



BETWEEN THE SHELLS: THE PRODUCTION OF BELGIAN, BRITISH AND FRENCH TRENCH JOURNALS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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When a new journal appears, it is common for the editor to explain soberly to the reader, in an article on the first page, what the journal will endeavour (*ce que sera ce journal*) and why it was begun (*pourquoi il est né*). The reader, who does not care about this, generally does not read the article, which for them is like a foreword to a book; and we all know no one reads forewords. What will the journal endeavour? He'll see! Why is it begun? It does not matter! All that is the concern of journalists.¹

With these opening words a poilu-turned-journalist from the 32nd infantry division of the French army launched *Bellica*, a bellicose monthly magazine written and edited in the trenches of the First World War. Its first issue appeared in December 1915, and it was especially expensive, averaging around a tenfold of the price of the cheapest titles available at the front. Not much more is known of the magazine, but the few advertisements it contains suggest that it was produced near Epernay and Châlons-sur-Marne, and printed in Paris. It comprised, in the words of its editor, the 'oeuvre des poilus', the work of the soldier.  That the trench press became an invaluable expression of its time and place is clear from the editor's suggestion, in a following  number, that front journalists merited the Palmes Académiques, France's highest honour for major contributions to national education and culture. The image would be prophetic. After the war, the Minister of Education, Léon Bérard, took his suggestion to heart.³

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- 1 'Quand un nouveau journal paraît, il est d'usage que la rédaction vienne solennellement expliquer aux lecteurs, en un article de première page, ce que sera ce journal et pourquoi il est né. Le lecteur qui s'en fiche ne lit généralement pas cet article qui est pour lui comme l'avant-propos d'un livre; et nous savons tous qu'on ne lit jamais un avant-propos. Ce que sera ce journal? Il le verra! Pourquoi il est né? Que lui importe! Tout ça, c'est l'affaire des journaliers.' Editor, 'Avant-Propos', *Bellica* 1 (December 1915): 4.
 - 2 Editor, 'Les Petits "Trésor et Postes" de *Bellica*', *Bellica* 2 (January 1916): 13.
 - 3 Maxime Weygand, 'La Presse des Tranchées', in *Histoire de La Presse Française II: De 1881 à nos jours*, ed. René de Livois (Paris: Les Temps de la Presse, 1965), 422.

The editor's opening words are noteworthy for what they suggest about approaches to the study of trench journalism. Sporadic though it is, the existing literature reads trench journalism as an 'oeuvre des poilus' and uses the periodicals to explore why soldiers continued to fight, an inquiry into the politics of endurance that opens Robert Nelson's impressive study of German trench journalism.⁴ The answer to that question is trench press, which existed to maintain morale and cohesion, and which played an important part in structuring the shared beliefs and identities of an army community. For Floris Prems, for instance, the primary use of Flemish trench publications for war historians is the contribution they make to 'the history of soldier psychology'. For J.G. Fuller, too, British

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- 4 On German trench journalism: Robert Nelson, 'Soldier Newspapers: A Useful Source in the Social and Cultural History of the First World War', *War in History* 17.2 (2010): 167-191; *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); 'German Soldier Newspapers and Their Allied Counterparts', in *Reading and the First World War: Readers, Texts, Archives*, ed. Shafquat Towheed and Edmund King (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 209-226. On English and Dominion trench journalism: A. Schlesinger, 'The Khaki Journalists, 1917-1919', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 6.3 (1919): 350-359; A.E. Cornebise, *The Stars and Stripes: Doughboy Journalism in World War I* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984); *Ranks and Columns: Armed Forces Newspapers in American Wars* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993); J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); John Pegum, 'British Army Trench Journals and a Geography of Identity', in *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History*, ed. Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 129-147; Tim Cook, 'Anti-heroes of the Canadian Expeditionary Force', *Journal of the Canadian Historical Society* 19.1 (2008): 171-193; Amanda Laugesen, *Boredom is the Enemy: The Intellectual and Imaginative Lives of Australian Soldiers in the Great War and Beyond* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Graham Seal, *The Soldiers' Press. Trench Journals in the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). On French trench journalism: André Charpentier, *Le livre d'or des journaux du front 1914-1918, feuilles bleu-horizon* (Paris: Imprimerie de Vaugirard, 1935); Maxime Weygand, 'La Presse des Tranchées', in *Histoire de La Presse Française II: De 1881 à nos jours*, ed. René de Livois (Paris: Les Temps de la Presse, 1965): 419-427; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *14-18: Les combattants des tranchées* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1986). On Belgian trench journalism: Floris Prems, 'Vlaamsche Frontblaadjes en Soortgelijke (1914-1918)', *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis* 14 (1922-1923): 455-456; A. Verbouwe, *De Vlaamsche frontblaadjes gedurende den wereldoorlog 1914-1918. Bibliografische en historische nota's* (Antwerpen: 1923); F. Bertrand, *La presse francophone de tranchée au front belge, 1914-1918* (Brussel: Koninklijk Museum van het Leger en van Krijgsgeschiedenis, 1971); G. Bulthé, *De Vlaamse loopgravenpers tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Brussel: Koninklijk Museum van het Leger en van Krijgsgeschiedenis, 1971).

counterparts publicly lay down 'the mood of the moment'.⁵ This appears to have been one of the official purposes of army periodicals already during the conflict: in March 1916 General Joffre admitted that France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs used the trench press to allow foreign correspondents insight into the excellent morale of the troops at the front.⁶ What emerges from the important work of Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, J.G. Fuller, and Graham Seal, among others, is a clearer picture of why trench journals were produced and read (*pourquoi il est né*) but not explicitly of what they were and how they were started (*ce que sera ce journal*).⁷ The nature and genesis of the trench press is the subject of this essay.

Despite disclosing the various ways in which trench journals 'fill out the life-world of the soldiers',⁸ remarkably little attention is paid in existing scholarship to how they came into being, especially from a comparative angle. The First World War was a moment of cultural encounter, but much scholarship on the phenomenon of trench journalism remains confined within national boundaries.⁹ This comparative essay indeed focuses on a small set of representative publications created on the Western Front, including the *Wipers Times* (British army), *Bellica*, *Le Bochofage* and *Le Poilu du 6-9* (French army) and *Antwerpen en Omheining*, *Ik ben Roeland* and *Saint-Trond Poilufié* (Belgian army).¹⁰ First, it explores the production context of Entente magazines. That little presses were established against the odds

5 'bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der soldaten-psychologie'. Prens, 'Vlaamsche Frontblaadjes', 455. Fuller, *Troop Morale*, 15.


6 Quoted in Audoin-Rouzeau, *14-18*, 23.

7 This is also the aim of Berkey's discussion of the soldier magazines of the Spanish-American War: 'rather than use [...] soldier papers to flesh out the everyday life of turn-of-the-century soldiers, I want to foreground their status as periodicals, a shift that enables a deeper consideration of the cultural work performed by soldier newspapers'. James Berkey, 'Splendid Little Papers from the "Splendid Little War": Mapping Empire in the Soldier Newspapers of the Spanish-American War', *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 3.2 (2012): 158-74, here 160.

8 Nelson, 'Soldier Newspapers', 168.

9 Exemplary is Weygand's claim that 'le véritable journal de tranchées ne pouvait naître qu'en France'. Weygand, 'Presse des Tranchées', 426.

10 This essay is only concerned with magazines produced in or near the trenches, and therefore excludes magazines published in training camps, hospitals, POW camps or on boats. Even the War Office in London had its own gazette. These publications found their way into the (scholarly and contemporary) mainstream more easily: *Reveille*, for instance, a journal devoted to the disabled sailor and soldier, was edited by John Galsworthy, and featured contributions by such figures as Edith Wharton, Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad.

of warfare fascinated the contemporary public: the French avant-garde poet Guillaume Apollinaire, for instance, contributed a short anecdotal essay entitled 'L'Histoire d'une gazette du front' to the *Mercure de France* in January 1917. The  profiles the editors, readers and contributors involved, and shows a comparative approach can complement what we already know of the apparently limited distribution and scope of the trench press. Finally, it asks how trench journals fit into the framework of periodical studies, arguing for their textual affinity with school magazines. The trench press has exclusively been read and studied by historians, who consider it a distinctive phenomenon of the cultural history of the First World War. The benefit of situating these magazines firmly within contemporary print culture is that it nuances that notion of exceptionality. It also provides a space for addressing some of the confusions in definition and categorisation that underlie much historical analysis. As a genre, soldier papers are 'difficult to define'.¹¹ While Nelson, Cook and others consistently speak of 'newspapers' rather than 'periodicals', many soldier-journalists themselves were conscious of the distinction.¹² We suggest journals like *Bellica* fit into the history of what contemporaries called the 'little magazine' or 'petite revue': coterie-based publications defined by their periodical appearance but not necessarily, and never exclusively, the daily or weekly bearer of army news.

PUBLISHING IN THE TRENCHES

One of the most impressive origin stories is that of the *Wipers Times*, a magazine produced near the trenches by the Sherwood Foresters as they moved between Belgium and northern France.¹³ It was initially a modest publication: its first issue, appearing in February 1915, had a circulation of no more than 100 copies. Meant to divert, with a kind of 'hilarity that

11 Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers*, 16.

12 'Our little magazine is not a newspaper. Friends have asked why we failed to give an account last month of the Christmas festivities in the hospital [...] But, late indeed though we are with our Christmastime intelligence, we offer no apology. The Gazette is not a newspaper (as we have said before), and therefore has the advantage of being able to deal in affairs which do not concern the public: we are frankly more interested in what happened six weeks ago in the hospital than in what happened yesterday outside.' 'Editorial Notes', *The Gazette of the Third London General Hospital, Wandsworth* 1.5 (February 1916): 108.

13 The *Wipers Times* is the best-known trench magazine. It has been reproduced in facsimile throughout the 20th century (1918, 1988, 2010, 2013) and the story of its publication was turned into a BBC mini-series.

was more often hysterical than natural', the *Wipers Times* contained sham adverts and a variety of humorous poems, parodies, fictional notes, anecdotes and letters.¹⁴ The tone is light-hearted throughout, a characteristic so typical of British trench journalism that some competing papers found they were losing readers as they strayed from the original set-up of topical and cheerful articles.¹⁵ The magazine was intended to appear weekly unless it came to an untimely end by any adverse criticism or attentions by our local rival, Messrs. Hun and Co'.¹⁶

Probably the best-known publication of its kind, the *Wipers Times* usefully recorded how it came into being, in a similarly tongue-in-cheek way. '[P]ick[ing] up a printing outfit (slightly soiled) at a reasonable price' meant that the editors found a damaged press in an abandoned printer's shop in Ypres. Writing of this discovery, the editor Captain F.J. Roberts, stated that 'the [press] were parts of the building remaining, the rest was on top of the press. The type was all over the country-side and he imagines the scene to encapsulate 'the most perfect picture of the effects of Kultur as interpreted by 5.9's ever seen'.¹⁷ We know that the first issues were printed on a Marinoni press in the cellar of the ruined printer's shop before it was destroyed by shelling. A new small treadle machine press was found in Ypres's orphanage soon thereafter, and the editorial office was moved to the Kazematten (Casemates), the ramparts under the Vauban fortifications surrounding the town, behind the church of Saint Jacobs [fig. 1].¹⁸ Ypres was under almost continuous bombardment, yet the production of the magazine must have been a particularly entertaining occupation. 'Our casemate will always be vividly remembered by those who knew it', recalled the editor after the war:

We had a piano—loot from a neighbouring cellar where it had been propping up the remnants of a house—a gramophone, a printing-press and a lot of subalterns. Can anyone wonder that

14 R.J. Roberts, 'How it happened', in *The Wipers Times* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1918), vii. This facsimile can be consulted at <https://sussexthegreatwar.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/wipers.pdf> (accessed 1 August 2016).

15 See also Fuller, *Troop Morale*, 16.

16 'Editorial', *The Wipers Times* 1.1 (12 February 1916): iii.

17 Roberts, 'How it happened', v.

18 The space has now been turned into a brewery producing a beer called 'Wipers Times'. For additional pictures of the Casemates, see the photos posted by the pseudonymous 'Fritz Kempf' on the Forum Eerste Wereldoorlog, 13.01.2010: <http://forumeerstewereldoorlog.be/viewtopic.php?t=18473&highlight=wipers&sid=5f7c12e2484d20063cbd3e1f3bfbbf61> (accessed 1 August 1916).

Fig. 1: the Casemates ('Kazematten'), Ieper 1919. The [redacted] construction was home to the editorial office of the *Wipers Times* in 1916.



we are but shadows of our former selves? When Fritz's love-tokens arrived with greater frequency and precision than we altogether relished we would turn our whole outfit on together. The effect of 'Pantomime Hits' on the piano, 'Dance with Me' on the gramophone, a number of subalterns, and 5'9 and 4'2s on the roof, has to be heard to be realized [as we were] trying to make a little cover for the lads who were holding on to the remnants of Belgium in the teeth of every disadvantage, discomfort and peril.¹⁹

From that fortified, makeshift editorial office the paper was to migrate numerous times, picking up new titles as it went along: first the *New Church Times*, in April 1916, the *Kemmel Times*, in July, the *Somme Times*, later that summer, and, for censorship reasons, the *B.E.F. Times* at the end of the year and throughout 1917.²⁰ In early 1918 both the *Press* and the March issue were lost when the division was forced to retreat. The change of title clearly tells us something about the movements of the 12th service battalion of the Nottingham and Derbyshire Regiment (of which the Sherwood Foresters were a part) along the western frontline, with the team of editors and contributing soldiers dragging "press and type (weighing 3 tons)" from Ypres, to Neuve Eglise, to Kemmel, to Morlacourt on the Somme, and finally to the area around Loos.²¹ In November 1918 the magazine returns as the *Better Times* for two final numbers, living up to the 'threat of carrying on a paper till the Hun is down and out'.²² There were an estimated 107 titles like the *Wipers Times* in the British and Dominion forces, a number that appears small in comparison to the roughly 200 French publications that survive today from a pool of what

19 Roberts, 'How it happened', v.

20 This is not uncommon: Schlesinger reports on a weekly paper, published at the American embarkation camp, which changed its original title, *Coming Over*, into *Coming Back* as soon as the American troops began to return. Schlesinger, 'Khaki Journalists', 358.

21 F.J. Roberts, 'For the Future Historians of the War', *The B.E.F. Times* 2.1 (August 1917): xv.

22 'Editorial'. *The Better Times* 1.2 (December 1918): 3. Bertrand points to an example from the Belgian army: 'Il était normal que *Bastogne à l'Yser* devînt *Bastogne au Rhin* après novembre 1918'. Bertrand, *presse francophone de tranchée*, 3.

is believed to have been over 400 distinct titles.²³ *Le Poilu*, a professional-looking magazine edited by a doctor and ‘aide-major’ in the 108th infantry regiment, began its productive run—48 issues in total—on 15 December 1914. It was printed in Châlons-sur-Marne and, read across France, reached a distribution of 30,000. As its title suggests, it was meant for all those ‘with rugged hearts and brave faces who are holding on from the Vosges to the North Sea and who stand up to the barbarians’.²⁴ Its purpose was to divert. Publications that surfaced in similar circumstances near the Belgian frontlines were equally numerous, especially given the size of the Belgian army: 131 in Dutch and 149 in French.²⁵

Ranging from transitory to professionally printed, British, French and Belgian trench journals were generally produced in quieter sections of the front (quieter, in fact, than the Ypres Salient) in one of three ways. Some journals were handwritten, and the single copy, much like a newsletter, would be handed from soldier to soldier, or pinned onto a tree or YMCA bulletin board. By nature these texts were ephemeral and fragile, and only a few have therefore survived. Magazine manuscripts could also be reproduced in or near the trenches with the use of several small machines, including the hectograph, mimeograph or cyclostyle. *L’Echo du Ravin*, for instance, the journal of the 41st Chasseurs in the French army, was ‘printed on a cyclostyle—and with great effort’.²⁶ Polycopying

23 The statistics are Nelson’s (2010: 175). The discrepancy in number is interesting, for British commentary tends to read trench journalism as a typically British phenomenon. Ian Hislop, for instance, writes about the *Wipers Times* that ‘it is actually firmly in the great tradition of British comic literature’. In the introduction to another facsimile edition published in 2013 one reads, ‘The Victorian ideal of the stoic Briton with the stiff upper lip was a real type, and one from which many men did indeed get inspiration, but there was also a [redacted]ly British counterweight in the form of the belief that no one should **ever** take [redacted] themselves too seriously.’ See *The Wipers Times. The Complete Series of the Famous Wartime Trench Newspaper* (London: Little Books, 2009), vii; and Christopher Westhorp, ‘Introduction’, in *The Wipers Times. The Famous First World [redacted] Trench Newspaper* (London: Conway/Bloomsbury, 2013), n.p.

24 ‘tous les gas / aux rudes coeurs et aux vaillants visages qui se hérissent des Vosges à la mer du Nord et tiennent tête aux barbares’. ‘A tous les Poilus’, *Le Poilu* 1.1 (15 December 1914): 1.

25 Bulthé, *Vlaamse loopgravenpers*, 13. Not all francophone journals are necessarily Walloon.

26 ‘imprimé au Cyclostyle—et à l’huile de coude’. *L’Echo du Ravin* 1.15 (November 1915): 2. With thanks to Patrick Vanleene and Michel Piérard for some of this information.

was a common procedure in this respect, by means of which a master copy was put on top of a metal tray filled with a firm copying paste of gelatine. The imprint left in the gelatine was then manually transferred to separate sheets of paper by pressing the sheet onto the gelatine. Trench journals thus reproduced are recognized by their characteristically purple ink. These production techniques are labour-intensive and produced a few dozen copies at best.²⁷ The third and definitely the costliest scenario is professional printing: either the troops printed the journal themselves on abandoned, loaned, or purchased presses; or the manuscript was sent behind the lines, as was the case for the above-mentioned *Wipers Times* and *Bellica* respectively. 'When [redacted] in 1917 it was resolved by the C.O., Lieut-Col. W.E. James, D.S.O., to establish a printing press on the strength of the unit', the editor of *The Red and White Diamond* writes of the establishment of his periodical, 'the task of securing the plant was entrusted to Pte. (now Sgt.) W.J. Harvey, M.M., who proceeded to London and bought a "Pearl" platen machine, type, and other necessary material'.²⁸ It is clear that distance was of little consequence: when the editor of *Antwerpen en Omheining* [Antwerp and Surroundings] could not find a printing press near his trench in Pervijse, he published an advert in the *Belgische Standaard*, a civilian newspaper, announcing his plans for a new trench journal. 'Immediately we were submerged by letters and cards from everywhere', he writes, 'amongst others from Mr Jos Van Pelt from Borgerhout [...] who was then staying in the Belgian military hospital in Rennes, the capital of Brittany, where there were many printers'.²⁹ The first issue of *Antwerpen en Omheining* was sent to Rennes for printing, travelling roughly 500 kilometres, and first appeared in the trenches of Pervijse in November 1915.

While modes of production and print run varied, the difficulties faced were universal. As Arthur Schlesinger points out in his discussion of American army papers, these struggles often read like fiction. No matter how the magazine was produced, its editorial staff was met with various challenges, including postal delays, paper shortages, (self-) censorship, bankruptcy, the unavailability of ink and printing materials,

27 For more details about this technique, see Bulthé, *Vlaamse loopgravenpers*, 35; Audoin-Rouzeau, 14-18, 26-28.

28 '24th Battalion Press', *The Red & White Diamond* 8 (March 1919): 11.

29 'Aan [redacted] kwamen brieven en kaarten van alle kanten: onder andere van de Heer Jos. Van Pelt van Borgerhout [...] deze bevond zich alsdan in het Belgisch militair gasthuis van Rennes, hoofdstad van Bretagne, waar dus drukkers genoeg te vinden waren.' Bulthé, *Vlaamse loopgravenpers*, 12.

and the unpredictability of war itself, which explains why so many trench journals appeared irregularly and were suddenly discontinued. 'The delay', the editor of the *Wipers Times* wrote of the August 1917 issue, 'was due to an awkward providence and more war than is conducive to the steady production of a paper'.³⁰ These irregularities existed in tandem with shifting wartime conditions, and, in theory, the closer to the frontline the journal was produced, the more irregular its publication. That the soldiers' press was entwined with the war and army life is further evidenced from its moment of disappearance. With a few exceptions, trench journals that made it that far into the war folded in great numbers between September and November 1918. From its conception it was clear that, for a paper like the *Fifth Glo'ster Gazette*, 'a long life [...] would entail a long war'. Similar feelings motivated the editor of *La Fourragère*, who found himself unable to bring out a final issue of his journal after the war: 'It is no longer the same, you will understand, you my old friends from the front. Demobilization, the return to civilian life, pre-occupation with other cares, with earning a living, with the joys and miseries of home life, mean that the state of mind required to create a front-line newspaper no longer exists.'³¹

TEXTUAL COMMUNITIES: EDITORS, READERS AND DISTRIBUTION

Trench journalism in the First World War was, as Audoin-Rouzeau and Nelson suggest, never a mass phenomenon. In the words of a contemporary, a soldier's magazine typically 'moves and has its being in a narrow sphere [...] like a tiny gold-fish that must disport itself meekly within the crystal bowl'.³² That narrow sphere was composed of what Fuller termed an 'inward-looking' army community that made up the

30 'Editorial', *The Wipers Times* 2.1 (August 1917): 3.

31 'Bricks from the Editor's Pack', *The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette* 12 (May 1916): 12. Raoul Aubaud, 'L'Adieu', *La Fourragère: Journal des Poilus du 51ième d'Infanterie* 17 (August 1919): 1. ['Il s'en est fallu de peu que je ne publie ce 17e et dernier numéro de la Fourragère. Ce n'est plus ça, vous me comprenez vous autres, mes anciens camarades du front. Démobilisé, rentré dans la vie civile, aux prises avec d'autres soucis, avec l'exercice de sa profession, avec les joies et misères du foyer, on ne se trouve plus dans l'état d'esprit nécessaire pour faire un journal du front.']

32 'An Ideal Army Paper', *The Cologne Post: A Daily Newspaper Published by the Army of the Rhine* 22 (25 April 1919): 2.

editors, contributors and readers of any given publication.³³ It is well-established that the editors were educated, low-ranking officers, often from a belletristic background and of urban, middle-class origins.³⁴ Owing to increased literacy, mass volunteering, and conscription, the First World War was mediated to an unprecedented degree 'through printed and written text'.³⁵ The reading public of the trench press was equally democratic. Nelson points out how editors wrote with the 'pre-knowledge' or 'repertoire' of the reader in mind—the terms are Wolfgang Iser's—but magazines were also free of charge or relatively inexpensive, 'simply sold at a price that permitted its survival'.³⁶ Indeed, shared and read out loud, the discursive voice of many trench journals was 'collective rather than individual'.³⁷ The mission statement for *Le Poilu*, for instance, read: 'The only purpose of this paper is to inform our friends about regimental life and to strengthen, to draw tighter still if possible, the ties of friendship which unite them.'³⁸

While it is true that trench journals have conventionally been understood in excluding terms—'by soldiers for soldiers'³⁹—we do not mean to suggest that contribution and readership did not extend beyond

33 Fuller, *Troop Morale*, 15. See also president Clemenceau to the editor of *Le Poilu* du 6-9: 'Votre oeuvre est belle puisqu'elle attise l'enthousiasme de nos poilus et qu'elle contribuera à la Victoire dans sa petite sphere.' Quoted in Weygand, 'Presse de tranchées', 422.

34 Nelson, 'Soldier Newspapers', 170 and Audoin-Rouzeau, *14-18*, 14. This confirms Santanu Das's claim that the literary consciousness that survived through print belonged mainly to middle-class – white – men. Das himself points to two colonial journals. Santanu Das, 'Sepoys, Sahibs and Babus: India, the Great War and Two Colonial Journals', in Hammond and Towheed, *Publishing in the First World War*, 61-77.

35 Towheed and King, *Reading and the First World War*, 1. On the reading practices of the front soldier, see also Edmund King, 'E.W. Hornung's Unpublished "Diary," the YMCA, and the Reading Soldier in the First World War', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 57.3 (2014): 361-387.

36 See also: James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History* 30.1 (1999): 203-215. 'chaque feuille était simplement vendue au prix qui lui permettait de survivre'. Bertrand, *presse francophone de tranchée*, 14. Bertrand estimates that the majority of the francophone Belgian journals were available for free.

37 Fuller, *Troop Morale*, 4.

38 'Cette feuille n'aura d'autre but que de renseigner nos amis sur la vie du regiment et de resserrer, avantage encore s'il est possible, les liens d'amitié qui les unissent.' Quoted in Audoin-Rouzeau, *14-18*, 18.

39 Nelson, 'German Soldier Newspapers and their Allied Counterparts', 217.

the particular unit in which it was created, especially in the case of more professionally-printed (and hence more popular) magazines. This is rarely pointed out in the scholarship, but it becomes clear when we read across linguistic boundaries. There are four additional categories of readers to be identified. First, Allied magazines were sometimes read across army regiments and divisions, as it was not uncommon for editors to send copies of their journal to fellow editors in neighbouring trenches. These would be listed in the journal itself, in sections entitled 'Our Contemporaries' or 'A travers la presse poilu'. Copies also traversed language boundaries: *Le Poilu*, for instance, sported a section on 'Les Australiens sur Notre Front' in which it assessed Australian magazines. In the British army, certain unit magazines, like the *Grey Brigade*, even travelled across continents: printed in Dorking, 'the paper goes to the ends of the earth [with] regular readers in British Columbia, United States, Egypt, India and South Africa'.⁴⁰ This appears to have been especially the case for training camp and hospital magazines, two places that typically housed a wide variety of soldiers who, once dispersed, wanted to stay in touch with their former community.

A second readership comprised family members at the home front. It can be assumed that above-mentioned publications such as the *Wipers Times* were sent behind the lines. The more popular ones were sold (at a higher price) at bookstands and military tailors in London, Paris, and beyond. That the home front was familiar with the army's periodicals is evident from coverage in the mainstream press. We have already hinted at two examples: *Antwerpen en Omheining's* advertisement in the *Belgische Standaard* and Apollinaire's short history of his own trench gazette for the *Mercure de France*. The *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Times* also brought the trench press into the spotlight. Relatedly, archiving measures undertaken during the war suggest a third possible readership: librarians and military historians.⁴¹ Through advertisements circulated in the (trench) press, editors were urged to send their ephemeral journals home for preservation. The initiative to store them in 'a few safe places' came from, among others, library staff at Oxford and Cambridge, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the British Museum Library, and from the War Office itself, which issued a General Routine Order to that

40 'Amateur Journalism in War Time', *The Grey Brigade* 11 (5 June 1915): 4.

41 The editors of the trench press were often conscious of this: the *Wipers Times*, for instance, carries a section 'For Future Historians of War', 2.1 (15 August 1917): xi-xxviii.

purpose in 1917.⁴² These collecting and conserving efforts were often in tune with the establishment of national collections of war ephemera: the Imperial War Museum in London in early 1917, the Australian War Museum in October 1917, and the *Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine*, which started as the private collection of a Parisian family.⁴³

A final group of readers are specific to journals that were established to serve the needs of a particular home community. They were meant to share news of that place and its soldiers dispersed across the frontlines. That this particular kind of magazine was so prevalent in the Belgian army was a result of the country's political situation, which also explains the disproportionately high number of magazines for such a small army. Soldiers' communication with the occupied home front was exceedingly difficult, and often carried out via the neutral Netherlands.⁴⁴ *Antwerpen en Omheining*, by its very name, is such a home community publication, and so is *Ik Ben Roeland* [I am Roeland], an outspokenly leftist trench journal for soldiers from Ghent named after the city's famous bell which had been memorialized in a 1877 poem by Albrecht Rodenbach. Writing of his new venture, the editor of *Ik Ben Roeland*, 'Goetgebuer van 't Rabot', commented:⁴⁵

It's true, we have been knocked about like a host of sparrows and are at present spread across different countries. This difficulty explains why so many have hesitated to get the ball rolling. But difficult does not mean impossible. Furthermore, our seclusion is another reason to found a trench journal for the *Gentenaren* [the inhabitants of Ghent]. It will bring news from our fellow

42 The quote is by Cambridge librarian Francis Jenkinson, in a letter to an army colonel. Quoted in Pegum, 'British Army Trench Journals', 132.

43 See Pegum, 'British Army Trench Journals', 131, and J.M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Morning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 80-81.

44 The creation of networks of communication between occupied and free Belgium from 1915 onwards saw 'large-scale smuggling of private correspondence between occupied families and their relatives at the front'. The best-known secret postal service was *Le Mot du Soldat*, and we can assume that a small number of trench journals found their way across the political divide through these networks. Emmanuel Debruyne, 'Forbidden Reading in Occupied Countries: Belgium and France, 1914-1918', in Towheed and King, *Reading and the First World War*, 227-241, here 237.

45 The editor's pen name is a reference to this idea of the community: literally 'good neighbour of Rabot', a Ghent neighbourhood.

townspeople who are staying in France, England and Holland, and it will keep us in the know about what is happening in our beloved city.⁴⁶

These magazines sometimes started off as epistolary publications, that is as a set of letters addressed to the soldiers: 'We can act as a collective letter', added the editor of *Ik Ben Roeland*, 'in which the news, received by a few, is communicated to all our fellow townspeople'.⁴⁷ The monthly 'Nieuws uit Gent' [News from Ghent] section is thus assembled from fragments taken from the letters soldiers received at the front. This form would enhance the empathy between writer and addressee. *Ik Ben Roeland* was available at no cost to all mobilized inhabitants of Ghent, provided they had proof of address (''tis easy to claim that one is Ghentian').⁴⁸ It became a key textual link between soldiers in the trenches and their families in occupied Belgium.

What this extensive readership—military, civilian, imperial—indicates, is something of the extent to which trench journals circulated locally and globally, and the key role the postal services played in this. The use of the post was free to serving soldiers.⁴⁹ But the scope also gives an idea of the professionalism of some of these initiatives. Especially in the French army, editors appear to have been well organized. Their journals were often supported by so-called war godmothers ('marraines de guerre'), like Jeanne Landre for *Bellica* or Agnès Rossolin for *Le Bochofage*,

46 "'t Is waar, we zijn net als een groep musschen uit een geslagen geworden en thans over verschillende landen verspreid. Dit is voorzeker een moeielijkheid geweest waarom velen hebben gearzeld de hand aan het werk te slaan. Moeilijk mag echter niet als onmogelijk beschouwd worden. Daarenboven is onze afzondering een reden te meer om een frontblad voor de Gentenaren te stichten. Het zal immers nieuws geven van onze stadgenooten in Frankrijk, Engeland en Holland verblijvend en ons voornamelijk op de hoogte houden van hetgeen in onze geliefde moederstad gebeurt.' Goetgebuer van 't Rabot, 'Ons Doel en Onze Werking', *Ik Ben Roeland* 1 (October 1917): 1.

47 'We kunnen dus als een gemeenschappelijken brief dienst doen, waarin het nieuws, door enkelen ontvangen, aan alle stadgenooten wordt medegedeeld.' Goetgebuer van 't Rabot, 'Ons Doel en Onze Werking', *Ik Ben Roeland* 1 (October 1917): 1.

48 "'t Is anders wel gemakkelijk zeggen dat men Gentenaar is!' Goetgebuer van 't Rabot, 'Ons Doel en Onze Werking', *Ik Ben Roeland* 1 (October 1917): 1.

49 'The history of reading and textual circulation in the First World War is indistinguishable from the history of the postal service.' Towheed and King, *Reading and the First World War*, 11.

who defended the journal's interests on the home front.⁵⁰ In addition, the editor of *Le Poilu du 6-9* founded the Association des Journaux du Front in 1917 with the aim of fostering exchanges between the contributors of the increasing number of journals that circulated in the army. Yet the task of managing a quickly growing organization proved incompatible with the demands of active warfare, and he passed his responsibilities on to Georges Berthoulat, editor of the civilian newspaper *La Liberté*, and Paul Reboul and Pierre Chapelle, both former editors of the trench press who collaborated at the Service des Journaux de Tranchées in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. André Charpentier, editor of the trench magazine *Le Bochofage* [fig. 2] and later author of the first study of trench journals, *Feuilles blue horizon 1914-1918* (1935), founded the Amicale des Journaux du Front in 1919.⁵¹ Marshal Foch became its honorary president. Replacing the Association des Journaux du Front, the Amicale in turn set up its own magazine, *L'Ex-Press du Front* and organized reunions. In a speech at the Amicale's banquet of 28 April 1921, honorary president of the society Raymond Poincaré explains that during his presidency he received all the trench journals, and read them all too. They gave him the opportunity to gauge the allegedly excellent morale of the soldiers—'les poilus'—even when he feared that it was affected by long bouts of inactivity in the trenches.⁵²

PERIODICAL PRECURSORS

The military periodical press has a long history. In 1494, under Charles VIII, there circulated a newsletter relating the events of the expedition of the king in Italy, and similar publications appeared in periodical form in Napoleon's army during campaigns in Italy in 1796 and Egypt in 1798. The first soldier periodicals in German and Russian were produced in 1812, quickly followed by the Prussian *Feldzeitung*, and the *Pekinger deutsche Zeitung*, which was issued in the field during the Boxer Rebellion

50 Godmothers also existed in England, but to a much smaller extent. Marysa Demoor, Birgit Van Puymbroeck and Marianne Van Remoortel, 'La revue des mairaines (1916-1917), een tijdschrift voor oorlogsmeters en hun petekinderen', *TS: Tijdschrift voor Tijdschriftstudies* 36 (2014): 119-138.

51 A similar though much less formal association was founded in Britain after the war: 'Some eighteen regimental journals have now become members of the Association of Regimental Newspapers, and the second meeting of the association is to take place at the Royal United Service Institution, at 11 o'clock one June 3, with Colonel Sir Arthur Leatham, C.M.G., in the chair.' See: 'Regimental Papers', *The Cologne Post: A Daily Newspaper Published by the Army of the Rhine* 667 (31 May 1921): 2.

52 Charpentier, *Livre d'Or*, 29-30.

Fig. 2: The first editorial staff of the French trench journal *Le Bochofage* in July 1916 (*Le Bochofage*, Issue 23, August 1918). André Charpentier is seated in the middle. [With permission of ProQuest and the Imperial War Museums.]



in China. Most major conflicts in the history of the United States saw the emergence of a soldiers' press, including the War of Independence (1775-1783), the Mexican War (1846-1848), the Civil War (1861-1865), and the Spanish-American War (1898).⁵³ In fact, periodical publications surfaced in armies across the globe: too poor to attend Oxford, Rudyard Kipling procured a first job as assistant editor for the English-language *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore and drew on this experience in the Transvaal in 1901, where he helped edit the journal *Friend* during the Boer War.⁵⁴ While this is by no means an exhaustive overview, it serves to indicate that the need for a periodical publication was natural for those who found themselves far away from their families (often for the first time) and engaged in warfare. But it was only in the First World War that trench journalism exploded in numbers: never before had warfare known a stalemate of several years, which produced circumstances relatively favourable to the production of periodicals.⁵⁵

These precursors would not have been known to most soldiers in the First World War.⁵⁶ They modelled their efforts in journalism after comical and satirical magazines, such as *Le Canard Enchaîné* in France and, especially, *Punch* in England. With its focus on Britain, much scholarship on trench journalism over-emphasizes this comical element, which is only rarely found in Belgian and German trench journals. A transnational approach, then, uncovers other possible sources of origin and affinity, such as, we propose, school magazines. There exists a long tradition in the scholarship of the First World War that sees the conflict as fostering a public school ethos.⁵⁷ Before 1914 the lower ranks of the British army were predominantly populated by men from the working classes who enlisted for economic reasons. With the First World War all ranks became more diversified and included many former public school and

53 Schlesinger, 'Khaki Journalists', 351. Charpentier, *Livre d'Or*, 11-12.

54 For a detailed history of the genre, see Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers*, 18.

55 The example of the *Wipers Times*, with its changing titles, underlines that attrition warfare also included movement along the frontline, which complicated the production of magazines. In the editorial to the final number published in December 1918, the editor attributes delays in publication to 'our nomadic existence'. 'Editorial', *The Better Times* 1.2 (December 1918): 3.


56 The soldiers' press continued its existence in conflicts after the First World War, including the Spanish Civil War, WWII, and the Vietnam War.

57 Notably, Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007) and Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

university students, particularly at junior officer level.⁵⁸ It is somewhat surprising that the link between serial publications in the trenches and in public schools and universities has not been emphasised more, especially since the connection appeared self-evident to contemporaries at the time. Writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1916, E.B. Osborn suggests that ‘trench journals are quite nearly related to unofficial school papers or to the journalistic rattles, making a cheerful noise, which sometimes lived for the whole of Eight Weeks at the Oxford that was, that never more may be’.⁵⁹

For the English writer J.R. Ackerley, ‘the Army with its male relationships was simply an extension of my public school’.⁶⁰ The analogy between battalion and school life relies on similar interests in sports and the game ethic, on parallel conceptions of masculinity (and homosociality) and on the role the magazine played in fostering a sense of male comradeship and collective identity based on a shared experience.⁶¹ In both a military and school context, magazines, with their characteristic mix of drawings, gossip, anecdotes, as well as first attempts at literary writing, served as the mouthpiece for that experience. The analogy further helps contextualise the ‘cheerful noise’ in the print culture of the British and French trenches. That these journals also look much like school magazines [fig. 3 and 4] was already suggested by the editors of the *Bulletin des Armées de la République* in 1917. Shoddily produced, the

58 Indeed, many of the figures that now dominate the canon of WWI art and literature —the protagonists of Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975)— had enjoyed elite educations before enlisting: Robert Graves at Rugby and Oxford, Siegfried Sassoon at Marlborough and Cambridge, Charles Sorley at Marlborough and Jena, and the Nash brothers at St Paul’s and Wellington. Edmund Blunden, who was educated at Christ’s Hospital and Oxford, called himself ‘a schoolboy officer’. See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 260.

59 Osborn, himself a patriotic journalist and  at one-time literary editor of the *Morning Post*, wrote with a good knowledge of the journalistic métier. He was so well-known in journalistic circles that, in *Boon* (1915), H.G. Wells made him the target of his critique of the profession of letters in wartime London. E.B. Osborn, ‘Trench Journals’, *Times Literary Supplement* 769 (12 October 1916): 482.

60 Quoted in Fussell, *Modern Memory*, 273.

61 The same set of values underlies Robert Baden-Powell’s immensely popular *Scouting for Boys* (1908), the first handbook of the Scout Movement which was partly inspired by Baden-Powell’s experiences in the Second Boer War (1899-1902). Chapters include ‘Camp Life’, ‘Endurance and chivalry’, ‘Saving life and patriotism’, and ‘Scouting games’.



Fig. 3: front cover of *Unmuzzled: The Wasp* (15 June 1891)

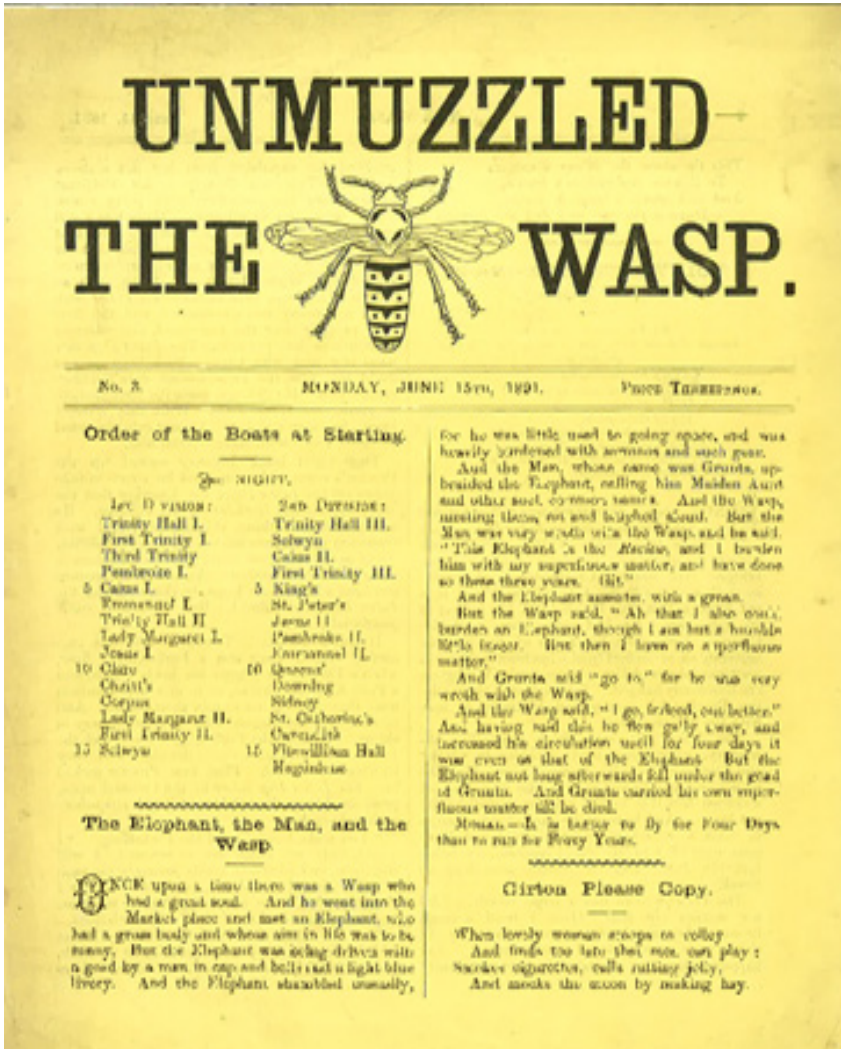
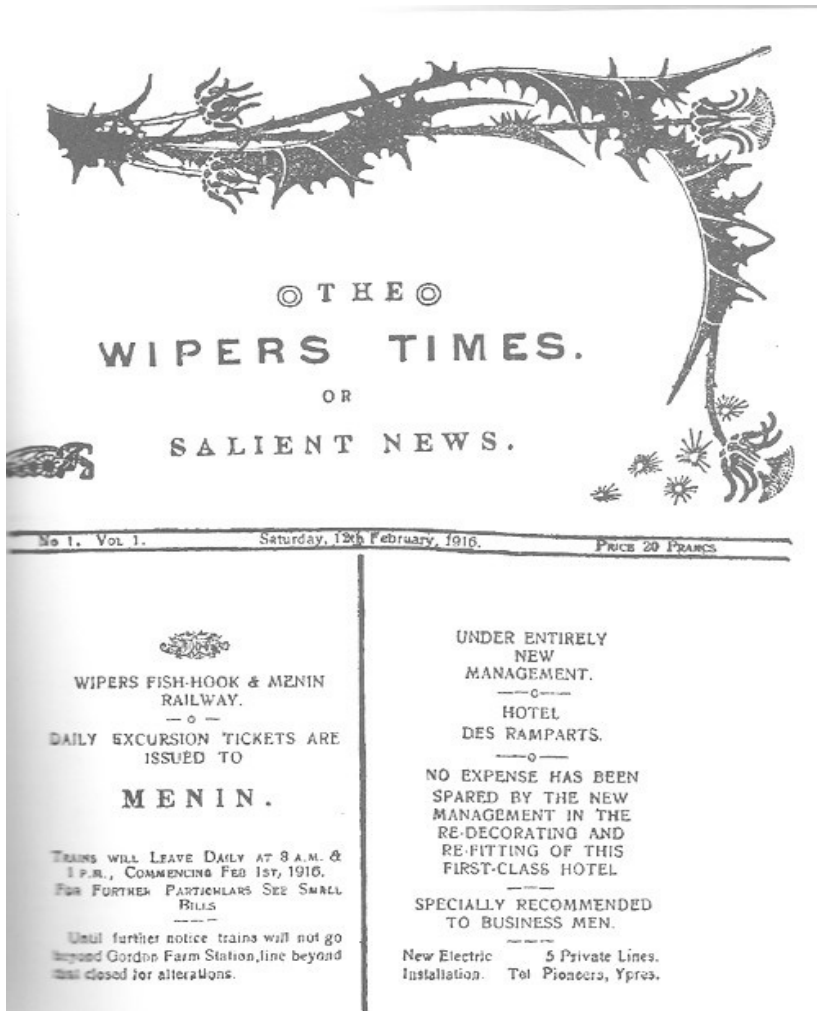




Fig. 4: front cover of the **Wipers Times** (12 February 1916)



average trench journal, they felt, 'excels at narrating the local anecdote, accompanied by a drawing in the margin, in the same naïve way as that of a schoolboy illustrating his notebooks. That method suits the trench gazette.'⁶²

The *Wipers Times* is, again, an interesting point-in-case. While little is known of the education of its two editors—apart from the self-proclaimed notion that 'none of us were writing men' (they were engineers) and that the magazine constituted 'our first efforts at journalism'⁶³—its most prolific contributor, the poet Gilbert Frankau, had launched and edited a school magazine, *The X*, at Eton.⁶⁴ When the magazine was suppressed by the headmaster, Frankau collected his satiric verse in *Eton Echoes* (1901). The affinity between periodical publications at the front and in schools becomes especially tangible in the case of the *Cambridge Review*, which opened up its pages to the contributors of the *G.O.C.B. Chronicle*, a magazine published by cadets in training at the university: 'The war has swept away almost all the junior members of the university [...] It is proposed, with the sanction of the Officers commanding the different Battalions, to open the columns of the Review to the Cadets.'⁶⁵ Similar tactics shaped French army periodicals, like *Bellica*, which were awarded an academic honour after the war. 'One found in them', president Poincaré stressed at a banquet for trench journalists held in 1921, a 'national youthful simplicity'.⁶⁶

If the link with school magazines provides a way to interpret the community, lay-out, style and humour of the British and French *presse poilu*, it also importantly explains the many religious undertones that are

62 'Il excelle à narrer l'anecdote locale, soulignée par un dessin en marge, avec le même art naïf de celui qu'un écolier illustrant ses cahiers de classe. C'est bien le procédé qui convient à une gazette des tranchées.' 'Le sceau à charbon', *Bulletin des Armées de la République* 3.242 (18 April 1917): 13.

63 Roberts, 'How it happened', vii.

64 Unlike the editors, Frankau is to be traced in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. His contributions to the trench press are not mentioned in the ODNB, but they were important enough for Frankau to refer to them in his autobiography, *Self-Portrait*: 'the origin of this particular sheet [*Wipers Times*], which changed its title whenever we shifted to a new part of the line, had been the discovery by an enterprising Sherwood Forester, F.J. Roberts, who afterwards commanded the battalion and is still among my best friends'. Gilbert Frankau, *Gilbert Frankau's Self-Portrait: a Novel of his own Life* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1939), 190.

65 Adv. 'The Cambridge Review', *G.O.C.B. Chronicle* 2.3 (June 1918): 67.

66 'on retrouvait en elles la simplicité jeunesse nationale'. Quoted in Charpentier, *Livre d'Or*, 30.

so typical of Belgian trench journals but that are almost absent elsewhere.⁶⁷ Contrary to its neighbouring nations (with especially France priding itself on being a secular state), Belgium still organized catholic education in the early twentieth century. The statistics are revealing: nearly half of the editors of the Walloon and Flemish trench press were churchmen, often teachers.⁶⁸ One such person who served in both capacities was Louis Leusch, a chaplain in the Belgian army, former abbot and teacher in the seminar at Sint-Truiden, and editor of three trench journals, *Saint-Trond poilufié*, *Journal des poilus de la Garde d'honneur de Verviers*, and *Amon nos autes*.⁶⁹ Carrying such head masts as 'Dieu et Patrie' or 'God en Vaderland', trench papers like those of Leusch existed as a means to maintain contact with former students and parishioners. Bulthé even goes so far as to argue that nearly all Flemish papers were 'in catholic hands'.⁷⁰

CONCLUSION: "ALL THESE EPHEMERAL THINGS"

In 1917 the poet Ezra Pound wrote a series of 14 articles for the radical socialist magazine *New Age*. He was already contributing notes on high culture under two pseudonyms, which is a telling gesture at a time when newsprint rationing forced the magazine to cut down to 16 pages. But in his new series Pound left high culture and instead studied a set of popular periodicals, including *Blackwoods*, *The Strand*, and *Punch*, in order to identify what he called the 'contemporary mentality' of the nation.⁷¹ Pound's assessments were characteristically harsh, but the point is that his efforts are similar to those made in the scholarship on front journalism, which puts publications like the *Wipers Times*, *Le Poilu* or *Ik ben Roeland* to the task of retrieving a history of emotions and mentalities from the trenches. Foregrounding their status as periodicals, this essay has argued for the importance of looking at the phenomenon of the trench

67 Major Walter Nicolai, who directed the Feldpressestelle, issued to the editors of the trench press the following directive on 24 May 1916: 'exclusion of everything that could be seen as having a religious [...] direction'. Quoted in Nelson, 'German Soldier Newspapers and their Allied Counterparts', 214.

68 Bertrand, *presse francophone de tranchée*, 21. Bulthé, *Vlaamse loopgravenpers*, 28.

69 Bertrand, *presse francophone de tranchée*, 17.

70 Bulthé, *Vlaamse loopgravenpers*, 18

71 For the first installment, see Ezra Pound, 'Studies in Contemporary Mentality I: The Hibberd', *The New Age* 21.16 (16 August 1917): 348-349.

press on its own terms, rather than scanning the journals for the ideas they contain, for the way in which they articulate and allow us access to what Audoin-Rouzeau called the 'national sentiment'.⁷²

There is no blueprint for the trench press, but the circumstances in which trench journals came into being were equivalent for all three armies discussed. The initiative came from the men in the trenches themselves, in most cases educated men with previous experience in (student) journalism. The periodical took shape around an army community, but its readership, we suggest further, crucially extended beyond that coterie, at times moving across national and linguistic borders. In fact, our cross-cultural focus has rounded out these generalizations in important ways, proposing that trench journals differ not only (and naturally) between single publications but also among regions and nations. In the Belgian army, for example, the majority of trench journals were set up around home communities, and French editors were organized in associations that did not, at least to that extent, exist in Britain or Belgium. These differences also make themselves felt in the textual affinities we trace between the trench and school press. Set up around a similar hierarchical, all-male community, school magazines help contextualize the satirical aspect of many British, and the religious imprint of many Belgian, publications. But trench journals remain, finally, as E.B. Osborn suggested in the *TLS* in 1916, 'ephemeral things' and the war always had the last word.⁷³ Thus, *Le Courrier des Sapes* came to an untimely end on 24 September 1915:

An unfortunate explosion of a shell destroyed the polycopier dough that a liaison agent was carrying in his canvas haversack. It was a disaster. Not only did issue no. 4 never appear but the *Courrier des Sapes* was gloriously died on the battlefield.⁷⁴

72 Audoin-Rouzeau, *14-18*, 1.

73 Osborn, 'Trench Journals', 482.

74 'un malencontreux éclat d'obus déchiqueta la pâte à polycopier qu'un agent de liaison portait dans sa musette. Ce fut un désastre: non seulement le n° 4 ne put paraître, mais le *Courrier des Sapes* tombait dans le champs d'honneur.' Charpentier, *Livre d'Or*, 84.