Marson (1933-2017)

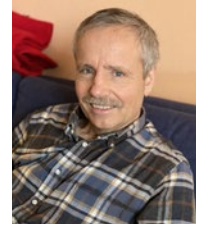
Grandfather William Marson (1895-1985)

LES MILLS

Les Mills (*1963)

Grandfather Arthur Wagstaff (1897-2000)

DIETRICH FILSINGER



Dietrich Filsinger (*1958)

Grandmother Berta Filsinger (1904-1979)

Grandfather Gustav Filsinger (1892-1969)

ROSEMARY LEVER

Rosemary Lever (*1957), in Normandy, June 2019.

Grandfather Robert Law (1889-1968)

RUTH GAYFER

Ruth Gayfer (*1930) with her mother

Mother Evelyn Oliver (1897-1998) in her nurse's uniform

Father Lieutenant Edwin Oliver (1898-1934)

MARTIN SPAFFORD

Martin Spafford (*1954)

Grandmother Nancy Garnett (1892-1980)

PETER COMPTON

Peter Compton (*1962)

Uncle Guy Compton (1894-1917)

Uncle Rex Compton (1897-1917)

HILLARY PAYNE

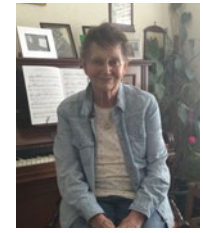
Hillary Payne (*1966)

Great-Grandfather George Ralph (1875-1916)

Grandmother Ina Payne (1913-2007)

Great-Grandmother Ann Ellen Ralph (1882-1943)

DELIA JANE HAMSHARE



Delia Jane Hamshare (*1939)

Grandparents Joseph Anthony Snijders (1888-1969) and Victoria Maria May Snijders (1893-1971)

ALLY EDWARDS

Ally Edwards (*1968)

Grandfather Walter Powell (1898-1994)

PROJEKTLEITER/IN

Elfriede Pauli (*1955)

David Savill (*1965)

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All photos are from the authors' private collections

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The Team

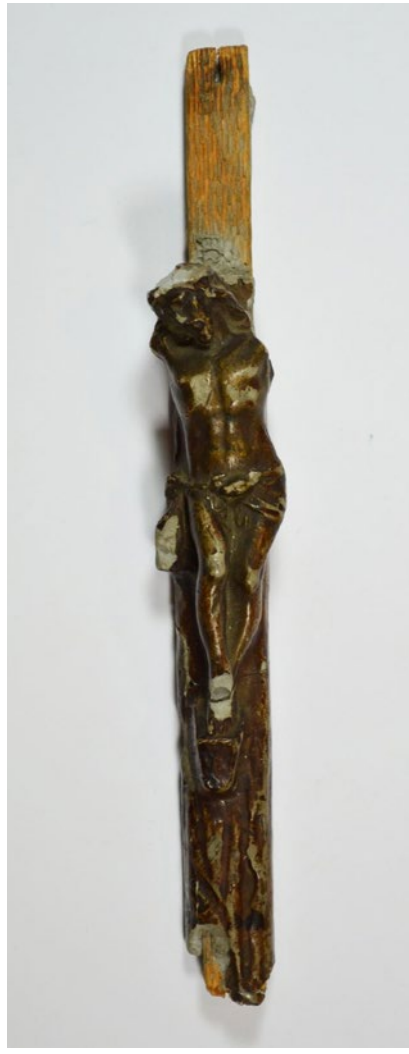
The "*Meeting in No Man's Land*" team at the Hofbräuhaus in Munich in April 2016
Photo: private

Mementoes

"Philipp Boley painted beautiful postcards decorated with flowers, moss and lichen which he sent to his wife and sisters back home. There are never any texts, just wishes."
(Christel Berger, see p. 48)
Photo: Christel Berger

"On Ist December, James was wounded by a sniper's shot to the top of his head, having been saved from death by his cap badge, which was dented as a result."
(Diane Savill, p. 69)
Foto: Diana Savill

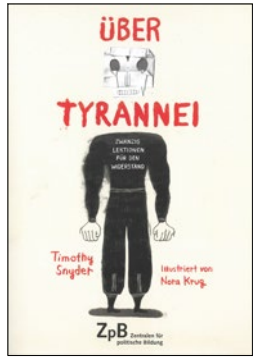
"This crucifix came from a house in Pozières, France in the British retirement of March 1918. As we passed through Pozières the Germans were bombarding the town heavily. A shell went through a house and wrecked the back portion of the building. I and a friend went into the house to see if anybody was there. Upstairs where the shell entered, everything was in ruins and on one side a portion of the wall was still standing. On this part of the wall hung the crucifix just chipped as you see it now. I have seen this sort of things so many times – buildings and churches wrecked but crucifixes and figures of Christ un- touched."
(William Strickland/Martin Spafford, p. 64)
Photo: Martin Spafford



"My grandfather's medals, love letters and poetry had sat untouched in a box for years. Now I had reason to examine these wartime mementoes." *(Rosemary Lever, p. 55)*
Photos: Rosemary Lever

Graphic Novels

published by the Bavarian Regional Centre for Political Education



These and many other publications are available to order from:

https://www.blz.bayern.de/publikationen-allgemeine-informationen.html

Great-Great-Aunt Hermine, Grandpa Wagstaff, Captain Stuart and Ferdinand Moser stood on opposite German and British sides during World War One. In this book, their descendants and those of many others who lived through those times recall their experiences. Graphic artists from both countries illustrate the various family stories, taking inspiration from military post letters, photos and personal belongings. The recollections show the power of dialogue between generations and former enemies – and provide a poignant appeal for peace and democracy.