



## **Was he downhearted' How a scientist dealt with four years of internment**

**by Sarah Kimbell & Rowan Pease**

**2020-09-04 08:54:08**

Thousands of British civilians were held in the Ruhleben internment camp near Berlin during the First World War. They were allowed a large degree of self-determination and established a miniature version of British male society behind the barbed wire. This included a flourishing bureaucracy and organisations promoting educational, cultural, religious and sporting activities, alongside less worthy pursuits such as gambling and drinking. The centenary of the opening of the camp prompted an [article in the BBC Magazine](#), to which readers responded with [memories of relatives who were interned there](#). At that time Derek Richards published his transcription and interpretation of the diaries kept by his father, Wyndham Richards, in the camp ([see separate article](#)). We have followed this story with particular interest, because our grandfather (Michael Stewart Pease) was also interned at Ruhleben and we have inherited the diaries he kept there, together with many letters and photographs from that era and the recollections he wrote subsequently. Interleaved between the pages of the diaries is a diverse collection of documents that provide very tactile evidence of our grandfather's day-to-day camp life: these range from the minutes of committee meetings and programmes for cultural events to administrative artefacts such as notifications from the parcels office and a receipt from the camp dentist. We have now transcribed and annotated the diaries and letters, and assembled them in a book which will be published later this year.

The title of this post paraphrases a catchphrase of the time ("Are we downhearted?") that became a rallying call to those interned in Ruhleben Camp. In public gatherings the response to the question was 'needless to say' a simple and resounding "No!", but the diaries provide a much more personal and subtle account of how an individual coped with his incarceration. Science played a key role in this. Michael had graduated in Natural Sciences from Cambridge University in 1913 and had commenced a scholarship at the university's School of Agriculture. He was visiting Jena when war broke out, and he found himself trapped in Germany. Shortly after the start of his internment a meeting of potential teachers was held to establish the framework for a Ruhleben Camp School. The school proved a great success, not least because of the wealth of academic talent amongst the internees. The prospectus for the summer term of 1916, for example, lists 12 departments offering 287 classes.

Michael was a stalwart of the Biological Sciences Department, representing it on the school committee, providing lectures on heredity and botany and (with his great friend Arthur Lechmere) establishing a laboratory for practical classes and original research. The laboratory became remarkably well equipped, including eight microscopes, several incubators, an embedding bath and a microtome for cutting thin sections. Obtaining the necessary reagents was a particular problem, but Michael was aided in this by his parents' energetic lobbying of

the Prisoners of War Department in Downing Street.

Michael's diaries reveal how his scientific teaching and research provided a structure to his life that helped him endure his internment. Further solace was provided by a voracious appetite for literature and ideas, and by music, which was performed to a high standard in the camp (whose number included many professional musicians who had been attending the Bayreuth Festival in 1914). His involvement in the arts included co-producing a performance of a Tudor parody *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. His judgement was that they "made a good job of it", although a heckler's point of view (in Wyndham Richards' diary) was: "Acting pretty awful. We had a gorgeous time making nuisances of ourselves".

In December 1915, Michael received a letter from Helen Wedgwood, a student at Newnham College, Cambridge. She had noticed him at political and social events in Cambridge (where both were members of the Cambridge University Fabian Society), but he confessed that he had no recollection of their meeting. Their letters express many common interests, and chronicle the growing friendship between them. After his repatriation at the end of the war the friendship blossomed into love and they married at the beginning of 1920. This marked a union between political families: Michael's father (Edward Reynolds Pease) was one of the founders of the Fabian Society and Helen's father (Josiah Clement Wedgwood) was an MP who defected from the Liberal to the Labour Party shortly after the war. Helen and Michael's wartime correspondence provides a very vibrant and immediate commentary on left-wing political attitudes of the time, including views on pacifism, women's suffrage, the trade union movement, hopes for the post-war era and (initial) optimism in reaction to events in Russia.

Michael's experiences shine a light on the cooperation and goodwill that existed between some British and German civilians during the First World War. Contacts were established between his family and the Neumeisters of Jena, whose son Walter had been captured early in the conflict and sent to England as a prisoner of war. This led to each family taking an interest in the welfare of the other's incarcerated offspring ' for example supplying food parcels and paying visits. Michael was even allowed out of the camp to stay with the Neumeisters for two weeks in 1917 and seven weeks in 1918. Attempts to obtain early release on both sides failed, but a strong friendship grew between the families which continued throughout their lives. Michael's correspondence with German academics is also marked by its civility, and they were supportive in his scientific endeavours. He stayed in touch and attempted to reciprocate after the war, when German society was suffering considerable hardships. This is evidenced in a sad and prophetic letter from Erwin Baur, Professor of Botany (Genetics) at the Institute of Agriculture in Potsdam, sent to Michael in December 1919:

"Yesterday the food parcel which some time ago you said you would send me has arrived here. I thank you so much for your kindness. Since I personally do not suffer any hardship, I have shared out the contents among the gardeners of the institute, some of whom are in dire need. I find it a bit strange of the English nation that on the one hand they block the ports and the docks and thus cause a famine and a severe crisis in the big cities, and on the other they found charitable societies to organise food relief. My feeling is that England and France are spreading the seeds of evil. You have no idea how hatred and bitterness is growing among our people in regard of the extortion and the chicanery forced on us through this 'peace treaty'".

Reading in Michael's diaries about the intrigues of committees, the goods he receives from home, or anxiously awaiting the delivery of dresses for *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, it is sometimes hard to remember that the world was at war, and that his younger brother (awarded the Military Cross with Bar) was serving in France. The sadness is there though, and the diaries are punctuated by news of the loss of close friends and relatives.

This toll continued after war ' when he was particularly affected by the loss of Arthur Lechmere to the Spanish Flu. Michael Pease was undoubtedly one of the lucky ones, and went on to lead a life enriched by his scientific curiosity, his strong bond with Helen and their lifelong commitment to the Labour Party and local politics.

### Further reading:

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## A View from a Bridge - Riqueval, 2 October 1918. David McClellan and images of victory

by Philip Dutton

2018-10-01 11:52:12

If the sustained upturn in Allied fortunes occurring during the '100 Days' of offensive operations on the Western Front after the Battle of Amiens could be expressed visually, no better image might perhaps be found than 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant David McClellan's study of 137th Infantry Brigade at Riqueval Bridge, near Bellenglise, north of St Quentin.

The photograph is as familiar as it is impressive. Taken on the wet morning of Wednesday 2 October 1918<sup>[1]</sup>, it shows serried ranks of mud-stained infantry, misaligned precariously upon the steep (and no doubt slippery) embankment of the St Quentin Canal as they are addressed by their Commander, Brigadier-General John Vaughan Campbell VC. The victors are recorded at the precise location of their spectacular triumph, three days previously, when on the early morning of Sunday 29 September, leading the 46<sup>th</sup> (North Midland) Division's attack, they captured, intact, the Riqueval Bridge, crossed the St Quentin Canal and pierced the supposedly impregnable German defensive system known as the Hindenburg Line <sup>[2]</sup>. The faces of hundreds of temporary warriors, citizen soldiers, gaze at the camera; some figures are still bearing specialist equipment associated with deep, wet-ditch assault crossings - life-belts, draw lines, Lewis guns; inevitably, soldiers being soldiers

(however temporary), enemy 'souvenirs' are displayed enthusiastically.

McClellan[3] in his role as an Official British photographer took at least nine separate studies at the bridge or in nearby Bellenglise that morning[4]. These included shots of the canal area (showing surviving footbridges) and the infantrymen assembling (or dispersing) for the photo shoot. Other photographs show 137th Brigade Staff and Band in Bellenglise and British forces symbolically passing across the bridge, and advancing eastwards in the direction of a now retreating enemy.

But, having captured these images McClellan's working day, it would appear, was just beginning. If the IWM records are correct, that same Wednesday he somehow contrived a difficult trip to Abbeville, over 80 miles (c. 138 kilometres) distant from Riqueval Bridge, over roads choked with advancing Allied forces and vehicles - there to record other, contrasting, images of the consequences of victorious Allied progress: German prisoners assembled in a vast Clearance Depot, in the town. He took at least seven photographs here[5] three of which were awe-inspiring studies of the prisoners '*en masse*'; impossibly large and densely packed crowds of a now powerless enemy, taken from a high angle above his subjects. He also took at least four separate 'portrait' photos of individual German prisoners reminiscent in their searching detail of the type of photographic propaganda records produced by the Germans in relation to their equally large bag of Allied prisoners in the wake of the dramatic initial successes of the March 1918 (?Spring?) Offensive.

## *The photographer and his pictures*

The impressive power of the Riqueval and Abbeville images owes much to the creative genius and technical skill of McClellan as a photographer. His achievements are made all the more remarkable when we consider the equipment available to him: 5 x 4 glass plates, by modern standards not overly sensitive to light, which would have needed a 'longish' exposure, depending on the brightness of the day; anything from half to one or two seconds requiring his subjects to be very still to avoid movement or blurring (particularly of the face). The heavy wooden camera, glass plates and metal and wood tripod had then all to be wrestled to the photographer's chosen viewpoint.[6] And in this regard McClellan displayed a particular knack, clearly evident during the Allied advance during autumn 1918, of selecting locations and suitable vantage points from which he could convey the epic scale of military operations and colossal numbers of troops involved. In the process he created visual records hugely supportive of propaganda activities of the Beaverbrook's Ministry of Information. At the same time, his vast group studies (and individual portraits) were essentially humane and their production, to a degree, acknowledged the public's appetite for viewing 'crowd scenes' - the popularity of which had been rapidly appreciated by moving film makers well before 1914. McClellan's studies of 137th Brigade in particular replicated, in stills photography, a by now well established component of the popular local 'cinema picture?', which quite deliberately included portraits of individuals whose likenesses could or might be recognised.[7]

The photograph of the Stafford Brigade at Riqueval Bridge, chock full of detail (Campbell's hunting horn, tucked into his tunic, may be discerned by careful use of a magnifying glass) celebrates a vitally important military success and directly acknowledges the work of the ordinary soldiers who took part in the action. The view from the bridge is, from the Allied perspective wholly positive, and the fog and smoke (which so valuably aided the attackers on the morning of the 29 September) have now cleared to reveal a vision of a war that may well indeed be nearing its end. The Staffords at Riqueval and the German prisoners at Abbeville, as depicted on 2 October 1918, shared, for that day at least, the same status as 'survivors'. A temporary status that would be fatally compromised, for some, through their involvement in the final actions of the October and November fighting, and the unavoidable and indiscriminate fatalities associated with active service - accidents and illness, the latter represented in its most virulent form by the resurgence of the deadly 'Spanish influenza' pandemic.

## References

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## ---- NOTES -----

[1]Weather conditions confirmed by War Diary of 6/North Staffordshire Regiment, WO95/2685/2

[2]For a A G Shennan's very personal account of this action see IWM ref Documents.10376:  
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030010218>

[3]McClellan, formerly a photographer for the Daily Mirror, took up his duties as an official photographer on the Western Front in December 1917. See Carmichael, pp. 65-66

[4]See IWM Photo Archive refs: Q 9509-Q 9512, Q 9522, Q 9534-Q 9535, Q 9537-Q 9538

[5]IWM Photo Archive refs Q 9353-Q 9359

[6]My thanks to Gordon McLeod, IWM Senior Photographer, for his insights here.

[7]For an in-depth study of the 'recognition factor?', see '*Watch the picture carefully and see if you can identify anyone?: recognition in factual film of the First World War period?*', Roger Smither, *Film History: An International Journal*, 14: 3/4 (2002)

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## **The French infantryman's experience on the Western Front 1914-16: a soldier-novelist's reaction**

**by Philip Dutton**

**2017-11-07 09:03:56**

*2017 marks the centenary of the publication in English of a remarkable French wartime novel ' one which aimed to 'tell the truth about the war?'*

The scale of losses experienced between 1914 and 1918 by the French Army was truly shocking. In late August 1914 alone, during the *Battle of the Frontiers*, French casualties totalled well over 200,000<sup>[1]</sup>. But French forces rallied, and with Allied help, pushed the German invaders away from Paris during the crucial Battle of the Marne in early September. In the ensuing trench warfare on the Western Front French armies resisted further enemy incursions, and, as opportunity allowed, launched their own attacks designed to regain national territory. This was a process of unremitting toil, loss, and misery not helped by unfortunate tactical and strategic decisions that played into the hands of a well organised enemy. Dismayed by his own personal encounters with these failures a French soldier participant, already an established writer by 1914 and one with definite socialist sympathies, concluded that many of his civilian countrymen failed utterly to appreciate the savage intensity of the fighting and intolerable conditions of the 'front' - '*this catastrophe of flesh and filthiness?*'<sup>[2]</sup> that their soldiers were condemned to inhabit. He aimed to make good this failure by writing a novel that would tell the truth about the war.

Henri Barbusse's powerfully anti-war novel '*Le Feu*' was imaginatively based on his over 16 months' active service on the Western Front in a French Infantry regiment. Written during a period of recovery after illness, his account was severely critical of the conduct of the war and uncompromising in its depiction of the gruesome realities of front line service. It first saw print in serialised form in the monthly literary journal '*L'Oeuvre*' during 1916 and it was published in book form in December of that year. The English translation of the novel, published as '*Under Fire?*', appeared in June 1917. The novel was warmly received in France and its English translation in Great Britain, received many approving notices.

Regarded as an honest '*piece of anti-war propaganda?*', by Cyril Falls, in his classic critical appraisal '*War Books*' (1930), '*Le Feu*' remains in print. A remarkable piece of wartime writing in its own right, literary scholars have identified the work as having exerted a powerful influence on a number of poets and writers during the conflict and, later, on that group of post-war authors, whose of 'trench memoirs' and war-based fictional works, published in the late 1920s, were largely fuelled by a spirit of anger about the appalling nature of the conflict, and disillusion with its consequences. A response typified in its most extreme form by Erich Maria Remarque's '*All Quiet on the Western Front*' (1929). Both *All Quiet* and *Le Feu* sold, and continue to sell, exceedingly well.

Understandably focus has remained on the continuing debate on the cultural impact of Barbusse's novel, notably as a forerunner and template of the anti-war, realistic school of 'disenchantment'. But in this concentration of purpose, the identity of the original translator 'William Fitzwater Wray - who first made the work accessible to English readers has been lost sight of. This is a pity as Fitzwater Wray was a fascinating character in his own right, and a good and prolific writer, particularly in his own specialist field 'cycling'. And it was a cycling experience in wartime France undertaken by Fitzwater Wray in September 1914 that unwittingly helped prepare him for the task of translating Barbusse's contentious novel.

A longer article about Barbusse and his translator is also available: See [\*The French soldier novelist and the British cycling journalist: some notes on 'Le Feu' by Henri Barbusse, and its first English translator, William Fitzwater Wray.\*](#)

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- *Under Fire*, Henri Barbusse, translated by Robin Buss, introduction by Jay Winter, Penguin Books, 2003 (Penguin Classics edition 2014)

**Online:**

'Le Feu' is available online:<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4380>This is the Fitzwater Wray translation

Teaching resource:<http://h-france.net/fffh/classics/teaching-le-feuunder-fire-by-henri-barbusse/>

----- NOTES -----

[1] 'No fewer than 80,000 French soldiers were killed?between 22 and 25 August, *The French Army Between Tradition and Modernity. Weaponry, Tactics and Soldiers, 1914-18*, by Professor Dr Francois Cochet, in *The World War I Companion*, edited by Matthias Strohn, Osprey Publishing, 2013, p.94. An aggregate figure for French war losses of '1,385,300' (killed and missing) for the period 1914-18 is offered by '*The World War I Databook?*, John Ellis & Michael Cox, Aurum Press, 2001, p.269

[2] *Under Fire*, Henri Barbusse, translated by W Fitzwater Wray, introduction by Brian Rhys, Dent & Sons, 1965, p.269

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## **The French soldier novelist and the British cycling journalist: some notes on 'Le Feu' by Henri Barbusse, and its first English translator, William Fitzwater Wray.**

**by Philip Dutton**

**2017-10-26 14:39:55**

In our absorption with the many Great War centenary commemorations in the UK it is easy to overlook the magnitude of losses experienced between 1914 and 1918 by our principal ally in that conflict, France. In late August 1914 alone, during the Battle of the Frontiers, the French Army incurred total casualties of well over 200,000[1]. But French forces rallied, and with Allied support, held and then pushed the German invaders away from Paris during the crucial Battle of the Marne in early September. In the ensuing trench warfare of the Western Front French armies resisted further enemy incursions, notably at great cost around Verdun throughout 1916, and, as opportunity allowed, launched their own attacks designed to regain national territory. This was a process of unremitting toil, loss, and misery not helped by unfortunate tactical and strategic decisions that

played into the hands of a well organised enemy.

Dismayed by his own personal encounters with these failures a French soldier participant, already an established writer by 1914 and one with clear socialist sympathies, concluded that many of his countrymen had no proper understanding of the conditions at the 'front?', nature of the fighting and the sufferings endured by the troops. He aimed to correct this deficiency by means of writing a novel that told the truth about the war. In the process the author identified, not only the dire circumstances of trench life, but also the existence of two unbridgeable and mutually uncomprehending worlds. That of the soldiers in the battle-zones, and the other quite separate world of civilians at safe remove from the fighting.

## Henri Barbusse and '*Le Feu*'?

Henri Barbusse's apocalyptic anti-war novel '*Le Feu*' was creatively based on his over 16 months' active service on the Western Front in a French Infantry regiment, from August 1914, when aged 41, he enlisted in the ranks. Written during a period of convalescence after illness, and while employed in a 'desk job?', his account, severely critical of the conduct of the war and uncompromising in its depiction of the gruesome realities of front line service, first saw print in serialised form in the monthly literary journal '*L'Oeuvre*' during 1916; it was published in book form in December of that year. The English translation of the novel, published as '*Under Fire*', appeared in June 1917. Oddly, given the unambiguously anti-war tone of the work it was largely tolerated by wartime censors on both sides of the Channel. The novel was warmly received in France and its English translation in Great Britain, received approving notices and, it appears, encouraged, in minority intellectual circles at least, a small growth in pacifist anti-war sentiment<sup>[2]</sup>.

Regarded as an honest '*piece of anti-war propaganda*?', and a not much liked one, by Cyril Falls, in his classic critical appraisal '*War Books*' (1930), '*Le Feu*' remains in print. A remarkable piece of wartime writing in its own right, literary scholars have identified the work as having exerted a powerful influence on a number of poets and writers during the conflict and, later, on that group of post-war authors, whose of 'trench memoirs' and war-based fictional works, published in the late 1920s, were largely fuelled by a spirit of anger about the appalling nature of the conflict, and disillusion with its consequences. A response typified in its most extreme form by Erich Maria Remarque's '*All Quiet on the Western Front*' (1929). Both *All Quiet* and *Le Feu* sold, and continue to sell, exceedingly well.

Understandably focus has remained on the continuing debate on the cultural impact of Barbusse's novel, notably as a forerunner and template of the anti-war, realistic school of 'disenchantment'. But in this concentration of purpose, the identity of the original translator 'William Fitzwater Wray - who first made the work accessible to English readers has been lost sight of <sup>[3]</sup>. This is a pity as Fitzwater Wray was a fascinating character in his own right, and a good and prolific writer, particularly in his own specialist field 'cycling. And it was a cycling experience in wartime France undertaken by Fitzwater Wray in September 1914 that unwittingly helped prepare him for the task of translating Barbusse's contentious novel.

## Pedal power

The period 1890-1914 witnessed a huge surge in popularity for the use of the evolving forms of the bicycle. With the arrival of the modern all-steel frame 'safety bicycle' cycling became a craze, and one that was quickly encouraged by the media and clever marketing. Indeed, the growth of cycling, as a leisure activity and as a

practical form of transport, may have influenced the British Army's decision to introduce a number of Cyclist Battalions for the Territorial Force created in 1908.

Cycling's popularity spawned numerous specialist journals and articles that fed the pedal-powered appetite for technical information and touring routes. Foremost among the cycling writers of the pre-1914 era was William Fitzwater Wray (1868-1938).<sup>[4]</sup> A committed and enthusiastic cyclist and gifted communicator, Fitzwater Wray' fashioned, under the pen-name 'Kuklos?', countless articles and several books, expounding the therapeutic benefits bestowed by the cycling experience. He regularly undertook prodigious journeys, often along routes, roads and tracks by no means smooth or well signposted, and visited France ' a country he loved and much admired ' many times.

Following the outbreak of war in August 1914, Wray discovered, to his alarm, that his regular cycling-themed articles and newspaper 'Notes' were now viewed as redundant by editors more concerned to place pieces covering the drama of the fighting. Not to be outdone (and rendered penniless by unemployment) Wray mooted a scheme whereby he, an ordinary civilian, over the age for enlistment, <sup>[5]</sup> might access the recent crucial actions on the Marne, and chronicle his experiences for publication and payment. By such process he could provide for the press a first-hand account of the state of France, and the morale of its citizens, once again victims of savage invasion. He would do this by means of a bicycle expedition, and approach the battlefields, in a fashion that Basil Liddell Hart might surely have approved, 'indirectly' from west to east.

## **A cycling journalist in wartime France**

Fitzwater Wray's account of his epic journey<sup>[6]</sup> was initially presented as a series of articles in *The Daily News*. Later, with an experienced journalist's nose for business, he sensed that these originally heavily censored pieces could be given a new lease of life by publishing them collectively. Linked and expanded by the inclusion of selected amusing anecdotes from earlier trips to France, he sought to generate an altogether fresh publication ' one tailored for the wider general public but containing much that his existing and committed cycling readership would enjoy.

The end product, '*Across France in War Time?*', was published by J M Dent & Sons in October 1916 ' during the later stages of the fighting of the Somme. Despite the grim timing of its arrival much of the book remains (perhaps deliberately) an amusing read. In some aspects, it may be seen as not far short of a 'ripping yarn?', a view encouraged by the author's frequent displays of eccentricity and boyish enthusiasm. He attached a Union Jack cycling pennant to his handlebars ' to signal his origins and allegiance ' but the flag is repeatedly wildly misidentified or not indentified at all. He is frequently mistaken for a German spy, and suspected as being an enemy scout on account of the unfamiliar cut of his Norfolk jacket, non-standard breeches and the pronounced curve and capacious bowl of his pipe. And his Touring Club of France (cycling club) membership card seemed a far more effective safe conduct with the authorities than his official pass.

Though amusing incidents thread their way through the narrative, there is a more serious aspect to his travel log. As well as detailing the effects of war on the French home front ' food prices and shortages, changes to licensing and working hours, curfews, travel restrictions, frequency of military convoys, spy mania and internal security, the plight of refugees, the status of the '*poilu*' and, even then, the public veneration of the French 75 field gun ' he witnessed at first hand the destruction wrought in the wake of the German invasion. These experiences profoundly affected him, curing him of his idealistic 'internationalism' and convincing him of the awful necessity of a war of outright victory fought to the bitter end. Key to his opposition to any notion of a premature peace was his empathy for France and its people, violated twice within living memory by catastrophic German invasions. And he is at pains to communicate to his English readership all the ignominies, hardship and suffering that invasion and military occupation brings in its wake.

# Fitzwater Wray and Barbusse

Having had '*Across France in War Time*' in print in late 1916, the same publishers, J M Dent & Sons commissioned Fitzwater Wray in early 1917 to produce an English translation of Barbusse's '*Le Feu*'. It is likely that Dent saw in Fitzwater Wray both a highly competent and relatively inexpensive translator, and one whose writing style was well known to them. But, as evidenced by the narrative of '*Across France in War Time*', in Wray they acquired an interpreter, entirely suited for the role by virtue of his sympathy for and knowledge of France, and his experiences as an eye witness of actual scenes of destruction, the devastating physical consequences of war, in that country.

Though by 1917 he did not share Barbusse's idealistic socialist faith in the attainability of an internationalist brotherhood of working men, there is ample evidence in '*Across France*' to indicate that Fitzwater Wray was an extremely good fit for the translation work. Cultured, immensely well-read, and a highly competent and confident writer, he shared to the utmost Barbusse's distress at the destruction of the French countryside, towns and villages by modern industrialised warfare. Wray's love of the open air and appreciation of the delights of the natural world proved of enormous value in rendering into English Barbusse's ecstatic visions of doomed masses of humanity in the devastated landscapes of oozing battle zones, the grandeur of daybreak and sunset and the ever-changing drama of light and skies.

As a vastly experienced traveller (he called himself a 'vagabond?') Wray too could sympathise with the feelings of soldiers exposed to long and exhausting marches in cutting wind, rain, making the best of inadequate shelter, food, impractical clothing and all the physical discomforts of open air life. His chapter headed '*Of Burdens*' (Chapter XIV), reflects the seasoned wanderer's appreciation of the importance of a judicious selection of kit, and how too heavy a load can exhaust the bearer physically and spiritually. Wray shared to the full the soldiers love and dependence on tobacco in its various forms (and tobacco's vital counterpart 'the good and reliable match'), and the morale-raising virtues of warmth, company and good food and drink. Like Barbusse, Fitzwater Wray, despite his upbringing[7], had no trust in organised formal religion 'and saw 'redemption' and moral progress perfectly attainable by the exercise of human reason, justice, and compassion.

Though criticised in a more recent translation of the novel[8] for his high-flown, too decorous language, and the artificiality of his French soldiers' dialogue, it may be argued that Wray was conscious of and subject to a wartime censorship (however lax it may have been applied) and as a creature of his time naturally replicated a proven prose style, in a tone that had, to date, perfectly satisfied his contemporary readers. A number of reviewers were highly complimentary of the literary quality of his translation[9] and it should be noted it was not until 1929 that a specialist publisher was willing to risk putting into print (in a strictly limited edition) the true reality of the obscenity-filled dialogue of the common infantryman.[10] Finally, though impossible to prove, the fact that Barbusse's mother hailed from Yorkshire, (Wray spent much of the early part of his life in the Bradford area) may further have increased his sympathy for *Le Feu's* creator.

## Legacy

Fitzwater Wray's version of *Le Feu* was superseded in 2003 by a translation by the late Robin Buss,[11] which based on a formidable knowledge of the French language and historical context of the novel, offers the modern reader text more immediately accessible than the version provided by the Fitzwater Wray 'original'. This was perhaps inevitable, but it should not be forgotten that Wray's translation was the one devoured by Siegfried Sassoon[12], who, so beguiled and inspired by its ferocious power, passed on his copy of the novel to Wilfred

Owen when both were patients at Craiglockhart Hospital in the late summer of 1917. *Under Fire* set Owen 'alight as no other war book had done?'<sup>[13]</sup> and notably formed one the selection of works he was reading in that most formative period of his short life, in Scarborough in December 1917.<sup>[14]</sup>

Despite his fine translation of *Le Feu* and other works by Barbusse<sup>[15]</sup> Fitzwater Wray's reputation remains, if he is remembered at all, largely that of a specialist writer on cycling and cyclists' matters, and also as a very entertaining public lecturer 'in which he made use of lantern slides created from his excellent collection of 'travel photographs.'<sup>[16]</sup> An energetic and paradoxical character, he died on the 16 December 1938, whilst undergoing an operation at a London hospital.

#### Sources:

- *Le Feu: Journal d'une escouade*, Henri Barbusse, Paris, 1916
- *Across France in War Time*, W Fitzwater Wray (?Kuklos?), J M Dent & Sons Ltd, London, 1916. Available at:<https://wdc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/cycling/id/4012/rec/1>
- *Under Fire. The Story of a Squad*, Henri Barbusse, translated by Fitzwater Wray (author of 'Across France in Wartime?'), E P Dutton & Co, New York, 1917
- *Under Fire: the journal of a squad*, Henri Barbusse, translated by W Fitzwater Wray, introduction by Brian Rhys, J M Dent & Sons (Everyman's Library), 1965
- *Under Fire*, Henri Barbusse, translated by Robin Buss, introduction by Jay Winter, Penguin Books, 2003 (Penguin Classics edition 2014)
- *Le Feu and the Crisis of Social Realism*, Jonathan King, in *The First World War in Fiction*, edited by Holger Klein, Macmillan Press, 1976, pp.43-52
- *Owen the Poet*, Dominic Hibberd, Macmillan Press, 1986

#### Web Sources:

- 'Le Feu' is available online:<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4380>
- *Across France in War Time* by W Fitzwater Wray can be found via University of Warwick Digital Collections <https://wdc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/cycling/id/4012/rec/1>

#### Sites relating to Fitzwater Wray:

- The Gentle Art of Cycling: Kuklos and the Bradford Jackdaw (University of Bradford Special Collections): <https://specialcollectionsbradford.wordpress.com/2015/04/27/the-gentle-art-of-cycling-kuklos-and-the-bradford-jackdaw/>
- William Fitzwater Wray ('Kuklos'). Lantern slides (University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre): <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/explorefurther/digital/nca/tours/kuklos/>

#### ----- FOOTNOTES -----

[1] 'No fewer than 80,000 French soldiers were killed' between 22 and 25 August, *The French Army Between Tradition and Modernity. Weaponry, Tactics and Soldiers, 1914-18*, by Professor Dr Francois Cochet, in *The World War I Companion*, edited by Matthias Strohn, Osprey Publishing, 2013, p.94. A total figure for French war losses of '1,385,300' (killed and missing), is offered by *The World War I Databook?*, John Ellis &

Michael Cox, Aurum Press, 2001, p.269

[2] 'In June of 1917, the Garsington pacifist circle suggested that Sassoon write something akin to Barbusse's *Under Fire*, but they eventually agreed that a statement of protest together with a refusal to serve would do just as well.' *The Great War and the Missing Muse: the early writings of Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon?*, Patrick J Quinn, Susquehanna University Press 1994, p.186

[3] The translator's unusual name did not help here. Early on *The Sphere*, 1 March 1919, mangled it into 'W. Fitzgerald Wray?'; and in a footnote to Jonathan King's *Le Feu and the Crisis of Social Realism* (in *The First World War in Fiction*, edited by Holger Klein, Macmillan, 1976) he becomes 'W. Fitzwalter Wray'.

[4] 'I was (and shall be to the end) a Journalist of the Road, my mission being the service of all who travel on wheels upon the King's Highway, service of both guidance and entertainment.' *Across France in War-Time*, W Fitzwater Wray, J M Dent & Sons Ltd, London, 1916, p.5. Before his career as journalist took off, Wray had trained and worked as a lithographic artist illustrating newspapers. A draughtsman of some quality, over 30 of his drawings were included in *Across France in War-Time?*

[5] Over age for enlistment Fitzwater Wray volunteered for and served as a Special Constable throughout the war, see Chapter VIII (*Night Thoughts by an Extra Special Constable*) in *The Kuklos Paper?*, Fitzwater Wray, J M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1927, pp.57-59.

[6] 'As certified by his cyclometer?', he clocked up 520 miles on his heavy Raleigh 'tourer?', an excellent machine made heavier by his carefully packed panniers and the souvenirs ' including a French 75mm shell case ' he collected on the way. He averaged over 80 miles a day.

[7] The son of a Methodist Minister he abandoned his Christian beliefs whilst at boarding school.

[8] Fitzwater Wray's 'high-flown rhetoric' is particularly taken to task by Jay Winter in his Introduction to the Penguin Modern Classic (2016) edition of *Under Fire*, translated by the late Robin Buss, pp.xv-xviii

[9] 'In *Under Fire?* Henri Barbusse pictures the scenes and incidents of life at the front with the ruthless fidelity of a Zola? He has been fortunate in his translator, and thanks very largely to his literary skill and imagination, the story should enjoy as great a vogue in this country as it has had in France.' *Liverpool Daily Post*, Wed 29 August 1917. 'The Book of the War as War Is. I have recently read a book, wonderfully translated from the French of Henri Barbusse, by a writer who calls himself Fitzwater Wray, which I should like to see circulated everywhere in the humblest homes? but especially in the greatest...' *The Tatler?*, 10 October 1917 (Richard King)

[10] *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, Frederic Manning, The Piazza Press, issued by Peter Davies, London, 1929

[11] *Under Fire*, by Henri Barbusse, translated by Robin Buss, with an introduction by Jay Winter, Penguin Books, 2003.

[12] 'Barbusse's French is beyond me, but the translation is good enough to show the truth and greatness of his book?' *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries 1915-1918*, edited by Rupert Hart-Davis, Faber and Faber Ltd, London, 1983, p.184. Barbusse's prose so impressed Sassoon that he included a moving paragraph from *Le Feu* (in its original French) as an epigraph for his *Counter Attack and Other Poems?*, published by William Heinemann, London, June 1918

[13] Quoted in *Out of Battle. The Poetry of the Great War*



day that Theresa had learnt he had been wounded.

## Hamo

The youngest of the three Sassoon brothers, Hamo was born on 4 August 1887<sup>[4]</sup>. Educated privately then at Marlborough and Clare College, Cambridge, he developed a flair for mathematics and for all things mechanical, creative and scientific. Inclined at first to architecture in the end he opted for civil engineering as a career and, following his degree, worked first for the family firm of Thornycrofts before journeying to Argentina to build breakwaters and bridges in the area of the River Plate with the engineering and construction firm Messrs Walker & Company. Following the outbreak of war in 1914, like hundreds of other British professionals working abroad, he abandoned his career and returned to England to enlist. He joined the Royal Engineers, and obtained his commission in June 1915. He left for Gallipoli with the 1/1<sup>st</sup> West Riding Field Company on 17 August and landed on the Peninsula in early October, when the campaign to force the Straits and '*knock Turkey out of the war*' was in a state of disastrous inertia following the failure of the Suvla offensives in August. His active service career was very short. On the night of 28<sup>th</sup> October, during wiring operations in front of the British positions, Hamo was shot in the leg 'an incident that was recorded starkly in the unit's War Diary: '*Casualties: 2/Lt. H Sassoon wounded; 6 sick.*'<sup>[5]</sup> Though gravely damaged, Hamo managed to crawl back into a frontline trench. After having his wound dressed he was moved back, first to the Field Ambulance (where his wound was deemed to be very serious) then to a Casualty Clearing Station. He was transferred to the '*Kildonan Castle*' on 1<sup>st</sup> November, and died on board that vessel following the amputation of his leg; he was buried at sea that same evening.

## First reactions

The shock of Hamo's death to Theresa Sassoon was intense and only added to her anxieties about Siegfried who was just about to leave England for service on the Western Front with the Royal Welch Fusiliers. Siegfried himself attempted to resolve his feelings about the loss of his brother via poetry but his subsequent effort, dated 18 December 1915, entitled '*Brothers*' displayed, by all accounts, nothing more than a competence in formally restrained and entirely conventional commemoration. <sup>[6]</sup>

It was only following Sassoon's experience of active service life in France, in the early part of 1916, and the distressing arbitrary loss, in the normal weekly 'wastage' of trench warfare, of his close friend David Thomas (the '*Dick Tiltwood*' of '*Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man*'<sup>[7]</sup>), that he determined to allow his accumulated grief a physical outlet in vindictive violence (i.e. 'killing Germans?') and channel his writing towards the poetry of angry protest. The death of 'Tommy' (who died on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1916) was also a means of re-experiencing and acknowledging the death of Hamo, as a chance encounter, a week later, with a Royal Engineers officer (called Sisson) who knew Hamo well and who shared fond reminiscences about him only compounded Siegfried's misery.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Spiritualism

Meanwhile at home, especially following the return of Hamo's personal effects (see *Appendix*), Theresa, an isolated figure at the best of times, retreated into a state of morbid introspection and grief. She turned her dead son's room into a shrine and became increasingly drawn to the dubious consolations of Spiritualism, which at the time (and especially after the publication of Sir Arthur Lodge's '*Raymond: or life and death*' in 1916) enjoyed something of a boom as countless numbers of bereft parents sought to make sense of the sudden and painful loss of their loved ones. A loss made more difficult to bear in many instances by the absence of a grave at which to mourn. Theresa's commitment to psychic communication with her dead son deeply depressed Siegfried and indirectly became the cause of a much later, post-war, rift between himself and his fellow ex-Royal Welch Fusilier and war poet friend, Robert Graves. This occurred in late 1929, on the publication of

Graves' autobiography, *'Good Bye to All That'*. This notorious work included a remarkable though unattributed description of his stay with Sassoon at 'Weirleigh' during the late summer of 1916 during which Graves claimed to have experienced a particularly uncomfortable and sleepless first night, being several times disturbed by unaccountably diabolic shrieks and loud bumps.[\[9\]](#) It would appear that he had been allocated a bedroom near Hamo's old room, which had been so carefully preserved by Theresa and fitted out with her son's old kit. Graves's lively description of his temporary accommodation (barely disguised as that of the home of an anonymous '*First Battalion friend?*') also depicted a mother besotted by grief and clearly obsessed with making contact with the spirit of her dead soldier son. This breach of decorum and caricature of his mother (who by 1929 was fragile and unwell) so upset Siegfried that he confronted Graves's publisher, Jonathan Cape, with a view to getting the offending passages removed; it also was the cause of a falling-out between Sassoon and Graves that lasted many years.[\[10\]](#) By then of course Siegfried may have forgotten how personally distasteful he found his mother's wartime refuge in spiritualism; certainly his diary entry for 23 January 1917 pulled no punches, as he fixes upon on what he sees as a weakness among many women, including his mother, who try to forget the horrors of war by 'clinging to the dead'.[\[11\]](#)

### **Marlborough College and John Bain**

Hamo's loss was also felt and acknowledged outside the family ' notably by his old school, Marlborough College, of which he was one of 749[\[12\]](#) old boys and staff who were killed between 1914 and 1918. After the war a large sum of money was collected to build a Memorial Hall, while during its course a ritual was established to pay individual tributes to the school's war dead by publishing poems celebrating their characters, virtues and sacrifice.[\[13\]](#) John Bain, former form master of the Army Class was the most prolific author of these.[\[14\]](#) In the June 1917 edition of '*The Marlburian*' Bain included a poem in memory of Hamo Sassoon.[\[15\]](#)

Prior to its publication, Siegfried was sent a draft of Bain's tribute and a critical appraisal of the poem was included in his reply (dated 12 May 1917) which now forms part of the Sassoon papers in the IWM's Department of Documents.[\[16\]](#) It is in this letter, far more than in the conventional lines of his poem '*Brothers?*', that Siegfried conveyed not only a deeply affectionate character study of his late brother but a far more accessible and humane sense of love and sorrow for the loss of a single life amidst the vast impersonal destructiveness of the Great War.

In his letter he acknowledges that the poem touched him deeply, and comments on how well it captures Hamo's essential nature. He suggests his brother would have liked the idea of being buried at sea, and offers a couple of suggestions for how the poem could be changed to reflect this.

John Bain absorbed these suggestions but the final lines of his poem were definitely his own:

O rest you well, young mountaineer,  
Tomb'd by the lonely, wine-dark sea!

Commemorations to Hamo crop up at odd times in Siegfried's continual prose re-workings of his own life; very notably a reference to his brother's death comes, entirely out of context, in the first volume of his 'real' autobiography, *'The Old Century'* (published 1938), when musing on a blissful Norfolk summer holiday in the 1890s, Sassoon ramblingly transports his readers into the future and allows himself an opportunity to express his continuing anger for Hamo's untimely death (and all the injustices of the war) after chancing upon (in 1937) a memorial inscription on the lych-gate at Edingthorpe Church, commemorating a soldier 'who went down in the torpedoed Transport Royal Edward in the Aegean Sea, 13<sup>th</sup> August 1915.'[\[17\]](#) The lych-gate becomes for him yet another portal to the past and thoughts of Hamo being mortally wounded on Gallipoli, stirred by the coincidental reference to drowning in the Aegean, re-awaken all the old anger about '*The donkeys who made the Great War?*'

[\[18\]](#)

## Resting places

Hamo Sassoon was lost in a campaign little regarded in this country and one seemingly doomed to failure. His quiet exit within the context of a classic military tragedy was in huge contrast to the dramatic upheavals marking the service life of Siegfried. Hamo's death, from which his mother never really recovered, at first contributed to his brother's powerful urge for vengeful action, manifested in displays of foolhardy daring in the trenches, and fuelled the ironic protests of his intimidating verse. Their contrasting lives and war experiences are in a sense mirrored by the physical memorials commemorating their deaths. Siegfried, having trod a complex and often unhappy path to self-acceptance, spiritual reconciliation[\[19\]](#) and personal peace, died, an aged and respected figure, on 1 September 1967. He lies buried, amidst the great and the good, in the quintessentially English churchyard at Mells in Somerset. Dying young, virtually unknown, and unobtrusively buried at sea, Hamo's name, together with those of over 21,000 other combatants with no known grave, is recorded simply on the *Helles Memorial to the Missing*, a gaunt 30 metre-high obelisk, at the windblown southernmost tip of the far off Gallipoli peninsula.

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## Postscript

July 2010 marked the dedication of the Spiritualists' first memorial to members that have served in the UK armed forces, which was unveiled at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire. Proposed and funded by the Spiritualists' National Union (SNU), it followed a number of unsuccessful attempts to have Spiritualists represented at the Cenotaph and Remembrance Day parade and the SNU's determination to create a lasting memorial to all Spiritualists who have served and continue to serve.[\[20\]](#)

## APPENDIX

National Archives file FO 917/1767 includes a list of Hamo's personal effects 'as presented by the Committee of Adjustment Malta, 10 November 1915'. The items (listed as articles 'of sentimental value' and presumably returned, with other items of kit, to his mother) were:

2 pipes; 1 safety razor in case; 2 pocket books; 1 leather case; 1 compass; 1 whistle; 2 leather straps; 2 stars; 3 RE buttons; 1 silver tobacco box; 1 purse containing 4d; 1 cheque book; 1 wrist watch.

## SOURCES

Imperial War Museum, Department of Documents, catalogue number Documents.1610: letters from Siegfried Sassoon to John Bain, former master at Marlborough College, held by the IWM's,

National Archives document reference: WO 95/4309, War Diary of the 1/1 West Riding Field Company Royal Engineers (later became 455 Field Coy RE), 29th Division, Feb 1915 - Feb 1916

National Archives document reference WO 339/45966, Hamo Sassoon's service papers (includes copies of the 2

telegrams sent to his mother

National Archives document reference FO 917/1767, re. the estate of Hamo Sassoon; includes list of personal effects.

*The Marlburian*, Vol LII, No.775, 21 June 1917, pp. 89-90

*Goodbye to All That*, Robert Graves, Jonathan Cape, 1929, pp. 289-90

*Siegfried Sassoon Diaries 1915-1918?*, edited by Rupert Hart-Davis, Faber & Faber, 1983.

*The Sassoons?*, Stanley Jackson, Heinemann, London, 1968, pp. 133 and 160

*Siegfried Sassoon. The Making of a War Poet. A biography 1886-1918?*, Jean Moorcroft Wilson, Duckworth & Co, 1998

*The Great War and the Missing Muse. The Early Writings of Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon*, Patrick J Quinn, Susquehanna University Press, (Associated University Presses), 1994

*Siegfried Sassoon and the Art of Autobiography?*, thesis submitted for the Degree of Bachelor of Letters in the University of Oxford by Hilary B Reid, 1970

*Siegfried Sassoon?*, John Stuart Roberts, Richard Cohen Books, London, 1999.

*The Old Century and Seven More Years?*, Siegfried Sassoon, Faber & Faber, 1938, pp. 92-93; pp. 125-127; p. 252.

*Robert Graves ' His Life and Work?*, Robert Seymour Smith, Paladin, 1982.

*Two Fusiliers: the First World War friendship of Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon?*, Martin Taylor (Imperial War Museum Review No7, c.1992)

*Siegfried Sassoon. The Making of a War Poet. (A Biography 1886-1918?*, Jean Moorcroft Wilson, Duckworth, 1998

'*Spiritualists commemorated*', in 'The Legion Magazine', Royal British Legion, September 2010, p.14

## **FOOTNOTES**

[1] 1<sup>st</sup> September 1967

[2] Copy held by the National Archives, under WO 339/45966

[3] Copy held by the National Archives under WO 339/45966

[4] Siegfried Sassoon. *The Making of a War Poet. A Biography (1886-1918)*, Jean Moorcroft Wilson, Duckworth, 1998, p.38. The birth date, '4 August 1887' is also confirmed by the Marlborough College 'Roll of Honour'. The year of birth given for Hamo's entry in De Ruvigny's 'Roll of Honour' (Part 2, p.269) is '1888'.

[5] WO 95/4309: War Diary of the 1/1 West Riding Field Company Royal Engineers, 29th Division, Feb 1915 -

Feb 1916; held by the National Archives

[6] Published in the Saturday Review 26 Feb 1916; later re-titled '*To my Brother?*'

[7] *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man*, Siegfried Sassoon, Faber & Faber, 1929 illustrated edition, pp287-88

[8] *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries 1915-1918*, edited by Rupert Hart-Davis, Faber & Faber, 1983, p46

[9] *Goodbye to All That*, Robert Graves, Jonathan Cape, 1929, pp. 289-90

[10] *The Great War and the Missing Muse?*, Patrick J Quinn, Susquehanna University Press, 1994, pp 25-6

[11] *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries 1915-1918*, op cit., p. 125 Digital image at <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-09852-00001-00008/66>

[12] <http://archive.marlboroughcollege.org/>

[13] Letter to author from Dr T E Rogers, Archivist, Marlborough College, 23 January 2004. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to Dr Rogers for his generous assistance.

[14] John Bain, scholar of Winchester and New College Oxford; taught at Marlborough from 1879-1913, with a short absence from 1883-6. He died in 1929. (Letter from Dr T E Rogers, *ibid*)

[15] '*The Marlburian?*', Vol LII, No. 775, 21 June 1917, pp. 89-90

[16] Letters from SS to John Bain, former master at Marlborough College, held by the IWM's Department of Documents, Catalogue number: Documents.1610

[17] *The Old Century and seven more years?*, Siegfried Sassoon, Faber and Faber, 1938, pp. 125-126

[18] *Ibid*, p.127

[19] He was received into the Catholic Church at Downside Abbey on 14 August 1957

[20] '*The Legion?*', journal of the Royal British Legion, September 2010, p.14

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