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Military Identification: Identity discs 1914-18 and the recovery of fallen soldiers

Sarah I. Ashbridge

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The University of Huddersfield

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Abstract

The identity disc has become an iconic piece of military kit, representing a physical embodiment of the soldier's identity. Despite their visual familiarity and their important role Zahrodisc was designed to facilitate the identification of soldiers who died on the battlefield, but a change in production material in 1914 had the unintended consequence of creating tens of thousands of missing and unknown soldiers. Identity discs are objects which transcended the military need to account for deaths, responding also to the Governmental need to mediate public grief. Their existence facilitated the development of graves registration practice resulting in the rapid transformation of burial practices during an ongoing war. On the Home Front, the delivery of an identity disc accompanied the confirmation of death, offering a final interaction with the deceased in the absence of a body or a grave within visiting distance.

This thesis investigates the development of identity discs by the British Army, reflecting upon the various ways that they were used by soldiers fighting on the Western Front between 1914-18. By investigating the cultures associated with death and identification it has been possible to provide an explanation for the phenomena of 'the Missing' despite what appears to be a period of rapid innovation. It argues that the British developments need to be situated within the operational responses to the humanitarian requirements of the 1906 Geneva Convention. It also argues for a significant reappraisal of the role of Sir Fabian Ware, founder of what is known today as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and the role of humanitarian partners in managing the response to mass casualties in a prolonged conflict. Finally, in presenting a comprehensive history of the identity disc's material culture, including its physical composition and embodied use, this thesis offers explanation for the lack of representation of British identity discs within the archaeological record today.

List of Publications

Academic Publications

Ashbridge, S. I. and O'Mara, D. (2021-pending publication). The *Erkennungsmarke*: The Humanitarian Duty to Identify Fallen Soldiers 1866-1918. *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*. Publication pending 2021

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Ashbridge, Sarah (2020). The Story of the Double Dog Tag [blog]. CWGC
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Statement of Author Contribution

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S.I.A. conceived of the presented idea. S.I.A. developed the theory and completed all translations used. S.I.A. and D.O.M. completed archival research. S.I.A. took the lead in writing the manuscript. D.O.M. contributed to the interpretation of the results and verified the findings presented. Both authors discussed the results and edited the final manuscript for publication. This publication is under review following a request for minor revisions.

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S.I.A. conceived of the presented idea and developed the theories presented. S.I.A. took the lead in writing the manuscript. S.V. contributed to the interpretation of the results and verified the findings presented. S.V. verified the findings presented. S.V. contributed all findings relating to the Hill 80 project. Both authors discussed the results and edited the final manuscript for publication.

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List of Abbreviations

AFB.2067 – Army Form B 2067
ACM – Asbestos Containing Material
AWM – Australian War Memorial
BRCS – British Red Cross Society
BRC – British Red Cross
CWGC – Commonwealth War Graves Commission
D.A.A.G. - Deputy Assistant Adjutant General
DGR&E – Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries
DIO – Defence Infrastructure Organisation
EDX – Energy dispersive X-ray
EOD – Explosive Ordnance Disposal
FSR – Field Service Regulations 1909
FWW – First World War
GC – Geneva Convention
GoLW – Guild of Loyal Women
GRC – Graves Registration Commission
HRCA – Hawthorn Ridge Crater Association
ICRS - International Committee of the Red Cross
I.O.D.E. - Imperial Order, Daughters of the Empire
IWM – Imperial War Museum
JCCC - Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre
KSO - *Krieg Sanität Ordnung* – Wartime Health Service Regulations
LJR - *Lehr-Infantry-Regiment*
Mle. – *Modèle*
MoB – Ministry of Blockades
NAM – National Army Museum

NAS – National Society for Aid to the Sick and NAS - National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded in War

NCCSG - National Committee for the Care of soldier's Graves NGO – Non-governmental organisation

OoW – Office of Works

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder PXRD - Powder X-ray diffraction QMG – Quartermaster General

RUSI – Royal United Services Institute

SDSR - Strategic Defence and Security Review SEM – Scanning electron microscopy

SOI – Site of interest

TNA – the national archive UXO- Unexploded Ordnance VAS volunteer aid societies

VDK - *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*

Prologue: Wilfred Owen 'Sonnet To My Friend (with an identity disc)'

Sonnet
To My Friend
(with an identity disc)
Wilfred Owen

If ever I had dreamed of my dead name
High in the heart of London, unsurpassed
By Time for ever, and the Fugitive, Fame,
There taking a long sanctuary at last,

I better that; and recollect with shame
How once I longed to hide it from life's heats
Under those holy cypresses, the same
That keep in shade the quiet place of Keats.

Now, rather, thank I God there is no risk
Of graves scoring it with florid screech,
But let my death be memoried on this disc.
Wear it, sweet friend. Inscribe no date nor deed.
But let thy heart-beat kiss it night and day,
Until the name grow vague and wear away.¹

On the 14th or 15th March 1917, Wilfred Owen was evacuated to a military hospital at Nesle after receiving a concussion at Le Quesnoy-en-Santerre. On the 17th, he was transported to the 13th Casualty Clearing Station at Gailly to recover. During this time, Owen wrote a letter to his younger brother Colin, which included the following passage:

Perhaps you will think me clean mad and translated by my knock on the head. How shall I prove that my old form of madness has in no way changed? I will send you my last Sonnet, which I started yesterday. I think I will address it to you. Adieu. Mon petit Je t'embrasse.²

Attached to the letter was an early draft of the above poem, which was revised at Craiglockhart between August and September 1917. In the poem, Wilfred addresses the issue of commemoration, rejecting 'hallowed forms of memorial' such as the engraving of his name upon a funerary or commemorative structure (as earlier letters indicated he had Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey in mind as a preferred resting place), thus neglecting literary recognition.³ Minogue and Palmer imply that the final lines suggest that 'grief will fade with the wearing away of the poet's name; and that it is the beating of the friend's heart which will cause the fading – that is to say, his grief will be overcome by his continuing to live'.⁴ The Sonnet is not an expression of a feeling of impending death, but about elegy, speaking 'not of

¹ Owen, Wilfred. (1983). *Complete poems and fragments: edited by Jon Stallworthy. vol I: The poems*, London: Oxford University Press-Chatto & Windus-The Hogarth Press. p241

² "Letter To Colin Owen / With an Identity Disc," *First World War Poetry Digital Archive*, accessed 16.09.2020, <http://www.lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/www.lit/items/show/8200>

³ Minogue, Sally & Andrew Palmer, Andrew (2018). *The Remembered Dead: Poetry, Memory and the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p195

⁴ Ibid.

the dead, but of the difficulty of speaking honestly about them'.⁵ It also attests to the fact that the identity disc was by the end of the war a recognizable feature in the landscape, culture and embodied experiences of war for both soldiers and civilians. That is not to say that its usage was uniform or without controversy. The sonnet reflects upon Owen's personal thoughts about his own death, and the way he would like to be remembered, rather than the traditions and values of British society or soldiers more broadly within the British Army.

The use of identity discs during the First World War is in itself a 'war culture', influenced by a range of variables including the consistency of training available to ordinary ranked soldiers, the conditions of the battlefield, the adapted use of identifying items, and misuse of identifying items. These cultures, both formal and informal, existed within the framework of the British Armed Forces, but would be influenced by transnational practice before and during the war. This thesis will trace the place of the identity disc in the history of modern war, bringing into focus its overlooked place in the administrative history and histories of the cultural experience of death on the Western Front during the Great War.

⁵ Ibid.

1. Introduction

The First World War (FWW) was the first incidence of mass, industrial war on an international scale, and was for many the first instance of death *en-masse* at distance, particularly within the context of a European civilian army. Industrial weapons decimated the bodies of soldiers and civilians indiscriminately, providing an unexpected new challenge for military strategists: how to respond to the rapidly rising numbers of dead or missing soldiers. The phenomenon of ‘disappearing’ bodies struck by shells and shrapnel or buried alive during blasts was not well understood on the home front, which could result in prolonged periods of distress for families whose loved ones had been declared deceased in the absence of a body. This presented a need for rigorous identification processes which would allow for the confirmation of death in a range of circumstances.

This thesis will focus on the role of the identity disc used by the British Army in the First World War, placing this in the wider context of early-twentieth century international wartime protocols, and exploring the implications of new identification rules and practices on battlefield clearance until 1921 when this exercise was abandoned. It is an interdisciplinary study of the identity disc, making use of empirical methods, and adopting approaches from cultural history, and forensic archaeology to examine its place within the ‘culture de guerre’ of the First World War, particularly cultures associated with death and burial.

The British Army introduced its first identity disc in 1907, after the approval of the pattern in 1906, approving the pattern shortly after the ratification of the amendments to the Geneva Convention of that year. Identity discs or “dog tags” are an iconic piece of military equipment in the Western World and Anglo-American militaries, recognized internationally by both soldiers and civilians alike. Designed to be worn around the neck and removed from the body in the event of death, the provision of identity discs was intended to provide a method of confirming and reporting death. Improvements were made in 1914, around the same time as the declaration of war, however, this system was not suitable for the new style of warfare which prevented the regular retrieval of the dead (as was common in historical British warfare), and the piles of unknown soldiers continued to rise. The identity disc plays an important role in processes of casualty and fatality recording but it also plays an essential role within processes associated with the retrieval of dead and wounded from the field, along with processes associated with burial. Given the number of internal Army processes that the disc engaged with (procurement, stores, preparations for mobilisation, confirmation of identity and death, POW processes etc), and a strong body of scholarly literature discussing topics such as

grief, memorialisation, commemoration, and the tomb of the unknown soldier, it is surprising that so little academic attention has been given to this iconic piece of military kit. The spectre of the missing has rarely been studied as anything other than a feature of elegiac commemorative practices by historians, who fail to consider why so many fell under the category of 'missing' in the first instance.

1.1 Histories of Death and Burial in the First World War

Despite the 'new wave' of historical studies, 'embracing new subject areas' such as death and the grief experienced during and following the war, there has been a distinct lack of focus on identity discs.⁶ Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the identity disc can help us to identify why so many soldiers became unknown soldiers even though an official system of identification was in place. This will also help us to understand why so many families would never receive the location of the resting place of their loved ones. Reflecting upon how the discs were misused by soldiers can also inform us about individual attitudes to death and burial, military training, and the faith of soldiers in bureaucratic procedures enforced within the wider army structure (or perhaps lack of faith).

There has been an expansion of scholarship relating to death and the FWW, considering the experience of living amongst death, burial, post-war clearance of the battlefields, Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) cemeteries and monuments, memorialisation and commemoration, yet few studies feature more than a fleeting reference to the identity disc, despite its important role in each of these themes.⁷ There is also a literature written for a popular audience on the military history of the First World War, which allude to identification and the role of Sir Fabian Ware in identification practice.⁸ These works are

⁶ Wilson, Ross (2016). *New York and the First World War: Shaping an American City*. Oxford and New York: Routledge, p.9. First published 2014 by Ashgate Publishing

⁷ Capdevila, Luc and Voldman, Daniele (2006). *War Dead: Western Societies and Casualties of War*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (original work published in French 2002). P.24; Doyle, Peter (2008), *The British Soldier of the First World War*. Oxford: Shire Publications; Ganschow, J.P.P. (2009). Identification of the fallen: The supply of "dog tags" to soldiers as a commandment of the laws of war. *New Zealand Armed Forces Law Review*. Vol. 9, pp. 22-54; Loe, L., Barker, C., Brady, K., Cox, M. and Webb, H. (2014). 'Remember me to all': the archaeological recovery and identification of soldiers who fought and died in the Battle of Fromelles, 1916. Oxford: Oxford Archaeology. p. 167 & 186; Osgood, R. and Brown, M. (2009). *Digging up Plugstreet: The Archaeology of a Great War Battlefield*. Sparkford: Haynes. p.173.; Richards, A. (2017). *The Flag: The story of Revd David Railton MC and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior*. Oxford: Casemate Publishers. p.53; Robertshaw, Andrew and Kenyon, David (2008). *Digging the Trenches: The Archaeology of the Western Front*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military; Summers, Julie (2010), *Remembering Fromelles: A New Cemetery for a New Century*. Berkshire: CWGC Publishing; Whitford, Tim and Pollard, Tony (2009). For Duty Done: A WWI Military Medallion Recovered from the Mass Grave Site at Fromelles, Northern France. *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, 5(1), pp.201-229

⁸ Longworth, Philip (2003). *The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword; Gibson, T. A. Edwin and Ward, G. Kingsley (1989). *Courage Remembered: The story behind the construction and maintenance of the Commonwealth's Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the*

often without citation to the archival material upon which they appear to have been based, such as the CWGC archive. Despite this lack of citation, these works are frequently referenced within popular military histories.

This thesis offers the first full historicization of identification practices, situating the British developments within the broader international context, cross referencing international archive collections with the CWGC archive. Within British academic scholarship, a number of proximate areas of study have been developed. Peter Hodgkinson has focused on the task of clearing the battlefields both during and following the war, demonstrating the impact of the poor identity disc system on processes related to burial through the use of archival material, despite the absence of literature on the identity disc.⁹ Hodgkinson's paper thus represents the only historical works located which present archival evidence to provide new information about the identity discs. This paper provided a vital starting point for archival research, allowing for the presentation of new information to build upon Hodgkinson's pivotal work.

Jay Winter considers the psychological aspects of grief and remembrance in relation to the missing.¹⁰ In his pivotal work, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Winter rejected 'familiar, but decidedly unhelpful, dichotomies of orthodox cultural history' which tended to argue for a break with the past, and instead drew out the role of tradition as well as innovation in the commemoration of the death.¹¹ Like Winter's work, this thesis will make comparison between the British and German experiences of mass loss, in order to reflect upon the British developments within a broader nineteenth and early twentieth-century global history of identification practice, and to consider the collaborative efforts required to respond to the challenge presented by the First World War. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* addressed cultural expressions of bereavement following war, including responses to the phenomenon of the unknown soldier. This thesis builds upon Winter's work to provide new context to the experience of loss during the war, offering an explanation as to why Missing and Unknown soldiers were created, and how public grief was mediated via the works of Fabian Ware's organisation.

Wars of 1914-18 and 1939-1945. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office; Crane, David (1942). *Empires of the Dead: How one man's vision led to the creation of WWI's war graves*. London: William Collins.

⁹ Hodgkinson, Peter (2007). Clearing the Dead. *Journal of First World War Studies*, 3(1). Accessed. 16.09.2020 <http://www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/clearingthedead.html> accessed 16.02.2018

¹⁰ Winter, Jay (1995). *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ Lawrence, Jon (1997). *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History*. *German History*, vol. 15 (3), pp. 428-429

Joanna Bourke has also been crucial in reshaping the historical approach to the First World War. In 1998 Susan Kingsley Kent wrote that Jay Winter and Joanna Bourke had ‘produced studies that challenge the status of the Great War as a movement of acute cultural or social discontinuity’.¹² In *Dismembering the Male*, Bourke analysed the attitudes of the state and of employer’s towards to the male body, recognising that ‘acceptable levels of death and appropriate responses were negotiated by the state, various interest groups...and the bereaved’ to ‘dramatically rearrange the theatre of death’ during the First World War.¹³ Like Bourke’s work, this thesis will consider the treatment of military bodies and the ways in which the treatment of their bodies reflected the class systems of Great Britain, exploring the similarities between ‘mass graves’ in a military context and pauper or penny graves on the Home Front. This thesis situates Bourke’s work alongside the findings of scholars such as Julie-Marie Strange to consider how military burial traditions reflected British burial traditions across different social classes, necessitating engagement with scholarship focused on nineteenth and early-twentieth century burial traditions, particularly with regards to pauper graves.¹⁴

Peter Doyle has published much on the uniform of the British Tommy and his experience in the field, describing or picturing the identity disc in several his books.¹⁵ Doyle’s works have helped to make sense of the lived or embodied experienced of trench warfare and every-day life for the British soldier, including the relationship between a soldier and his kit, offering a good critical methodology that is attentive to objects beyond documentary sources. This thesis will build upon Doyle’s works which describe the discs, to provide a detailed history about their use, and the lack of uniformity that can be encountered for the duration of the war.

¹² Kent, S. K. (1998). *Remembering the great war - sites of memory, sites of mourning: The great war in european cultural history.* by jay winter. cambridge: Cambridge university press, 1995. pp. x + 310. \$34.95. - *dismembering the male: Men's bodies, britain, and the great war.* by joanna bourke. chicago: University of chicago press, 1996. pp. 336. \$32.50. - “White feathers and wounded men: Female patriotism and the memory of the great war.” by nicoletta gullace. *journal of british Studies* 36, no. 2 (1997): 178–206. - “. *The Journal of British Studies*, 37(1), p. 106

¹³ Bourke, Joanna (1996). *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.210

¹⁴ Hurren, Elizabeth and King, Stephen (2005). ‘Begging for a burial’: form, function, and conflict in nineteenth-century pauper burial. *Social History*, vol. 30 (3), pp.321-241; Strange, Julie-Marie (2002). ‘She Cried a Very Little’: Death, Grief and Mourning in Working-Class Culture, c. 1880-1914. *Social History*. Vol. 27 (2), pp. 143-161; Strange, Julie-Marie (2003a). Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns: Reassessing the Pauper Grave c. 1880-1914. *Past & Present*. No. 178, pp. 148-175; Strange, Julie-Marie (2003b). ‘Tho’ lost to sight, to memory dear’: pragmatism, sentimentality and working-class attitudes towards the grave, c. 1875-1914. *Mortality*, vol. 8 (2), pp. 144-159

¹⁵ Doyle 2008; Barton, Peter, Doyle, Peter and Vandewalle, Johan (2004). *Beneath Flanders Fields: The Tunnellers’ War 1914-1918.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press; Doyle, Peter (2013). *Great War Tommy: Owner’s Workshop Manual.* Yeovil: Haynes; Doyle, Peter and Schäfer, Robin (2015). *Fritz & Tommy: Across the barbed wire.* Stroud: The History Press to name but a few

Though identity discs were a piece of military kit, they were also used by non-military personnel including Red Cross volunteers and staff belonging to Fabian Ware's organisation.

The most impactful and popular histories of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission are those written by David Crane in 1942 and Philip Longworth in 1967.¹⁶ Both works describe the complex development of Fabian Ware's organisation during and after the First World War, and feature a focus on Ware's remarkable ability to position himself, envision change and eliminate his rivals to achieve a built legacy which has reshaped the way in which we remember soldiers from the First and Second World Wars. Longworth's work was commissioned by the CWGC, making use of their extensive archival collection.¹⁷ Crane also referenced his own use of the 'vast archive covering the foundation and history of the Imperial War Graves Commission, describing that 'the first debt of anyone writing about the Imperial War Graves Commission will always be to its original historian Philip Longworth'.¹⁸

Both Crane and Longworth's studies have proven resilient to the test of time, with Longworth's *the Unending Vigil* updated in 1985 and reprinted in 2003, and Crane continuing to deliver public talks about *Empires of the Dead*, with the most recent taking place in January 2020, demonstrating the prolonged public engagement with the subject and the demand for more information. Both author's works are insightful because they inform us about new approaches to war and organisational structure, whilst also considering the ways in which Ware's ideals and visions were shaped by imperialism. Through this lens, the response to death presented during the First World War can be considered an example of social and cultural discontinuity, in contrast to the findings of Bourke and Winter which challenged this notion. The findings of this thesis present a scenario of evolving traditions and innovation to align military burial traditions with social expectations. This thesis will situate Ware's interactions with the British identity disc within the known history of the Commission, presenting new archival material from the CWGC archive which allows for further exploration of Ware's relationship with the French, his ability to influence military and political structures, and the ways in which his vision was shaped by imperial values which would culminate in the establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1917.¹⁹

¹⁶ Updated 1985 – reprinted 2003

¹⁷ Longworth (2003), p. xiii

¹⁸ Crane (1942), p.275-276

¹⁹ Dehne, Phillip (2019). *After the Great War: Economic Warfare and the Promise of Peace in Paris 1919*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 15-30; Dehne, Phillip (2016). *The Ministry of Blockade and the fate of Free Trade during the First World War*. *Twentieth Century British History*. Vol.27, pp. 333-356

Military burial traditions in the First World War have been the focus of a range of scholars. Ross Wilson has explored battlefield burials and ‘the presence of the dead amongst the living’, utilising methodologies from cultural history, French historiographies of war and First World War archaeology.²⁰ Wilson has explored the ‘uniquely prominent’ role of archaeology in providing glimpses into ‘the material and physical conditions of the soldiers’, presenting new and undisturbed data which can add new weight to historical findings.²¹ This thesis will situate the identity disc as an item which is both archival and archaeological in order to reveal more about the breadth of battlefield cultures which could influence the use of identity discs and thus, identification practice. Hanna Smyth’s PhD thesis ‘the Material Culture of Remembrance and Identity: South Africa, India, Canada & Australia’s Imperial War Graves Commission Sites on the First World War’s Western Front’ examined the relationship between material culture, war memory and identity for Commonwealth nations following the First World War. Like Wilson, Smyth advances the concept that identity was navigated and expressed through different engagements with the dead and the cemetery landscape.²² Similarly, Natasha Silk has considered the ways in which soldiers of the British and Dominion Armies ‘came to view and understand the place which they had fought and many had died for’, exploring emotional connections with the commemorative landscape.²³

Scholars Luc Capdevila and Danièle Voldman have dedicated an monograph to the war dead, exploring how European societies involved in conflict treat and respect their fallen soldiers.²⁴ Though the book features a section focused on identity discs, the information is brief and occasionally incorrect, describing up to nine types of British identity disc, possibly reflecting variation in manufacturing methods as official variations in disc patterns, misrepresenting the British identity disc system to an extent.²⁵ Such ideas reflect ideas about identity discs held by some members of the general public today. During the course of this project, a variety of materials have been described by an interested general audience when discussing identity discs with the public. The perceived lack of information available about identity discs has resulted in a lack of consistency in the public memory of identification practice, which can on

²⁰ Wilson, Ross (2008). Strange Hells: a new approach on the Western Front. *Historical Research*, 81(211), p. 161

²¹ Ibid. p. 151

²² Smyth, Hanna M. G. (2019). the Material Culture of Remembrance and Identity: South Africa, India, Canada & Australia’s Imperial War Graves Commission Sites on the First World War’s Western Front’. [PhD thesis]. University of Oxford. Accessed 08.01.2021 <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:d851b171-566f-4cee-9005-a3f438ee8f6c/>

²³ Silk, Natasha (2019). “‘Some Corner of a Foreign Field That Is Forever England’”: The Western Front as the British Soldiers’ Sacred Land’. In Beyerchen, Alan and Sencer, Emre (eds.). *Expeditionary Forces in the First World War*. Cham: Palgrave McMillan, pp. 289-311. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25030-0_2

²⁴ Capdevila and Voldman (2006)

²⁵ Ibid. p.22-26

occasion be shaped by contemporary memory of the war or contemporary use of identity discs as an established piece of military equipment. In 1914, the British identity disc was not yet fully incorporated into military practice, a condition which became more acute as the war progressed following the deaths of increasing numbers of experienced soldiers.

Much of recent scholarship has been produced in response to scholarship of the early 90's, during a 'cultural turn' which challenged the emphasis that 'Military historians traditionally were interested in military outcomes more than in the details of the carnage producing them'.²⁶ The findings of the historians discussed have helped to make sense of the various ways in which soldiers engaged with death, identity and their new landscape. Yet the identity disc continues to receive little attention for its role within these themes. Similarly, archaeological literature often discusses issues of both identification and 'the Missing', yet discussion about the role of the identity discs rarely develops beyond a physical description of the identity discs.

This thesis takes up Susan-Mary Grant's argument that the dead, and more particularly the war dead, play a symbolic role in the development and validation of nationalism.²⁷ Conflicts of the nineteenth century, such as the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), the Austro-Prussian or Seven Week's War (1866) and the American Civil War (1861-1865) resulted in shifting attitudes towards the sanctity of the grave and the respect that should be awarded to soldiers in death. The gradual development of systems of identification within military forces before 1906 can be seen as a direct response to the national experience of loss in war. However, the British decision to introduce identity discs, appears to have been an action in response to the requirements of the 1906 Geneva Convention, rather than an act to account for the dead as an act of military necessity. Britain did not have a history of conscription, possessing an armed force which reflected the class structure of the home front. Nations scarred by loss continued to develop their systems of identification, along with various strategies for burial, including the establishment of military cemeteries. Britain's progress in these matters by 1914 requires comparison with other combatant nations, to understand the implications of the timing of the introduction of the British discs. The experience of the First World War was crucial in the shaping of public attitudes and memory with regards to the war dead. The carnage of the First World War was beyond expectations, and the staggering numbers of missing and unknown soldiers left much of the British public searching for answers, desperate to gain an

²⁶ Smith, L. V. (2007). The '*Culture de guerre*' and French Historiography of the Great War of 1914-1918. *History Compass*, 5(6), p. 1972 . doi: 10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00484.x

²⁷ Grant, Susan-Mary (2004), Patriot Graves, American national identity and the civil war dead, *American Nineteenth Century History*, 5(3), p. 76

understanding as to how their loved one could have disappeared without a trace. Philippe Ariès identified a peak in the 'civic cult of the dead' as a result of the First World War. Explaining that 'the idea of burying or burning the dead on the field of honour was no longer tolerated'.²⁸ All this research has been done, but there remains a blind spot with regards to identification practice and how the reception for the dead was shaped. This statement is not intended to discredit existing work, but to highlight the potential to build upon it.

French historiographies have featured much discussion of 'Culture de guerre', or 'cultures of war', viewing the war as an experience which transcended the trench and French civilian life, requiring scholars to 'take the civilians with the soldiers, the hatred with the patriotism and the brutality with noble sacrifice'.²⁹ Wilson noted that the concept of 'war cultures' has 'made only a brief incursion within the British historiography of the war'.³⁰ The concept of 'war cultures' is a helpful approach to the study of identity discs, allowing for an interdisciplinary approach to an understudied issue. Whilst the development of the discs can be observed through the study of official communications such as Army Orders, or records relating to procurement, the cultures which determined the way that mobilised soldiers used their discs within the field must be examined in a different way. This requires new readings of a greater range of sources across the disciplines, allowing for new insights which link trench culture, bureaucratic military process and lived experience on the home front into a culture of death/dying in the FWW which transcended fighting, or at least puts the soldier and the civilian into a shared frame of culture and experience. In 2008 Ross Wilson described how 'anthropologically informed studies and archaeological investigations have enabled new conclusions to be drawn', which led to 'the emergence of different considerations of traditional sources of evidence and to the development of original areas of study'.³¹ Nicholas Saunders has written extensively on the material cultures of the First World War, exploring the relationships between object and maker, and the living and the dead through the study of trench art or objects recovered during archaeological excavation.³² Saunders describes

²⁸ Ariès, Philippe (1983). *The Hour of Our Death*. Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books (original work published 1977). p.550

²⁹ Becker, J. J. (1990). 'Présentation', in J. J. Becker and S. Audoin-Rouzeau (eds.), *Les sociétés européennes et la guerre de 1914 –18*. Nanterre: Publications de l'Université de Nanterre. P. 11– 12, cited in Smith, L. V. (2007). The 'Culture de guerre' and French Historiography of the Great War of 1914-1918. *History Compass*. Vol. 5(6), p.1972

³⁰ Wilson, Ross (2012). The Burial of the Dead: The British Army on the Western Front, 1914-18. *War & Society*, 31(1), p.26

³¹ Wilson, Ross (2008), p.151

³² Saunders, Nicholas J. & Cornish, Paul. (eds.) (2013), *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War*, Abington: Routledge face aux tués de la guerre (XIXe-XXe siècles). *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*, pp.240-243; Saunders, Nicholas J. (2011). *Trench Art: A Brief History & Guide*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military; Saunders, Nicholas, J. (ed.) (2004). *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War*. Abingdon: Routledge; Saunders, Nicholas J. (2003). *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War*. Oxford

‘Trench Art’ as an ‘important and hitherto overlooked source for understanding the cultural memory of 20th century war’.³³ As Saunders sought to offer an ‘initial categorization of types’ of trench art, this thesis will attempt to categorise identity discs, including handmade examples, allowing for the utilisation of methodologies relevant to material culture. Drawing on Wilson, Doyle and Saunders’ approaches to material culture, this thesis will offer an approach to the history which is founded in both close reading of source material and sensitivity to material culture. This thesis is not written as a military history, but a cultural and social history of the ways in which identity discs were used.

The research presented within this thesis provides positive examples of interactions with non-military organisations such as the British Red Cross, through Fabian Ware’s mobile unit, in response to military needs, but also provides us with a case study about the implementation of information relating to death, identification and burial during a long and complex war. This allows us to reflect upon how the Army was able to create the operational framework to accommodate an external organisation to perform services which help to ensure that military practice is in keeping with international humanitarian legislation, such as the 1906 Geneva Convention; but also how these organisations handed their duties back to the British Army during peace times. This process is important as this is where key information appears to have been lost, affecting the transmission of knowledge which would dictate the approach to the burial of the war dead during the Second World War. In 2017, Heather Draper and Simon Jenkins highlighted that ‘very little literature exists exploring the ethical challenges experienced by humanitarian workers, and even less is known about the experiences of the medical military employed in an humanitarian capacity’ during a study of the U.K. response to the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone (2014-2015) during Operation GRITROCK.³⁴ Since then, little has been done to increase our understanding of these experiences. The FWW case study provides a framework for the meaningful interrogation of contemporary partnerships formed in response to COVID, such as the relationship with RE:ACT UK to consider their relevance to future war planning. Additionally, the findings of this thesis present the

and New York: Berg; Saunders, Nicholas J. (2002). Excavating memories: archaeology and the Great War, 1914-2001. *Antiquity*. Vol. 26, No. 291, pp. 101-107; Saunders, Nicholas J. (2000). Bodies of Metal, Shells of Memory: ‘Trench Art’ and the Great War Re-cycled. *Journal of Material Culture*. vol.5 (1), pp.43-67

³³ Saunders, Nicholas J. (2000). Bodies of Metal, Shells of Memory: ‘Trench Art’ and the Great War Re-cycled. *Journal of Material Culture*. vol.5 (1), p. 43

³⁴ Draper, Heather and Jenkins, Simon (2017), Ethical challenges experienced by UK military medical personnel deployed to Sierra Leone (operation GRITROCK) during the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak: a qualitative study, *BMC Med Ethics*. Vol. 18 (1), p. 77. doi:10.1186/s12910-017-0234-5

opportunity to reassess the importance of transnational military relationships and cultures of information sharing which would inspire change during an active war.

1.2 Methodology and Sources

As identified, there is limited literature available which engages directly with the development or use of identity discs. Consequently, it has been necessary to rely heavily on archival research to explore these themes. The archive of the CWGC has proven the most valuable resource to explore the usefulness of the discs in burial and graves registration processes. The Internet Archive (archive.org) has provided access to key military texts published in France, Great Britain and Germany which has resulted in the ability to situate the British developments within the broader international narrative of identification practice, whilst facilitating a transnational discussion on these developments. The Imperial War Museum, the National Army Museum and the Wellcome Collection have provided vital images which visualise the developments of identity discs and burial traditions described, to assist the reader with visualising how cultural changes manifested in burial practices on the battlefield.

Archaeological literature comes in the form of scholarly publications, books and blogs aimed at an interested general audience and grey literature (site reports and data), and the use of archival material is not uncommon. However, the term archive holds a different meaning to archaeologists from historians. Historians often describe their trade as source criticism, but many fail to recognise their regular engagement with material culture when describing items found in archives, museums, or personal collections. Material culture is in itself an academic subfield, but in U.K. universities, specialists in material culture are most commonly aligned with archaeological departments which have an increasingly science-based focus.

Archaeologists often use the same archives as historians, to provide historical context to their work, situating a tiny snapshot of time excavated within the broader historical narrative, allowing others to see the significance of the practical work completed. However, archaeology companies and museums often hold dedicated archaeological archives, which almost are almost exclusively comprised from physical objects removed during the process of excavation. Each item will be individually bagged with a number which corresponds to the field report and associated documents created during the excavation and post-excavation processes. Particularly in prehistoric archaeology, objects can provide information in the absence of literature, or inform us about alternative uses that differ from our current understandings, often adding an important layer of understanding relating to elements of daily life which are so often unrecorded in a number of time periods. By considering the use of identity discs after soldiers had received them, in addition to their movement through official

processes before they are distributed, we can better understand the experience of life amongst death on the battlefield, and the ways in which soldiers responded to this very unusual reality. Thus, the originality of this project lies in an approach which is attentive to material culture not only at the site of archaeological remains but also in following the use of the dog tag in the soldier's daily life.

Trentmann has explored the 'status of things' and 'a celebration of objects as "thought companions, as life companions"'.³⁵ The identity disc is the perfect representation of this analogy, particularly in the case of privately purchased identity discs, often represented as a physical embodiment of the soldiers desire to ensure he didn't become unknown. Though there are examples of letters where soldiers *have* expressed this view, as shall be shown, there are also many examples of letters and objects which provide an alternative motivation for wearing, purchasing or producing such an item. This approach to identity discs is informed by the historians' use of archival material culture, particularly the emphasis on how these items were used, rather than how they were supposed or assumed to have been used, and these narratives will help to explain the large absence of identifying items within the archaeological record today. This thesis will therefore address a gap in both our historical and archaeological understanding to move beyond elegiac interpretations of the missing on one hand, and a too narrow adherence to military rules over cultural practices in interpreting archaeological remains on the other.

The British fibre identity disc is a well-recognised piece of military equipment, dearly beloved by descendants of soldiers of the Great War, frequently encountered at collector's markets or eBay, regularly featured in museum displays³⁶, and regularly discussed on military web forums. Archaeological excavations which have revealed the remains of fallen soldiers have been met with much public interest, for example the 2014 excavations in Fromelles³⁷, the 2017 & 2018 excavations at Bullecourt³⁸ and the more recent crowdfunded excavations at Wijtschate.³⁹ Archaeological publications referring to the recovery of the war dead often

³⁵ Trentmann, Frank (2009). Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics. *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 28 (2), p.284

³⁶ Bankfield Museum (4th August 2014 – 22nd December 2018). *For King and Country*. Halifax, West Yorkshire; In Flanders Fields Museum (16th February – 26th August 2018). *Traces of War*. Ypres, Belgium. Discs can also be found on display within in smaller military museums e.g Hooge Crater Museum, Ypres, Belgium

³⁷ Summers 2010; Loe et al. 2014

³⁸ Osgood, Richard (2018). 'Mud, blood, and green fields beyond: Exercise Joan of Arc, Bullecourt 2017'. *Archaeological Excavation Report for DRAC Nord Pas de Calais*. Accessed 16.09.20

<https://www.breakinggroundheritage.org.uk/onewebmedia/report%202017.pdf> ; Osgood, Richard (2019). 'Mud, blood, and green fields beyond: Exercise Joan of Arc, Bullecourt 2018'. *Archaeological Excavation Report for DRAC Nord Pas de Calais*. Accessed 16.09.2020

³⁹ Excavation Report: Dig Hill 80 Project. In preparation (not yet published)

include a reference to identity discs, rarely going beyond a description of their appearance, (presumed) material of manufacture, the information stamped upon the disc and the instructions to remove in the event of death.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, archaeologists have not yet sought to confirm the materials used to produce identity discs and how they might decompose, given their importance in the process of identification. An understanding of the material structure of the disc, and the way that the materials used might degrade in a buried environment will benefit archaeologists tasked with the recovery of located soldiers. Therefore, the historical findings will be used make recommendations as to best practice for the recording of the skeletal remains of located soldiers before they are exhumed, in advance of any investigation to establish identity.

1.3 A Transnational History of the British Identity Disc: Historiographical, archaeological and policy implications

The British were not unique in their use of identity discs, nor were they the first combatant nation to implement a system of identification. In fact, the German Army was the first Armed Force to officially enforce a system of identification for their soldiers, following the Franco-Prussian war (19th July 1870 – 10th May 1871). Archaeologically, German identity discs can be found in greater quantities, with few British identity discs recovered from excavation sites. Using the interdisciplinary methods outlined, chapters Two and Three investigate the developments of both British and German systems of identification of human remains, illuminating the contingencies of war and the separate military responses to similar challenges. This thesis will demonstrate how both forces used their identification systems to identify not only their own soldiers, but the remains of enemy soldiers, and how this may have resulted in the failure to identify a body, or the complete absence of information which led to the soldier receiving a “missing” status. Given the number of soldiers who would remain missing or unknown, with 54,000 names listed on the Menin Gate alone, it is vital to unravel the procedures which could lead to a loss of identity, given the value of the tangible, touchable, and whole body in post-Victorian British funerary tradition in order to truly understand the impact of such a status on the bereaved. Chapters Three and Four will investigate the way in which the British Army adapted, under the heavy influence of Fabian Ware, in order to attempt to identify and bury the war dead, who now lie in Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries across the globe.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Robertshaw and Kenyon 2008; Loe et al 2014; Summers 2010

⁴¹ The Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E) became the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1917. The organisation was rebranded as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in 1960.

This thesis will examine the administrative processes employed by the British Army in relation to the deceased through a multidisciplinary lens, utilizing a combination of archaeological reports, archival evidence (such as soldiers' diaries and letters, army orders, minutes of official meetings and media cuttings) and surviving material culture of war, in keeping with the methodologies utilised by Saunders and Zahra, to provide a thorough insight into the challenges faced by combatant nations.⁴² Documents held by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission will provide a new insight into a severely neglected historical field of inquiry, illuminating how the experience of death *en-masse* at distance influenced military procedure, and the impact of these procedures on existing civilian mourning cultures. The discovery of the design for the double identity disc within the archives of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has helped to consolidate theories developed during the pilot study, 'Military Identification: The identification systems of the German, American and British Armed Forces 1900-1970', completed in 2013 as part of an MSc in Forensic Archaeology and Crime Scene Investigation at the University of Bradford. This has consolidated the need to re-appraise the available archive material to reconstruct the history of the identity disc and assess the value of the identity discs used during the First World War when seeking to identify fallen soldiers both historically and in present day. The rising number of fallen soldiers on both sides of the conflict influenced a series of administrative procedures, which would lead to the ultimate formation of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*.

Researching the material, cultural and administrative history of the identity disc can help us to understand how the British Army engaged with both the government and the grieving Home Front, with the unit developed by Fabian Ware acting as a mediator between all parties to develop burial systems which would overhaul both military and civilian traditions of burial and mourning. Identity discs and the graves registration units developed in response to the expectations of the increasingly civilian army, and their families. Ware's first duty upon

The history of the organisation will be explored within chapters three and four. For histories of the Commission see Longworth 2003, Crane 1942 and Gibson & Ward 1989

⁴² Saunders, Nicholas J. (2000). Bodies of Metal, Shells of Memory: 'Trench Art' and the Great War Re-cycled. *Journal of Material Culture*. vol.5 (1), pp.43-67; Saunders, Nicholas J. (2002). Excavating memories: archaeology and the Great War, 1914-2001. *Antiquity*. Vol. 26, No. 291, pp. 101-107; Saunders, Nicholas J. (2003). *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War*. Oxford and New York: Berg; Saunders, Nicholas J. (ed.) (2004). *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War*. Abingdon: Routledge; Saunders, Nicholas J. & Cornish, Paul. (eds.) (2013), *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War*, Abingdon: Routledge; Auslander, Leora and Zahra, Tara (2018), *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press Project MUSE muse.jhu.edu/book/58419

promotion to the rank of Director-General in 1916 was to ‘meet the demands of relatives... as the numbers of non-professional soldiers forming the New Armies increased’.⁴³

1.4 Conclusion

This thesis will not only address a critically overlooked area of military history and material culture, bridging gaps between existing research areas, but it will provide knowledge that may assist with future archaeological recoveries of First World War soldiers, and the subsequent investigations to establish identity. Though many of the key literatures referred to throughout this thesis touch upon the issue of identifying dead soldiers before, during or immediately after the First World War, none of them deal directly with the history of identification itself. The history of British identity discs alone is both an international and transnational history of an item developed during peace time for use in times of war, though this thesis is focused upon the British case of the learning curves regarding the identity disc during the First World War. To understand the significance of the British identity discs used during the First World War, it is essential to consider various histories of the disc such as the development, implementation, adaption, use and misuse of identity discs, and how these processes fit within broader existing military structures. The requirement of the disc to function within military structures makes the history of the identity disc more complex, as the British Army of the First World War was an adaptive force, allowing for the creation of dedicated units for specific tasks where required. Unfortunately, it became clear during the first few months of the war that the issue of dead and wounded soldiers on the battlefield could not be responded to by the army during active fighting, requiring the assistance of medico-military volunteer groups, such as the British Red Cross, in order to ensure that the British Army was maintaining the standard of battlefield conduct described in the ratified 1906 Geneva Convention.

Tammy Proctor has written on the need to internationalise First World War Studies to overcome national boundaries and to assess the larger shared trends.⁴⁴ As an international conflict, the war ‘crossed national, religious, and ethnic boundaries’, but Proctor describes that ‘few historians have attempted to synthesize the various accounts of the war’.⁴⁵ This thesis provides an international investigation in response to a national question, with results that identify a series of shared military cultures and help us to make sense of the chaos associated

⁴³ Ware, Fabian (1937). *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years, 1917-18*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.24

⁴⁴ Proctor, Tammy M. (2010). *Civilians in World at War, 1914-1918*, New York and London: New York University Press

⁴⁵ Ibid. P.8

with death during the FWW. Through the adoption of an interdisciplinary methodology, this thesis will provide a holistic investigation into identity discs, inspired by the multi-disciplinary approach utilised during forensic investigations. Susan Griffin wrote:

And what is even more true is that the idea of the soldier remains as a fixture of all of our thought, so that in some way each of us is both civilian and soldier. In the full understanding of ourselves, the story of the soldier is also our own.⁴⁶

Many of our contemporary engagements with the First World War, e.g., centenary or memorial events, are shaped by the experience of losing huge numbers of soldiers, with CWGC cemeteries or memorials providing the physical space to remember these events. Our current cultures of military burials have been shaped by the individual graves system produced by the CWGC immediately after the war. In turn, our serving military attend the burial services of British or Unknown services to pay their respect to those who fell. The traditions of the FWW continue to inform and engage with contemporary soldiering traditions. Despite this, there has not yet been sufficient critical analysis to assess why so many soldiers became unknown or missing. This is problematic because of concepts that the story of the FWW soldier also reflects our own understanding of identity discs, which are now well incorporated into military cultures and are well known amongst the public. Some veterans have informally challenged the findings of this thesis, claiming that no soldier would ever leave their identity discs behind. The international narrative presented within this thesis demonstrates that this was not the understanding of the average soldier, particularly between 1914-15, and offers an explanation for the variation in knowledge held. Additionally, this narrative fails to consider the proven failures of the identity disc system used, despite the 1916 pattern being used by the British Army until around 1960 when it was phased out. This thesis will present the forgotten learning curve of the identity disc. Though the term ‘forgotten’ is so often used by the media when featuring a lesser-known aspect of the FWW, the archival documents used will illustrate the reported failures of the identity disc system which had already been forgotten by 1935, resulting in the continued use of fibre identity discs.

The historical findings of my thesis confirm what is known amongst many field archaeologists who have worked on sites associated with British military activity on the Western Front: That British fibre identity discs rarely survive, meaning that the identification

⁴⁶ Griffin, Susan (1992). *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War*. New York: Anchor Books, p.316. Cited in Proctor, Tammy M. (2010). *Civilians in World at War, 1914-1918*, New York and London: New York University Press, p. 267

of a British or Commonwealth soldier by identity disc during contemporary excavations is incredibly rare, in contrast to French and German discs, for example, which can occasionally be encountered in varying stages of preservation during fieldwork (though such an occurrence is still quite a rare occasion). These findings necessitate an improved approach to the recording of artefacts found in close proximity to the body at the point of excavation, in order to better facilitate the work of the professionals who will later conduct a desk-based investigation to attempt to establish the identity of the recovered individual(s). The discussions regarding the materiality of British identity discs, and cultures of private identification may also be of interest to museum and archive professionals, tasked with cataloguing, displaying, or engaging with identity discs held within their collections. Of further interest is the results of collaborative investigative work between the University of Bradford and the Australian War Memorial, conducted for the benefit of this thesis, designed to interrogate myths relating to the inclusion of asbestos within British and Commonwealth identity discs.

Through the study of identity discs, this thesis reviews the development of First World War identification practice and the story of the Missing. This thesis advocates the virtues of understanding our history in contemporary planning arrangements, in particular when planning operations which require public support or have the potential to divide public opinion. The findings act as a case study with policy relevance to assist internal defence discussion and planning, and to consider how the army advocates its needs to government. Though identity discs are rarely recovered during archaeological works today, their study provides an explanation for the phenomena of missing and unknown soldiers, and why their presence was so important in shaping the individual and collective memory of the First World War.

2. Nineteenth Century Warfare: The transformation of military burial traditions and the introduction of identifying marks, 1851-1905

For First World War enthusiasts and the descendants of those who served in the war, the British identity disc is an iconic and easily recognisable piece of military equipment. Despite their familiarity scholars have not yet paid adequate attention to the significance of the identity discs, tags or plates within the broader development of military ethics and codes of humanitarianism globally. The First World War transformed British burial culture, for both military personnel and civilians at home, as the national preference for the individual grave developed. However, the significance of the long nineteenth century on the global development of a shared medico-legal framework which incorporated the use of identifying marks has been overlooked by military historians and historians of humanitarianism alike.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the shift towards industrial war began, and as industrial weapons continued to develop, so did the experience of death and dying in warfare. New weapons inflicted new injuries, and prolonged battles reduced the number of opportunities for the living to recover the dead. There are many studies investigating the battlefield tactics and developments in weaponry during conflicts such as the Crimean War, the Austro-Prussian War, the Franco-Prussian War, the South African War, and the Russo-Japanese War, both military and academic, along with a number of researchers focusing on humanitarian themes within this period. Yet there remains an absence of literature describing the development and impact of identifying marks used during this period, despite their impact on international humanitarian law in the twentieth century.

This chapter will describe the development of two separate yet connected processes: the international development of identification practice, and the parallel transformation of British military burial traditions, within which there was no agreed identification protocol at this point. To explore these themes, this chapter will explore a series of national and international wars taking place between 1851-1905 in chronological order, considering the impact of each conflict on identification practice and the evolution of British military burial traditions. There is an absence of scholarly literature on identification practice before and during the First World War, within both historical and archaeological works, with both fields relying heavily on articles such as Peter Hodgkinson's 'clearing the dead' to make sense of how bodies were identified, transported and buried, despite the fact that Hodgkinson's article focuses largely on

the post-war period.⁴⁷ Beyond academia, there are a number of independent researchers who share their research on British, French, and German identity discs through informal channels such as personal blogs, blogs for larger organisations, popular historical magazines, self-published books and even social media. However, this information on the development, design, trial and use of identifying marks has not yet been interrogated within scholarly works, despite a wealth of historical studies which explore related aspects such as the treatment of the dead in military and civilian contexts, explorations of familial grief following military loss, the history of the Red Cross, humanitarian law and the history of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, as identified in the introductory chapter. Even literatures which explore the phenomenon of the missing or the tomb of the unknown soldier fail to engage with the very item that was designed and used to prevent a soldier from becoming unknown: the identity disc.

The story of the British identity disc, formally introduced in 1907, is only a later contribution to the international saga of identification practice, which is predominantly staged within the second half of the nineteenth century. By tracing the development of identifying marks during the long nineteenth century, we are able to situate the British development within the broader context of international practice, identifying differential practice in response to increasingly industrial, or colonial warfare. This allows us to begin to unpick cultures of international observation and reporting, whilst also considering how military burial practices developed in response to sanitary and humanitarian developments to form the traditions that would shape the operational response to the First World War. These themes will be explored through the study of archival material, incorporating textual documents such as letters, diaries or newspaper content alongside pieces of material culture, which will allow us to scrutinize both the formal development of identification systems and informal cultures of using identifying items amongst mobilised soldiers.

Identifying items for soldiers are not a modern creation, with systems to identify fallen soldiers used during the classical era. The information that we do have comes from surviving texts, with a distinct lack of the items described surviving to become part of the archaeological record today. Polyaeus (a second century Macedonian rhetorician), and Diodorus (90 BC- 30BC) referred to identification systems employed by the Lacedaemonians (people of Laconia) during their fight against the Kingdom of Macedonia.⁴⁸ The Romans also

⁴⁷ Peter Hodgkinson, 'Clearing the Dead', *Journal of First World War Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 1. (2007), online at: <http://www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/clearingthedead.html> accessed 16.02.2018

⁴⁸ Shepherd, R. (1973), Polyaeus's *Strategems of War*: Translated from the original Greek. London: G. Nicol. p.16; Siculus, Diodorus (1939), *Library of History, Volume III: Books 4.59-8* (Oldfather, C. H., Trans.). Loeb

made use of identifying items for soldiers, known as *signaculum* (also referred to as the ‘military mark’), which typically consisted of a marked piece of lead worn around the neck.⁴⁹ It appears that these items came into use in the late Empire, replacing oaths used by the Republic, though the date and reason for introduction are unknown.⁵⁰ Legionnaire's were given the *signaculum* upon enrolment, following selection, but before taking the oath; receiving a lead disc, which some say was worn in a leather pouch round the neck.⁵¹ It is said that *signacula* featured the name of the recruit, and information about the legion to which he belonged, typically in the form of a seal or stamp.

Further detailed information can be found in *De Re Militari*, written by Roman military writer Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, believed to have been published in or around AD 390.⁵² Though in this text, it appears that the military mark refers to tattooing or branding by this point in time.⁵³ The text became influential in medieval military thinking in Europe and was translated into six European languages by 1500.⁵⁴ Cathal Nolan recently asserted that until the publication of Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* (*Vom Kriege* - 1832), arguably one the most influential piece of military writing in the Western World to this day, *De Re Militari* was ‘the most widely read military treatise in Europe’.⁵⁵ It is possible that nineteenth century military leaders would have been familiar with this text, but further research is required to establish any connections.

Though the story does not begin in Europe, the trial of an identifying mark by the then Prussian Army in 1866 following severe losses during the Austro-Prussian War, would transform to become a system which would influence not only the design of the identification systems of other Western combatant nations, initiating transnational cycles of learning, as combatant nations observed one another and adopted examples of good practice into their

Classical Library 340. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 421 Accessed 18.09.2020

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/8*.html

⁴⁹ Southern, Pat (2006). *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, p.133; Southern, Pat and Dixon, Karen R. (1996), *The Late Roman Army*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Pp.74-75; Bingham, Joseph (1856). *Origines Ecclesiasticae: The Antiquities of the Christian Church, vol. 1*. London: Henry G Bohn, p.449

⁵⁰ Southern, Pat and Dixon, Karen R. (1996), *The Late Roman Army*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Pp.74-75

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Renatus, Flavius Vegetius (1767), *De Re Militari* [text written in 390. A.D., British translation published 1767]. Translation by Lieutenant John Clarke. Accessed 16.09.2020 https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-sOkC3FmoLlr4C6zz/The+Military+Institutions+Of+The+Romans+%5BDe+Re+Militari%5D_djvu.txt

⁵³ Southern, Pat and Dixon, Karen R. (1996), *The Late Roman Army*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.74

⁵⁴ Nolan, Cathal, J. 2017). *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 58

⁵⁵ Ibid.

own systems⁵⁶; but one that would influence humanitarian policies regarding the treatment of the war dead on an international scale. The establishment of the Prussian identification system create a new precedent in war, which would spread slowly but surely, as belligerent nations continued to engage in war, whether national, international, or colonial, resulting in increasingly brutal deaths on the battlefield. Following the Franco-German War (1870-71), The French army would observe improved identification rates reported by the Prussian Army, prompting them to formally introduce their own identity disc system in 1881. The French identity disc was not the only consequence of the Franco-German War that would later influence the design and use of identity discs across the globe, including the British design, as will be explored in Chapter Three.

The British National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded in War (NAS) was founded upon the outbreak of the conflict in August 1870.⁵⁷ This organisation sought to provide a first aid service on the battlefield, with Capt. Burgess of the Order of St John in England proposing before the first meeting that “our object is not to interfere in any way with the military medical staff, but to temporarily tend to the wounded until the hard-worked surgeons can get to them”.⁵⁸ The NAS later became an important founding member of the British Red Cross Society (BRCS), created in 1905. The Red Cross movement dates its origins to the committee formed by Henry Dunant who would organise a conference in October 1863, the results of which would become known as the First Geneva Convention, with a treaty signed by 12 nations including Britain. The convention defines ‘the basis on which rest the rules of international law for the protection of victims of armed conflicts’, with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRS) acting as both the instigator for the inception of articles within the convention, and the enforcer of articles agreed.⁵⁹ Whilst the articles defined the treatment of wounded and captured soldiers, they neglected to comment on the treatment of own and enemy dead. A second conference followed in 1868, drafting additional articles, with the inclusion of articles relating to maritime warfare. However, these articles were only ratified by North America and the Netherlands, the latter of whom later withdrew their ratification. Nevertheless, the approved articles of the 1863 Convention served as the basis of

⁵⁶ For more on the definition of transnational, see Clavin, Patricia (2010). Time, Manner, Place: Writing Modern European History in Global, Transnational and International Contexts, *European History Quarterly*, vol. 40(4), pp.624-640, doi: 10.1177/0265691410376497; Thelen, David (1999). The Nation and Beyond: Transnational perspectives on United States History. *The Journal of American History*, vol. 86(3), pp. 965-975

⁵⁷ Gill, Rebecca (2014). “The origins of the British Red Cross Society and the politics and practices of relief in wat, 1870-1906”. *Asclepio*. 66(1), p.209. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3989/asclepio.2014.03>

⁵⁸ Capt. Burgess, Letter to the editor, *The Times*, 19.7.1870. Cited in Gill, Rebecca (2014). “The origins of the British Red Cross Society and the politics and practices of relief in wat, 1870-1906”. *Asclepio*. 66(1), p.209, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3989/asclepio.2014.03>

⁵⁹ Pictet, Jean S. (1951), ‘The New Geneva Conventions for the Protection of War Victims’, *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 45 (3), pp.462-475

the Convention for the Adaption to Maritime Principles of the Geneva Convention which were drafted during the First Hague Peace Conference in 1899.⁶⁰ The Hague Conference had made recommendations that the revisions to the original Geneva Convention of 1864 ‘concerning the wounded in war on land’ should be made.⁶¹ These international, typically medico-legal conferences and conventions would prove to be hugely important to the British narrative which shall be explored during the following chapter, and so it is vital to understand the main actors behind these movements, and how experiences of mass loss on the battlefield during the nineteenth century shaped the societal expectations held by European publics in the decade before the First World War.

This nineteenth century history also has practical contemporary relevance. In the field of First World War Archaeology, it is not uncommon to come across the remains of German, French or Commonwealth soldiers along with or even alongside the remains of British soldiers. However, it is very rare that we recover British identity discs with skeletal remains today. In the early years of the war, French and German soldiers carried identity discs which had been designed during the nineteenth century, which means that any archaeologist, finds specialist, archivist, museums professional or investigator tasked with decoding or identifying discs from the First World War period must also have knowledge of nineteenth century material culture in order to avoid making errors which may result in the mis-identification of an individual today, or the misrepresentation of information to the public during display. There is a body of informed enthusiast literature on the development of German identity discs, particularly on the internet, though these summaries often fail to acknowledge the impact of the German fight for identification on the global development of codes of conduct regarding treatment of the war dead.⁶² Within French historiographies there has been some investigation into the *disparus* (the missing), though again, the main body of work into the identification plates lies on webpages written by enthusiast historians.⁶³ British scholars have invested much time into exploring themes of commemoration, memorialisation and the work of the

⁶⁰ (1916). The Geneva convention of 1906 for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded in armies in the field., p.i, Washington, D. C.: The Endowment. Accessed 16.09.2020:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044080076078&view=1up&seq=7&size=125>

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Burroughs, M. (1995). *German Identity Discs of World War Two*. self-published; Burroughs, M. (2005). *Collecting World War II German Military Identification Discs*. Shropshire: Ulrich of England; Lalis, Stephen. LES PLAQUES D’IDENTITES ALLEMANDES DE 1869 À 1918: RETROUVEZ CE DOSSIER ET D’AUTRES INFOS SUR LES PLAQUES D’IDENTITES ALLEMANDES SUR, Accessed 16.09.20 :

<https://lalis.pagesperso-orange.fr/militaria/plaquesID.htm>

⁶³ On ne passe pas!. *Les plaques d’identité*. Blog. Accessed 20.02.21: <http://www.onnepassepas.fr/pages/le-barda/livret-et-plaque-militaires.html>; Blog Histoire Géo (2014). La plaque d’identification d’un soldat de la Première guerre mondiale. Blog. Accessed 20.01.21: <https://pierrickauger.wordpress.com/2014/10/17/la-plaque-didentification-dun-soldat-de-la-premiere-guerre-mondiale/>

Commonwealth War Graves Commission, yet almost exclusively fail to discuss the role of the identity disc in these narratives, rarely going beyond a brief description of how the tags should look.⁶⁴ Capdevila and Voldman have attempted to piece together the global development of burial traditions and attitudes towards the dead, piecing together an important narrative on the slow transformation of these attitudes in response to war⁶⁵; however they too fail to acknowledge the role of identity discs in the history of 'the missing', which has dominated our contemporary approach to memorialisation. This is because the general understanding of 'the missing' is often associated with the First World War, failing to recognise that British military culture did not facilitate the remembrance of ordinary ranked soldiers, meaning that uncertainty and an unknown grave in an unknown location were a common reality for the families of ordinary ranked British soldiers, with an army polarised by class, in contrast with the armies of neighbouring France and Germany which had long histories of conscription, which had the unintended consequence of ensuring that military cultures appear to have been better aligned with civilian cultures than in Britain. In order to understand the significance of the British identity disc, and its introduction in 1907, in terms of military culture, practice and burial traditions, it is essential to understand the international context in which the discs developed. This chapter will provide a pioneering study into not only the use of identity discs, but also into the impact of the use of identity discs on institutionalised ways of thinking, and the civilian experience of loss during and after war and how these phenomena helped to shape the first international laws of war.

2.1 Taiping Rebellion (1850-66)

Within the nineteenth century, the idea of personal identification worn as part of the uniform began to gain traction, centuries after the *signacula* and the military mark had been used in the Classical world. Though this thesis will focus on the Western Front, and the systems of France and Germany which would most influence the British identity disc, the first recorded use of identifying items in the modern period can be found beyond Europe. During the

⁶⁴ Bridger, Geoff (2009), *The Great War Handbook: A Guide for Family Historians & Students of the Conflict*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, p. 83; Longworth, Philip (2003). *The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword; Messenger, Charles (2006). *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*. London: Cassell; Richards, A. (2017). *The Flag: The story of Revd David Railton MC and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior*. Oxford: Casemate Publishers; Gibson, T. A. Edwin and Ward, G. Kingsley (1989). *Courage Remembered: The story behind the construction and maintenance of the Commonwealth's Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the Wars of 1914-18 and 1939-1945*. London: HMSO

⁶⁵ Capdevila, Luc and Voldman, Danièle (2006). *War Dead: Western Societies and Casualties of War*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (original work published in French 2002); Capdevila, Luc and Voldman, Danièle (2002), *Nos Morts: Les sociétés occidentales face aux tués de la guerre (XIXe-XXe siècles)*, Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages; Roynette, Odile (2002), Luc CAPDEVILA et Danièle VOLDMAN, *Nos Morts: Les sociétés occidentales face aux tués de la guerre (XIXe-XXe siècles)*. *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*. pp.240-243

Taiping Civil War in China (1850-1866), also known as the Taiping Rebellion, a war in which around 20 million lost their lives, systems of identification can be observed.⁶⁶ Taiping soldiers would attach patches of cloth with the words ‘Taiping’, ‘holy soldier’ and the name of their unit sewn into civilian clothing, transforming it into a military uniform. Taiping soldiers were observed to stamp their regimental number onto their coat, as illustrated in *figure 1*, though there is no scholarly literature which informs us about whether these patches assisted with identification in death (at least not published in English). More relevant for the purpose of this thesis is the use of wooden markers.

A piece of wood would be marked with the owner’s name, rank and native name place, and worn hung from the belt, providing a system for the identification of other soldiers within an expanding rebel army.⁶⁷ These wooden markers or plaques might also include the seal of the regiment’s commanding officer, as seen at Suzhou, where Taiping soldiers were provided with belt tags marked with the seal of the Loyal King.⁶⁸ The inclusion of such a seal implies that the purpose of these wooden plaques was to identify other rebel soldiers within a force which lacked uniforms, possibly facilitating more covert conversations, rather than an item specifically created for the purpose of identifying the remains of fallen soldiers. It would be beneficial for an academic with fluency in Han Chinese and Manchu to undertake further academic and archival research to further interrogate the use of identifying wooden items, and traditions or practices associated with the burial of war dead. Despite our lack of knowledge about these items, particularly their visual appearance and purpose for use, the introduction of an item containing personal information along with visual indicators of the wearers military affiliation during a civil war created a new precedent in military history.



Figure 1. Military jackets of a Taiping private (left) and corporal (right) from the Taiping Chun-mu; Heath & Perry (1994). p.8

⁶⁶ Grant, Susan-Mary (2004). Patriot Graves: American national identity and the civil war dead. *American Nineteenth Century History*. Vol 5(3), p.78

⁶⁷ Withers cites Forrest in Thomas Wright Blakiston (Late Captain Royal Artillery), *Five Months on the Yang-Tsze, and Notices of the Present Rebellion in China* (London: J. Murray, 1862), p.33 and also, Lewin Benthall Bowring, *Eastern Experiences* (London: Henry S. King, 1871), p.346 in Withers, J. L. (1983). *The Heavenly Capital: Nanjing Under the Taiping, 1853-1864*. PhD thesis, Yale University, USA. P.174. Both sources are also referred to in Meyer-Fong, Tobie (2013). *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p.68

⁶⁸ Dai Xi, “Wumen bei nan jilue,” in *Zhongguo jindai shi ziliao congkan xubian: Taiping tianguo*, ed. Liu Ergang et al. (Guilin, Guangxi renmin chubanshe), vol. 4, p.398; cited in Meyer-Fong, Tobie (2013) p.68

2.2 Crimean War (1853-1856)

Whilst the British did intervene in the Taping Rebellion, in support of the Manchu rulers of China, these was not until the later stages of the war, with an immediate change in British policy following the ratification of the Treaty of Tientsin and of the Convention of Peking towards the end of 1860.⁶⁹ Prior to this, the British were preoccupied with the Crimean War, referred to by some as the world's first trench war, which took place between October 1853-February 1856. Though the British identity disc would still not be introduced for some time, during and following the Crimean War, we can see a shift in attitudes towards British military burial traditions, and the treatment of the war dead, as the burial and preservation of the graves of British soldiers became a political issue of national concern. These debates relating to the treatment of those who had died fighting in the Crimea would help to shape the public expectations held before and during the First World War.

The nineteenth century was a period of intense debate and reform with regards to medicine, hygiene and burial practice for the British public, and these discussions, along with scientific developments improved general hygiene and helped to reduce the spread of diseases such as cholera by introducing acts to control public hygiene, including within burial grounds, such as the 1832 Act for the Prevention of the Cholera Morbus, the Cemeteries Clause Act 1847, the first Public Health Act 1848, the Metropolitan Burial Act 1852, and the Burial Acts and 1854 and 1857.⁷⁰ Summers argues that it was only in the advent of medicine that it was understood that the biggest risk to soldiers at the end of any battle was disease.⁷¹ To fight against disease, and prevent the spread of conditions such as gangrene and dysentery, it was now considered a priority to ensure that the dead were buried appropriately.

In addition to developments in public health, which led to change in military practice, there was a shift in attitude towards fallen soldiers in Britain, as the practices of battlefield journalism and photography developed, and social change within the ranks themselves. Literacy rates were increasing amongst the lower ranks (though only approximately twenty per cent of the army were reported to be literate in 1858), and soldiers began to write letters

⁶⁹ Gregory, J. (1959). British Intervention Against the Taiping Rebellion. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 19(1), p.11 doi:10.2307/2943446

⁷⁰ Hurren, Elizabeth and King, Stephen (2005). 'Begging for a burial': form, function, and conflict in nineteenth-century pauper burial. *Social History*, vol. 30 (3), pp.321-241; Hotz, Mary Elizabeth (2002). Down Among the Dead: Edwin Chadwick's Burial Reform Discourse in Mid-nineteenth Century England. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 29(1), pp. 21-38. doi: 10.1017/S1060150301291025; Rugg, Julie (2013). Constructing the grave: competing burial ideals in nineteenth-century England. *Social History*, vol. 38(3), pp.328-345; Thorsheim, Peter (2011). The Corpse in the Garden: Burial, Health, and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century London. *Environmental History*, vol. 16, pp. 38-68. doi: 10.1093/envhis/emq146

⁷¹ Summers, Julie (2012). The History of the CWGC [Video file]. Accessed 18.09.2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0I10fJzy8mQ>

and memoirs; This, combined with the use of battlefield photography for the first time which allowed the British public to understand the impact of war, changed the public perception of the soldier, from Wellington's smartly dressed 'scum of the earth' army, known for their persistence in fighting and smart attire, to good Christian men and brothers who ought to be afforded a Christian burial wherever possible.⁷² Berridge argues that in the Crimean war, 'even ordinary soldiers were now seen as Christian men and brothers', describing Crimea as the 'first war where Britain made a serious effort to respect her fallen of all ranks'.⁷³

However, this section will demonstrate that a more nuanced investigation into the burial of ordinary soldiers is required.

Berridge also argues that that 'proper burial was impractical after the Battle of Alma, where most ended in the kind of mass graves typical of the Napoleonic wars'. This assertion is vague, and potentially misleading. During the Battle of Alma, which took place on 20th September 1854, around 2,000 British were killed, along with approximately 1,600 French casualties, and 500 Egyptian casualties from the allied Expeditionary Force. There were an estimated 5,000 losses from the Russians. Following a Russian retreat, the allied expeditionary force of Britain, France and Egypt remained on the battlefield for three days, and during this time the allies assisted the injured and buried their dead. Despite what must have felt like an overwhelming task, the dead were buried in mass or trench graves close to where they fell, burying the Russian dead within their own pits separate from the allied dead, having removed all reusable equipment.⁷⁴ In 2020, Nigel Hunt described a British cemetery from the battle, near to the river. This cemetery contains a grave 'noting the names of the first officers to die'.⁷⁵ It also contains a mass grave which 'gives no indication of the number of troops buried, or their names', evidencing the differential treatment of war dead according to their rank – whilst all ranks were placed into mass burials, only the officers' names were deemed important enough to record.⁷⁶

Octave Cullet, of the French 20th Ligne described the use of both individual and mass graves, stating that 'sometimes we buried the dead in isolated pits, sometimes in the deeper ones

⁷² Berridge, A.L. (2015). Off the Chart: The Crimean War in British Public Consciousness. *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Issue 20, p.10. For more on perceptions on Wellington's army see Carter, Louise (2014). 'Scartlet Fever: Female Enthusiasm for Men in Uniform, 1780-1815'. in Lynch, Kevin and McCormack, Matthew (eds.). *Britain's Soldiers: Rethinking War and Society, 1715-1815*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. pp. 155-179

⁷³ Berridge 2015. p. 11

⁷⁴ Fletcher, Ian and Ischenko, Natalia (2008). *The Battle of the Alma: First Blood to the Allies in the Crimea*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military (e-reader)

⁷⁵ Hunt Nigel (2020). *Landscapes of Trauma: The Psychology of the Battlefield*. London and New York: Routledge, p.126

⁷⁶ Ibid.

when the bodies had accumulated on the same spot'.⁷⁷ This indicates that the type of burial that a soldier received was determined by practicality. Where possible, an individual grave would be provided, but if the concentration of bodies was high, or the ground conditions were difficult, a mass grave would suffice. The provision of an individual grave, with exclusive rights to the space and a permanent marker would not be within the expectations of many British men who served in the ordinary ranks, for this did not reflect working class burial traditions in England at the time. Please refer to *Appendix 1* for a discussion on types of grave plot and burial in Victorian England for further contextual information.

Back in England, newspapers reported scenes of death and destruction in what was one of Britain's most deadly wars yet. British journalist William Howard Russell sent reports from Crimea to *The Times*, letters now recognised as the world's first examples of war correspondence. Russell provided a detailed account of the Charge of the Light Brigade (the failed military advance involving the British Light Cavalry against the Russian force led by Lord Cardigan on 25th October 1854 during the Battle of Balaclava), emphasizing the blood and destruction that he witnessed:

"A more fearful spectacle was never witnessed than by those who, without the power to aid, beheld their heroic countrymen rushing to the arms of death. At the distance of 1200 yards the whole line of the enemy belched forth, from thirty iron mouths, a flood of smoke and flame, through which hissed the deadly balls. The flight was marked by instant gaps in our ranks, by dead men and horses, by steeds flying wounded or riderless across the plain."

"The first line is broken, it is joined by the second, they never halt or check their speed an instant; with diminished ranks, thinned by those thirty guns, which the Russians had laid with the most deadly accuracy, with a halo of flashing steel above their heads, and with a cheer which was many a noble fellow's death-cry, they flew into the smoke of the batteries, but ere they were lost from view the plain was strewn with their bodies and with the carcasses of horses."

"At twenty-five to twelve not a British soldier, except the dead and dying, was left in front of these bloody Muscovite guns."⁷⁸

This report would inspire the poem *The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. William Simpson, war artist, produced a watercolour painting, later reproduced as a coloured lithograph by F. Jones, entitled 'graves at the head of the harbour of Balaklava' (fig 2). Within this scene, we can see row upon row of individual graves, with only a small number headed by a marker. If we are to assume that the marked graves are likely to be the

⁷⁷ Cullet, Marie Octave (1894). *Un régiment de ligne pendant la guerre d'Orient: notes et souvenirs d'un officier d'Infanterie, 1854, 1855, 1856. Publiés par S. Rochet*. Lyon: E. Vitte cited in. Fletcher and Ischenko (2008)

⁷⁸ Russell, William Howard (1854). 'The Operations Of The Siege'. *The Times*. Tuesday Nov 14th 1854, p.7, GALE|CS117607278

graves of the officer class, it is not unreasonable to infer that the remainder of the unmarked graves are those of ordinary ranked soldiers. This scene is important, as a survey of the newspaper articles available on the topic might lead one to believe that only mass graves were used for ordinary ranks.

However, photographs appear to confirm the use of individual burials for ordinary ranked soldiers, where time allowed. *Figure 3* depicts the graves of Col. G. Egerton and other officers of the 77th Regiment. Within the image, the focus is on the three graves which feature a headstone, yet we can learn more from the ‘unmarked’ graves. The unmarked graves at the back of the picture are topped with a pointed mound, supported by stones at either end. To the far right, we see burial mounds with a raised surface, surrounded by stones. But graves to the front left of the picture have been prepared in a similar fashion to the featured officer’s graves, with a flattened mound, and stones arranged with a cross and ‘IHS’, a Christian monogram which symbolises Jesus Christ. The item record provided by the Imperial War Museum does not inform us when the photo was taken, but the tented camp in the background implies that it was taken during war time. The photo lends credence to the argument in this chapter that the use of individual graves was more commonplace than has been historically assumed, and demonstrates that where possible, even unnamed graves were treated with respect, and even decorated. It is not clear, however, whether these are the graves of officers before the arrival of headstones (*Fig. 4*), as a later photograph of the officer’s graves in the 77th cemetery features many more headstones. An annotated lithograph of Cathcart’s Hill, seen in *figure 5*, also by William Simpson, labels graves without headstones as the graves of Lieutenants, Captains and Majors, meaning that a more nuanced and detailed analysis is required to understand the burial traditions of this war.



Figure 2 Crimean War, Balaklava: graves at the harbour. Coloured lithograph by F. Jones after W. Simpson, London: P. & D. Colnaghi & Co. (Day & Son, Lith. To the Queen). Wellcome Library no. 21423i



Figure 3 Grave of Col.G.Egerton and other officers of the 77th Regiment. IWM Q71129



Figure 4 Part of the 77th Regiment's Cemetery with some of the Officers' tombstones, April 1856, NAM. 1994-01-1-417-24

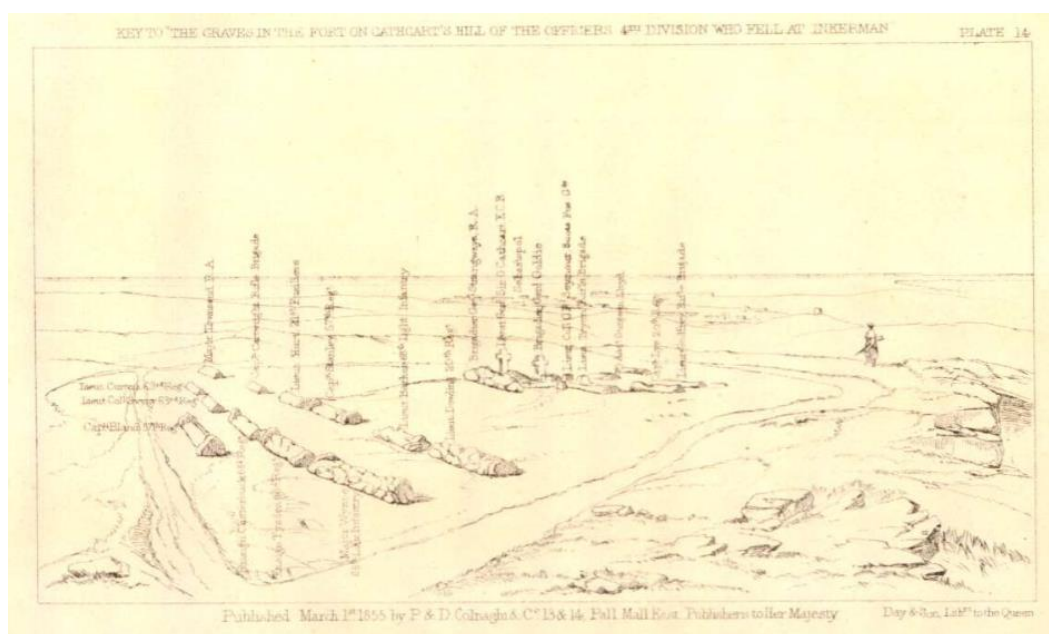


Figure 5 The graves in the fort on Cathcart's Hill. Print by Charles Haghe after William Simpson, 1855. The British Museum 1944,0405.2.14

Many soldiers wrote letters home, sending them not only their families, but directly to newspapers for publication. These letters were often detailed, describing their experiences of war and sights of the destruction caused, and were particularly emotive to the British public. Accounts can be featured in a number of historical newspapers, including *the Times* which published many a letter under the headline '*Letters from Crimea*', written by soldiers of various ranks.⁷⁹ Not all letters or reports would feature under this headline, for example, an extract entitled *The dead-house at Scutari* taken from a letter written by Edward Harris, a private in the 24rd Welsh Fusiliers to his mother which recalled:

“Dear mother, I am sorry to inform you that we bury from 50 to 60 a-day. I have seen as many as 60 put into one hole. There are men doing nothing but digging graves here. I am not talking about the French, only the British Army. It is nothing to see as many as 40 in the dead-house, when I go there at 7 o’clock in the morning. There are as many as 40 that have died in the night, let alone the daytime. The Turks are from the first thing in the morning to the last at night carrying them to the grave.”⁸⁰

Reports such as this contribute to the modern misconception often expressed to the author that only mass graves were used for the ordinary ranks, however this chapter has already presented three examples within this section alone which demonstrate is not true, and so during the Crimean War, we can consider that there may have been a shift in burial traditions from the Napoleonic era, where individual burials were provided where possible. The high number of mass graves used can be attributed to high levels of illnesses such as fever, cholera and dysentery, which killed more men in total than the number killed as a result of enemy action during the entire war. In this context, larger pit burials, particularly those near medical stations, can be considered more akin to plague pits, where the mass grave is used as a method of containing the disease, rather than a strict adherence to historical battlefield burial traditions, a theory which many battlefield guides adhere to. This theory seems particularly viable when framed within the context of developments in the British understanding of public hygiene⁸¹ and burial hygiene⁸², along with knowledge of a bustling trade in corpses for doctors and anatomists, enabled by the 1832 Anatomy Act. Owing to the lack of records and scholarship on this topic, the extent of the use of individual graves for the ordinary ranks is unclear, particularly due to the lack of grave markers and burial records which survive, making it difficult to assess from both a historical and archaeological perspective. It would be beneficial to undertake further archival research to investigate the use of individual graves for

⁸⁰ Harris, Edward (1855). ‘The Dead-House At Scutari’. *The Times*. Wednesday Feb. 28th, 1855, p.8, GALE|CS135171164

⁸¹ Such as Chadwick, Edwin (1842). Report to Her Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department from the Poor Law Commissioners on the sanitary conditions of the labouring population of Great Britain. London: HMSO. Accessed 16.09.2020 <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vgy8svyj>

⁸² Hotz, Mary Elizabeth (2002). Down Among the Dead: Edwin Chadwick’s Burial Reform Discourse in Mid-nineteenth Century England. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 29(1), pp. 21-38. doi: 10.1017/S1060150301291025; Thorsheim, Peter (2011). The Corpse in the Garden: Burial, Health, and the Environment in Nineteenth Century London. *Environmental History*, vol. 16, pp. 38-68. doi: 10.1093/envhis/emq146; Scholz, Maximilian (2017). Over Our Dead Bodies: The Fight over Cemetery Construction in Nineteenth-Century London. *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 43(3), pp. 445-457, doi: 10.1177/0096144215584152; Rugg, Julie (2013). Constructing the grave: competing burial ideas in nineteenth-century England. *Social History*, vol. 38(3), pp.328-345, doi: 10.1080/03071022.20113.816167

ordinary ranks, to further interrogate the development of burial traditions from the Napoleonic era.

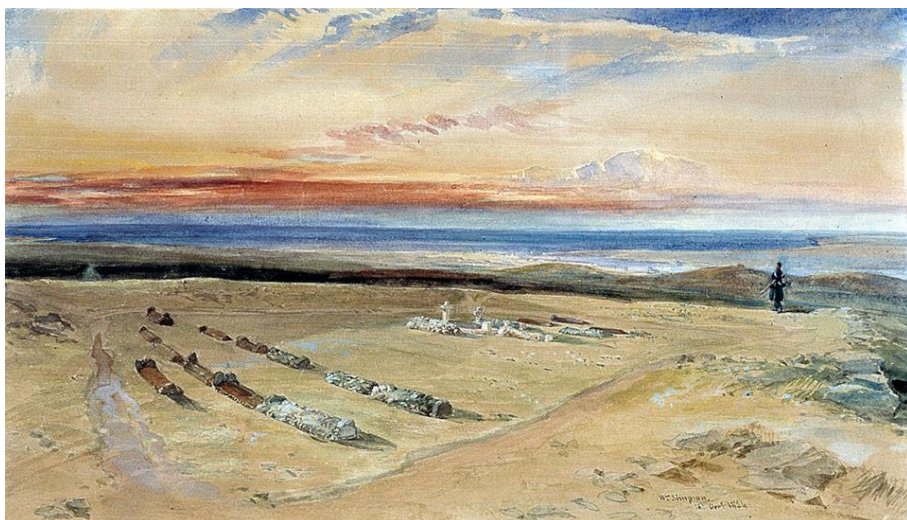


Figure 6 Cathcart's Hill, 16 December 1854, watercolour by William Simpson, reproduced as Plate 4 in Simpson's 'Seat of War in the East', published 1855. NAM.1992-01-115-1

One cemetery of importance is Cathcart's Hill Cemetery, near Sevastopol, Crimea.

Lieutenant-General Sir George Cathcart, KCB, commander of the 4th Division, a veteran of Waterloo, was killed on 5th November 1854 during the Battle of Inkerman, part of the long Siege of Sebastopol (17th Oct 1854 – 11th September 1855). The graveyard formed around General Cathcart's grave, and was named Cathcart's hill, becoming the main cemetery for British soldiers killed in the conflict. The long Siege of Sebastopol "afforded the opportunity for more traditional obsequies", allowing for the formation of divisional graveyards, which replicated the image of an English country churchyard.⁸³ The cemetery at Carthcart's Hill, was said to contain the graves of 12,000 men, 6,000 of whom died of cholera. In 1938, James Edmonds described how 'all the British memorials, and there were many, had been brought into one enclosure on Cathcart Hill, where, according to old photographs there were already a few graves. The dead buried elsewhere had been left undisturbed in their now unmarked graves'.⁸⁴ Thus, the cemetery became an important place for memorial and commemoration, even for those who were not buried within the cemetery walls.⁸⁵ The cemetery was badly damaged during the Second World War, but its development can be explored further through the study of illustrations and lithographs during and following the war, such as *figure 7*.

⁸³ Berridge, A.L. (2015). *Off the Chart: The Crimean War in British Public Consciousness. 19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*. (20) p.11

⁸⁴ Edmonds, James (1938). The Crimean War Cemetery. *Journal for the Society for Army Historical Research*. Vol. 17 (66), p.66

⁸⁵ Ibid.



Figure 7 Tombs of the Generals on Cathcart Hill 1855, photograph by Roger Fenton, Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 2500510

Memorials were erected both at home and abroad, creating an important precedent for the First World War, as communities grieved the loss of loved ones who had died and been buried in a land so far away that few families of the ordinary ranks could hope to visit a grave, or to afford the costs associated with repatriation. Crimean war memorials were typically paid for by communities, whether local or regimental, ‘by subscription’. Whilst there are a variety of examples which can be found across the country, the most dominant types are obelisk style monuments and plaques in or on church walls, usually featuring a written dedication to a regiment, but occasionally including lists of the names of the fallen - though more lavish examples which don’t immediately strike the viewer as war memorials do exist, such as the Sowerby Bridge Crimea War Memorial Clock installed in 1863 into a building designed by Perkin & Backhouse of Leeds, who hoped that the building would become the town hall, a fate that was not to be. Today, building is used as a bank, and the connection to the Crimean War goes unnoticed by most.

Despite the establishment of the first military cemeteries, the intense losses and lack of information would fuel rumours of the bones of Captains being shipped back at the expense of his wealthy family, reflecting the unequal treatment and commemoration of troops who fell in Crimea depending on the private wealth of their family.⁸⁶ The public interest in the graves and cemeteries, and their maintenance continue in the years after the war, with many a scandal published, despite a great number of reports which spoke positively of the condition of the cemeteries. *The Times* featured reports that cemeteries in the Crimea were well maintained in 1859, being ‘held as sacred as any in England, both by the state and the people’ in an environment where ‘any offence to them could not pass without being severely

⁸⁶ France, W. S. (1859). ‘Bones From Sebastopol’. *The Times*. Wednesday Dec. 21st, 1859. p.12

punished’;⁸⁷ There were regular reports of intentional damage, weathering and poor maintenance of the war graves in the British media for a number of years, including one report from 30th November 1869 written by T. Brocklebank and J.H. Law of King’s College, Cambridge, which reported that many of the walls enclosing the cemeteries that they visited in the Crimea were ‘crumbling and melting away direction...partly from climate, partly from violence’.⁸⁸ The materials used to create monuments to mark many graves created further conservation problems, with the reporters describing that ‘the stone of the country is very soft and friable, and soon yields to wet and frost, while many monuments which have been sent out from England by affectionate relatives consist of floriated crosses and other delicate work in marble, which exposure to the weather soon shatters and demolishes’.⁸⁹ Local ‘Tatar peasants’ were said to:

have a notion that valuables are buried with the dead, and, consequently, rifle the graves. An Englishman told us at Sebastopol that his servant once went out shooting, came upon some Tatars actually engaged in exhuming a corpse for the sake of plunder. Again, a distinguished officer who fell at the Alma is buried under a large altar tomb; that Tatars, imagining the corpse is above ground, inside the raised part have ruthlessly destroyed the monument in their endeavours to discover treasure. Iron railings, too, are carried away for the sake of the metal and of the lead which fastens them.⁹⁰

British cemeteries in Crimea were not always enclosed within walls, which could lead to damage caused by grazing animals, and the materials used for headstones often needed maintenance to prevent the erosion of the names of those interred.⁹¹ Even the graves of officers were at risk of desecration, with the bones and uniform of Commander Lacon Usser Hammet of Her Majesty’s ship Albion exhumed and scattered at the ‘graveyard of the Naval Brigade’.⁹²

Extracts from *The Times* also provide a glimpse into the politicisation of the issue of the lack of care of British war graves in the Crimea as a matter of international shame. Brocklebank

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Brocklebank, T. and Law, J. H. (1869). ‘Soldier’s Graves in the Crimea’. *The Times*. Tuesday Nov. 30th, 1869. p.4. GALE|CS67545470

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Oldfield, David (1861), ‘Sebastopol’. *The Times*. Thursday Mar. 21st 1861. p.10. GALE|CS168335477; ‘House of Commons, Thursday 11th April: The Sebastopol Cemeteries’ (1861). *The Times*. Friday Apr. 12th, 1861. p.6. GALE|CS101226636; ‘London, Thursday, September 26, 1867’ (1867). *The Times*. Thursday Sept. 26th, 1867. p.6. GALE|CS101360954; W.G.W. (1860). ‘The Graves at Sebastopol’. *The Times*. Friday Apr. 27th, 1860. p.12. GALE|CS202020507

⁹² W.G.W. (1860). ‘The Graves at Sebastopol.’. *The Times*. Friday Apr. 27th, 1860. p.12. GALE|CS202020507

and Law described French and Russian military cemeteries as examples of superior provisions for burial:

The French have collected their dead into one large cemetery, laid out the ground neatly, put a guardian at the gates, and built a series of monumental chapels, which, though questionable in taste, are, at all events, solid and durable, and show that a great nation is not prevented by distance from remembering the duties of civilization. The Russians, pits, covered with sloping masses of stone which seem indestructible by weather or violence. The ground, which is a slope commanding a view of the country is disposed ornamentally, and the most conspicuous monument is a marble bust, under a canopy, of Prince Gortschakoff, the Russian Commander-in-Chief during the war, who, though he died in Warsaw, in 1861, desired to be buried among his former comrades in arms.⁹³

The report concluded that:

It is not for us to point out the precise remedy for the present state of the English cemeteries, but we may add that we are assured at Sebastopol that the Russians would, in their chivalry, readily facilitate any endeavours to protect them.⁹⁴

Examples of Russian respect for the dead were also referred to within newspaper articles in order to reduce fears over the perceived lack of care of war graves. James Fergusson wrote to the editor of *the Times* in 1858 to describe the good preservation of ‘the burialgrounds (sic) of the allied armies’ at Odessa and Sebastopol, made possible as a ‘result of genuine solicitude on the part of the local Government to gratify what they know to be the earnest wish of numbers of every class both in this country and in France’.⁹⁵ The Russian government had ordered that the graves be well cared for, and Fergusson described his assurance that Madame Bellavodsky, ‘proprietress’ of the grounds, would ‘be rewarded by the gratitude of English wives and mothers for the kindness of heart which prompts her to care for the honoured graves of those they have lost’.⁹⁶ In 1859 C.B. Curtis wrote to the editor of *The Times* with a translated extract of a letter written by an ‘officer of distinction’ who had visited and reported his sons grave. The extract reported that “the Russians are a religious people and respect the dead. The tomb is a sacred object with them; and you may be certain that if ever they fall into ruin in that place of repose it will be the work of time and not of man”.⁹⁷ Letters such as these examples from *The Times* reported both the good upkeep and the decay or destruction of

⁹³ Brocklebank, T. and Law, J. H. (1869). ‘Soldiers’ Graves in the Crimea’. *The Times*. Tuesday Nov. 30th, 1869. p.4. GALE|CS67938686

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ An Officer (1858). ‘The Graves at Sebastopol’. *The Times*. Monday June 24th, 1858, p.6. GALE|CS101225180

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ourtis, C. B. (1859). ‘The Tombs at Sebastopol’. *The Times*. Wednesday Apr. 27th, 1859. p.11. GALE|CS185111707

military graves and cemeteries, keeping the matter of fallen soldiers in the public psyche for years after the conclusion of the Crimean War until at least 1869.

The letters and reports published after the war demonstrate a prolonged public interest in the treatment of fallen soldiers, and the way in which transnational examples of good practice were used to demonstrate a need for reform. Though Summers argued that it was only in the advent of medicine that burial traditions would begin to reform, the evidence suggests that the recognition of the corpse as a vector for disease, and the requirement to maintain sanitary burial grounds as a public health provision in Britain did not translate into the immediate transformation of military practices in a dramatic and immediately distinguishable way during or following the Crimean War.

Further work would be required to fully interrogate the intensity and frequency of public and political debate in order to do justice to the topic, however, it is clear that the respectful treatment of the war dead was considered a matter of public concern for a prolonged period of time, representing a shift in attitudes towards the body of the fallen soldier, and the needs of the living family to have a respectable focus for grief in British burial traditions as Victorian funerary traditions continued to develop.

2.3 The American Civil War (1861-65)

The American Civil War (1861-65) is another significant conflict relevant to the development of British First World War military burial traditions, with the building of national cemeteries which undoubtedly inspired the British reaction to the First World War.⁹⁸ However, more significantly for this thesis, during this war, it is possible to observe informal cultures of the sale and use of identifying items by soldiers, and consider how these systems would influence later designs in a range of European countries.

During the American Civil War, a culture for privately purchased identification began to develop. Soldiers were concerned about the possibility of being buried in a 'nameless grave', and that their families would never learn what had happened to them or come to recover their remains. Initially, soldiers would pin paper notes containing personal information such as a name and address to the back of their coats. Others chose to stencil their details onto their knapsacks or carve information into the back of the army issue belt buckle, which was

⁹⁸ Faust, Drew Gilpin (2005). "The Dread Void of Uncertainty": Naming the Dead in the American Civil War. *Southern Cultures*. Vol. 11(2), pp.7-32. doi:10.1353/scu.2005.0018; Chapman, William (2019). A Heritage of War, Conflict, and Commemoration. *Change Over Time*, vol. 9(1), pp.2-13; Grant, Susan-Mary (2004), Patriot Graves: American national identity and the Civil War Dead. *American Nineteenth Century History*, vol. 5(3), pp. 74-100. doi: 10.1080/1466465042000302773

produced from soft lead. On 3rd May 1862, John Kennedy of New York wrote to Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War for the United States, offering to produce a 'name disc' to be supplied to all Federal army soldiers. Kennedy's design was abruptly rejected with no explanation.⁹⁹

In the following months, periodicals began to feature adverts for 'soldier pins', which came in a variety of shapes, often using shapes or designs associated with a branch of the service. One company who produced such items was Drowne & Moore Jewelers of New York who placed an advert in *Harper's* weekly in 1863 to promote their goods: 'Attention Soldiers! Every soldier should have a badge with his name marked distinctly upon it...a solid silver badge... can be fastened to any garment' (fig. 8).¹⁰⁰ These pins or tags swiftly became known as dog tags, possibly in association with the introduction of dog licensing laws implemented by President Thomas Jefferson. By 1850, many states had begun to enforce licensing laws which instructed that all dogs were required to wear a collar featuring the owners name and license number. These small wooden or metal collar tags became known as 'dog tags', a name which appears to have been transferred to identity discs for human use.



The tag proposed by Kennedy.

Figure 9 Stansbury Haydon, F. (1939). An Identification Disc for the Army, 1862. *The Journal of the American Military Institute*. Vol. 3(1). P.62

Figure 8 (top and bottom) adverts for soldier pins featured within *Harper's Weekly* on 6th February 1864. *Harper's Weekly* (1864), vol.8. Accessed 03.11.2020

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015021733780&view=1up&seq=96&q1=badge>



⁹⁹ Stansbury Haydon, F. (1939). An Identification Disc for the Army, 1862. *The Journal of the American Military Institute*. Vol. 3(1). pp.61-63

¹⁰⁰ *Harper's Weekly* (1864), vol.8. Accessed 03.11.2020

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015021733780&view=1up&seq=96&q1=badge>

Throughout the Civil War, civilian merchants known as sutlers would set up mobile tent stores which would follow the movement of soldiers. These mobile “stores” would sell a range of goods such as tobacco, sugar, coffee and even identification tags. Small machines could stamp designs into discs created from materials such as brass or soft lead. These tags typically featured phrases such as 'Liberty, Union and Equality', 'Against Rebellion' or 'War for the Union', with the soldier’s personal information such as their name and unit featuring on the reverse. Other designs included stamped images including portraits of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. Some even included a list of battles in which the owner had participated. These metal tags featured a punched hole at the top of the tag which allowed for a piece of string to be threaded through, to be worn around the neck. The primary market for the sutlers was the Union soldiers, though Confederate tags have been identified. As the tags used in the American Civil War were not officially issued, and because there exists a number of publications on the American tags, this thesis will not focus on the American tags in great detail, focusing mainly on the aspect of development.¹⁰¹ Further research is required to establish whether Chinese migrants living in the US were involved in the trade for such tags, importing innovations from the Taiping Rebellion to the West.



Figure 10 Corporal Alvin B. Williams of Company F, 11th Regiment New Hampshire Volunteers, with musket and a bayonet in scabbard; dog tag in case. United States, None. [Between 1862 and 1864] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010648769/>



Figure 11 Petersburg, Va. Sutler's tent, 2d Division, 9th Corps. Petersburg United States Virginia, 1864. November. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018666693/>

¹⁰¹ Maier, Larry B. and Stahl, Joseph W. (2008). *Identification Discs of Union Soldiers in the Civil War: A Complete Classification Guide and Illustrated History*. Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Co. Inc. Publishers; Sledge, Michael (2007). *Soldier Dead: How we Recover, Identify, Bury and Honor Our Military Fallen*. New York: Columbia University Press; Faust, Drew Gilpin (2006). “Numbers on Top of Numbers”: Counting the Civil War Dead. *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 70(4), pp. 995-1009; Faust, Drew Gilpin (2005). “The Dread Void of Uncertainty”: Naming the Dead in the American Civil War. *Southern Cultures*, vol. 11(2), pp. 7-32

Despite the rapid development of the American private purchase identification market, thousands of federal soldiers buried in national cemeteries across America would remain unknown. National military cemeteries another cultural by-product of the American Civil War, though this war culture would soon become part of formal process across Europe and the British Empire. On 17th July 1862, Congress passed a motion which would provide the Quartermaster General with the authority to establish military burialgrounds. Whilst this act ensured that cemeteries could be created, the Army did not have experience in such an operation and lacked the organisational skills to enforce the required works consistently. Additionally, there were few procedures relating to the identification of human remains, particularly for soldiers who died on the battlefield and were not recovered for some time. Some soldiers had purchased identifying items like soldier pins and coins, but these items were easy to miss due to the lack of uniform use, easy to misplace and easy to loot. So, the purchase of such an item could not necessarily guarantee a positive identification.

With so few soldiers identified, with estimates of up to 60% unknown, Susan-Mary Grant argues that the losses incurred during the American Civil War resulted in the construction of a ‘civil cult of the dead’, translating such significant losses into a ‘meaningful symbol of national rebirth’.¹⁰² A physical manifestation of this was the development of national cemeteries across the land. These cemeteries provided not only a place within which the dead could be re-homed, but a physical focus for grief for the living in a format which acknowledged individual sacrifice but also represented a ‘composite expression of national will’; the grave of a fallen soldier was no longer an individual, familial burial, but a national burial symbolic of the relationship between the soldier and the nation.¹⁰³ In 1998, Phillip Shaw Paludan described that during the war, the purpose of religion was not only to ‘justify the killing but also to provide the comfort that 620,000 deaths required’, resulting in changing ideas about heaven for American Christians, becoming a home to which the fallen boys could return.¹⁰⁴ A place of comfort, rather than a distant and strange place, perhaps previously only accessible to the most devout. This elevation of the dead soldier to a quasi-holy status that they were unlikely to have obtained in life had they not been a soldier can also be observed in British tradition during the First World War, as will be explored in the following chapters.

¹⁰² Grant, Susan-Mary (2004). *Patriot Graves: American national identity and the civil war dead. American Nineteenth Century History*. Vol 5(3), p 78

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.78 and 94

¹⁰⁴ Paludan, Phillip Shaw (1998). ‘Religion and the American Civil War’. In Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Regan Wilson (eds.). *Religion and the American Civil War*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 37

From 1864, the federal government undertook the responsibility of manufacturing the coffins to be used in the national cemeteries and began to realise the importance of not only identifying the dead but marking their graves in an ‘appropriate and lasting way’.¹⁰⁵ This concern for the respectful treatment of the war dead continued following the conclusion of the war. On the 22nd February 1867, ‘An Act to establish and to protect National Cemeteries’ was passed, requiring that each cemeteries was enclosed by a ‘good and substantial stone or wooden fence’, with each grave within the cemetery ‘marked with a small headstone, or block, with the number of the grave inscribed thereon, corresponding with the number opposite to the name of the party in a register of burials to be kept at each cemetery and at the office of the quarter-master general, which shall set forth the name, rank, company, regiment and date of death of the officer or soldier; or, if unknown, it shall be so recorded’.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, a porter’s lodge was to be built at each cemetery, with a superintendent selected from ‘enlisted men of the army, disabled in service’, who would ‘have the pay and allowances of an ordnance sergeant, to reside therein, for the purpose of guarding and protecting the cemetery and giving information to parties visiting the same’. Army officers were to be commissioned by the Secretary of War to conduct annual inspections and to provide the money for the necessary repairs and protective work, with a report to be submitted to Congress via the Secretary of War ‘at the commencement of each session’.¹⁰⁷ The act even included margin notes relating to the issuing of penalties for the wilful damage, removal or destruction of any structure within a national cemetery. This act created an international precedent in that the instructions for the burial of officers and soldiers, and the subsequent marking of and care of their graves were exactly the same. The act solidified the American expectation that all soldiers would be treated respectfully because of their sacrifice. Unlike the case of the British graves in Crimea, these graves were not on foreign soil; the looting or desecration of a grave was no longer a distant crime, it would not take months or years for the American public to hear news of a cemetery decaying due to a lack of care.

Whilst a formal identity disc, or system for the identification of deceased soldiers was not implemented during this war, the American Civil War resulted in a shift in attitudes towards the bodies of fallen soldiers, and the value of human identification processes, decades before the British experience of losses incurred during the First World War. The American national cemeteries created an international precedent for the standards of burial and memorialisation for ordinary ranked soldiers in particular, reframing the idea of who should be remembered

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p.92

¹⁰⁶ The United States Statutes at Large, 39th Congress, 2nd Session (1867), p.399. Accessed 03.11.2020 <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=014/llsl014.db&recNum=430>

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

following battle. Despite a clear need for further archival and academic research in order to gain a more informed insight into the differences between British and American military burial culture at the time, and how American military burial traditions were adopted internationally following the conclusion of the American Civil War, it seems clear that the American national military cemeteries created a new minimum standard of treatment, which other national armies would observe, and many national publics would remember. The placement of soldiers within individual, marked graves highlighted the individual sacrifice of each soldier, offering a lasting place of rest in a marked grave, regardless of rank, was a statement, which would surely influence the development of the systems which will follow within this chapter. In spite of these social advances in American military culture, it would be some time before a formal identifying item would be issued, the development of which will be explored in the following chapter.

2.4 The Austro-Prussian War (1866)

Despite the significance of the American Civil War regarding the expectations for the burial of soldiers, the conflict which would result in the most significant development for the purpose of this chapter, and the broader thesis, is the Austro-Prussian War, which resulted in the introduction of the first formal identification system issued by a national army. The significance of this development will be realised as the chapter progresses. Amongst enthusiastic collectors of German identification tags, tales of an earlier development do exist, describing that after the conclusion of the Second Schleswig War (also referred to as the German Danish War), which took place between 1st Feb 1864 – 30th October 1864, a craftsman from Berlin who had several sons in the military reportedly proposed the issue of an identifying tag to soldiers, which would be known as the ‘*Hundemarke*’ or dog tag.¹⁰⁸ . Whilst it is possible that the origins of the identity disc scheme which would eventually become known as the *Erkennungsmarke* were a consequence of reflecting upon the treatment of the dead following the Second Schleswig, there is no historical evidence to confirm this at present. The real story of the *Erkennungsmarke* is a far more complex picture, beginning with the Austro-Prussian War (14th June-22nd July 1866, also known as the Seven Weeks’ War, the German Civil War, the War of 1866, the Unification War and the Fraternal War), which tells tales of developing humanitarian values in both national military forces and international agreements, resulting from lessons learned during an intense period of fighting and military development.

¹⁰⁸ Ganschow, Jan, Haselhorst Olaf and Ohnezeit, Maik (eds.) (2013). *Der Deutsch-Französische Krieg 1870/71: Vorgeschichte, Verlauf, Folgen*. 2. Aufl. Gratz. p.405

In 1866, a small number of Prussian units trialled a voluntary identity tag system, issuing soldiers with a small, rectangle tag produced from iron and marked with unit information. Whilst little is known about the trial, including the dates of the trial, the battles in which the trial featured, information about the tags used, or the results of the trial, it is said that the trial tags were not well received, with many soldiers discarding the tags which they superstitiously perceived as an omen for death.¹⁰⁹ In spite of any negative feelings about the tags, the need for a system to help to identify dead and wounded soldiers would become increasingly apparent towards the end of Austro-Prussian War. In this conflict, the Prussian Army utilised many technologies seen in recent continental wars, such as railways and telegraphs, but also introduced new weaponry such as von Dreyse's breech-loading needle gun, which would prove particularly useful for the outnumbered Prussian infantry against the Austrian opposition during the decisive Battle of Königgrätz (3rd July 1866).

A Prussian review of the 1866 campaign published in 1872 reported 1,935 Prussian officers and men killed during the battle, with 6959 wounded, and 278 missing. In total, these figures represented 9,172 soldiers killed, injured, or incapacitated to a degree which temporarily or permanently prevents the bearing of arms by the individual. In contrast Austria and her allies incurred 4,861 casualties, 13,920 wounded and a colossal 25,419 missing soldiers out of a total of 44,200 killed, wounded and missing.¹¹⁰ Statistically, Prussia experienced a slightly higher percentage of casualties during the battle, with 21.1% of reported losses counted as a casualty, compared with a casualty rate of 20.75% reported by Austria. However, Prussia reported only 3.03% of soldiers as missing, compared with Austria who reported 57.51% of soldiers as missing. This left Prussia with 75.87% of losses reported as wounded, in contrast to the 31.49% reported for wounded Austrian soldiers. These figures demonstrate that the aftermath of the Austro-Prussian War had demonstrated an operational need to account for the dead and wounded, and to respond to the presence of dead bodies as a sanitary measure.

Even before the publication of this particular report, Prussia was reflecting upon the experiences of and lessons learned from the Austro-Prussian War. One lesson which would later influence international humanitarian policy was that of the need to respond to the issue of dead and wounded soldiers. Minister-President Otto von Bismarck visited the battlefield of

¹⁰⁹ David O'Mara (2016), *Identifying the Dead*, unpublished, p.3

¹¹⁰ Note- this figure also includes 19,800 prisoners of War. Great Britain. [Prussian General Staff]. *Campaign of 1866 in Germany. The War With Austria. Compiled by the Department of Military History of the Prussian Staff*. Translated by Colonel von Wright and Captain Henry M. Hozier (orig. 1872, rpt. 1994, Nashville). p.606. Accessed 18.09.2020: http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_00000001B83A

Koniggratz after the battle, an experience which appears to have affected him deeply, Writing to Count Eduard von Bethusy-Huc, he lamented:

“If foreign ministers had always followed their sovereigns to the front history would have fewer wars to tell of. I have seen on a battlefield-and what is worse, in the hospitals- the flower of our youth carried off by wounds and disease... With such memories and such sights I should not have a moment’s peace if I had to reproach myself for making war irresponsibly, or out of ambition, or the vain seeking of fame.”¹¹¹

Bismarck was not the only individual to have been deeply affected by their experience of the Austro-Prussian Dr Gottfried Friedrich Franz Loeffler, a doctor of the 1st Prussian Army during the war, was another individual affected by his experiences at the front. In 1868, he published his recommendations for reform in a book entitled: *Das Preussische Militär-Sanitätswesen und seine Reform nach der Kriegserfahrung von 1866* (Loeffler 1868). Subtitled 'The Voluntary Nursing and Geneva Convention of 22nd August 1864 and the War Experience of 1866' (trans.), Loeffler’s work reflected upon the treatment of the dead, acknowledging that the ‘funeral of the dead in sanitary and in other aspects left much to be desired’¹¹² In the book, Loeffler explained that he had previously reported on the events of the war from the Prussian perspective in 1866, including how a response to war might look in the future, optimistically hoping that ‘in all states, central organs of voluntary nursing, recognised by the government, will exist in the future’, even if they were not all Prussian.¹¹³ For this to work, Central Organs of the warring States would need to maintain relations with both neutral states and each other ‘in the interest of the wounded and the sick on both sides, be it directly or through the mediation of the “International Central Committee”’.¹¹⁴

Loeffler referred to Article 8 proposed at the 1856 Congress of Paris, which proposed that the victorious army should be obliged to protect those killed on the battlefield from plunder and maltreatment, including the burial of the dead which would also help to maintain the sanitary conditions of the living, proposing to incorporate it into the Geneva Convention.¹¹⁵ Warring parties should be required to exchange lists of casualties, which would require measures to ensure that identity could be easily ascertained. Satisfactory regulation of such a system was ‘certainly not an easy task, especially after big battles’, as revealed in 1864, where efforts were made to identify the dead. Even in the dressing stations and field hospitals, many had died without being able to give their name, or without the presence of a translator to help to

¹¹¹ Edward Crankshaw (1981), *Bismarck*. Reprint, A&C Black, 2011. P.1741

¹¹² Loeffler 1868, p. 63

¹¹³ Ibid. p.62

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.62

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p 63

confirm their identity. This obstacle, the need to establish identity, especially amongst the dead, could be overcome 'with more certainty', if all parties would commit, in the event of war, to equipping each soldier with a 'similar sign [*Zeichen*], which shows their name, place of birth and troop number.' In the event of death, the sign should be forwarded to the authorities of the soldier's nation.¹¹⁶

Loeffler had witnessed the impact of a failure to deal with the dead and identify the fallen at Konnigratz, where it was a 'fact' that the dead and severely wounded had been looted upon the battlefield, by both Prussian and Austrian soldiers, along with "dwellers of the land".¹¹⁷ In 1866 Loeffler reported that there were 12,000 Austrian soldiers still missing months after the conflict, as well as 700 Prussian soldiers, as most official and private attempts to research the fate of individual soldiers failed to yield results.¹¹⁸ The inability to confirm the fate of these men had caused increasing uncertainty for the families, whose grief and worry was 'accompanied by delayed regulation of property and inheritance rights'.¹¹⁹ Heinrich Bernhard Oppenheim, a scholar of international law, also reflected upon the rights of the dead, insisting in 1866 that 'the right of war does not abolish the human right, and also that the enemy dead must be treated in a humane way' and so the provision of burial rights must also be extended to enemy war dead.¹²⁰

Loeffler addressed a previous request made to the Berlin Conference (1884-85) to contemplate the question of the dead, to formalise an international commitment on the recovery of dead from the battlefield, acting as a supplement to the Geneva Convention of 1864. The War Ministry had already begun to take initiative to 'settle this matter for the Prussian army', creating an authority for the 'unified management of the service in the back of the operating field army'.¹²¹ He continued, 'one can expect that the task in question will receive appropriate attention from all armies. Nevertheless, it remains desirable that a passage with the meaning and scope of the proposed will be included in the convention.', adding that it would also be desirable if an agreement was made during the official negotiations on the form and mode of support for the identification mark (*Erkennungszeichen*) which every soldier should receive.¹²² Loeffler revisited the proposed modifications for the

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Oppenheim, H. (1866). *System des Völkerrechts*. (2nd ed.), p.229, cited in Ganschow, J. P. P. (2009). Identification of the Fallen: The Supply of "Dog Tags" to Soldiers as a Commandment of the Laws of War/ *New Zealand Armed Forces Law Review*, 9, pp. 21-54

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 64

¹²² Ibid. p. 64

Paris Convention, stating that it could be said that they ‘all correspond to the purpose of making the “too ideal” or “too doctrinal” provisions of the convention more practical’.¹²³

A second part to *Das Preussische Militär-Sanitätswesen...* was published in early 1869, with the subtitle ‘the Medical Service and its organisation in the campaign of 1866 and the reform after 1866, which revisited the issue of the need for an identifying mark, reminding the reader that ‘there are still some tasks to be remembered in connection with the combat situation, although only partially touch the sanitary service. These include: caring for the dead, ensuring the identity of the dead and dying, the burial of corpses in accordance with the requirements of piety and hygiene’.¹²⁴ These issues had already been raised in Part I, with a request to amend the articles of the 1864 Geneva Convention, though Loeffler added that these issues had since been raised at the Congress of Government Plenipotentiaries who believed it necessary to limit protocol memoranda to these topics.¹²⁵ Undeterred, the Prussian Army was proceeding with its plans to introduce an identifying mark, now referred to as a

Recognoscirungs-Marke:

Nevertheless, the North German Confederation will meet the needs identified by the experience of 1866 through the regulatory introduction of a special brand of Recognition.

On mobilization, each soldier will receive a tin tag, which is worn on a cord around the neck (and on a bare body) the name of the unit and the number which the holder has in the register of his unit.¹²⁶

The *Recognoscirungs-Marke* was formally introduced under the new name of *Rekognitionmarke* (recognition mark, also referred to as the *Recognitionmarke*) on 29th April 1869 in §110 of the Prussian *Instruktion über das Sanitätswesen der Armee im Felde*, which instructed that the a metal tag would be provided to each soldier before leaving for the field to be suspended from a length of cord and worn around the neck “in order to positively establish the identity of soldiers killed on the battlefield or found unconscious”.¹²⁷ The tag was rectangular, with rounded corners and a raised edge, typically measuring approximately 4cm by 3cm and produced from pressed steel. Information was hand stamped at regimental level upon mobilisation to include the regiment, battalion, and company number of the disc holder. Other regimental details were stamped during manufacture. This tag was first issued in July 1870. Interestingly, in some of the very early discs, we can see that 'C' is used to abbreviate

¹²³ Ibid. p. 64

¹²⁴ Loeffler 1869, p. 233

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 234

¹²⁶ Loeffler 1869

¹²⁷ Instruktion über das Sanitätswesen der Armee im Felde of 29 April 1869. Berlin: Mittler. 1869. article (§) 110; Burroughs, Peter (1994). “An Unreformed Army? 1815-1868” in Chandler, D. (eds.). *The Oxford History of the British Army*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp.161-186

'*Companie*', rather than the 'K' we see on later discs and the use of '*Kompanie*'. Ranked soldiers and non-commissioned officers were supplied by the army, but officers (including medical officers, veterinarians and senior officers assigned to the campaign army) were required to provide their own identification discs produced by civilian manufactures.¹²⁸



Figure 12 1869 disc adapted and re-issued to a soldier in 1914. Photo by David O'Mara, published in S. I. Ashbridge (2019), p. 65 Note that the C for *Companie* has been kept, rather than updating the disc to feature a K for *Kompanie*

The *Rekognitionmarke* ensured that if any soldier were killed, a durable item would remain upon the body allowing for identification at a later point. In *History of Clothing and Equipment of the Royal Prussian Army in the years 1806-1878*, Mila wrote that the tag enabled the army to 'better ascertain the identity of those wounded or found unconscious', indicating that the tags were designed to assist with the identification of the living who were unable to confirm their identity for any reason.¹²⁹ Today, we refer to this model as the 1869 disc, though in practise, the discs were not issued until July 1870 with the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War (19th July 1870-28th January 1871). The discs and cords should be purchased by 'the interested parties (officer and assimilated of the active army, the reserve and the Territorial Army)', who were also responsible for the stamping of the tags. Tags could now be purchased in silver and could feature mechanical engravings.¹³⁰

2.5 The Franco-German War (1870-1871)

The Franco-German War (19th July 1870-10th May 1871 – also known as the Franco-Prussian War) 'saw the emergence of huge armies and the mass mobilisation of reservists' which required new structures and systems of command and control, as the 'methods of an earlier

¹²⁸ Anon. *Les Plaques d'Identité allemandes 1869-1918*. blog. Accessed 21.01.2021 http://plaques-identite.eu/main_dossier.php?page=P1

¹²⁹ Mila, Adalbert (1878) *Geschichte der Bekleidung und Ausrüstung der Kgl. Preußischen Armee in den Jahren 1806 bis 1878: Zugleich eine Ergänzungsschrift der Uniformierungs-Liste des Deutschen Reichs-Heeres*. Berlin: Mittler. Accessed. 18.09.2020 <https://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/df/59332/1/>

¹³⁰ Trouvetout Détection (2019). *Les Plaques de soldats*. Blog. Accessed 21.01.2021 <http://trouvetoutdetection.over-blog.com/2019/03/les-plaques-de-soldats.html>

era' were blended with military science.¹³¹ The war would become the first widely-commemorated conflict in Europe, with ordinary soldiers buried in permanent resting places for the first time, followed by the erection of war memorials and the establishment of annual commemorative gatherings to honour those who fell. These practices may not have developed to the same extent were it not for the use of the *Rekognitionmarke* ensuring a higher rate of identifications.

Scholars such as Daniel Pick have acknowledged the significance of the Franco-German War on the development of war, citing the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published in 1910-11, which described that: 'Since 1870 it has been recognised that preparation of the theatre of war is one of the first duties of government', redefining war as a matter of movements and organisation, rather than blind struggle.¹³² The exploitation of machinery through the use of industrial weaponry had an excessive human cost, yet the impact of the war on military burial practices, and practices of remembrance in Europe remains overlooked.¹³³ Bertrand Taithe reflected in 2001 upon how the Franco-German war has 'always been considered in relation to the American Civil War', however the relationship between the American Civil War and identity discs or military burial traditions in Europe in the late nineteenth century has still not been fully explored, nor the impact of German identity discs on European and American military cultures.¹³⁴ The response to the operational need to identify dead soldiers witnessed during and following the Franco-Prussian War laid the foundations for European practices which would develop during the First World War.

In May 1871, following the conclusion of the war, Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg were amalgamated, amongst others, into the North German Confederation under the Treaty of Frankfurt (1871) (under Otto von Bismarck in 1867, who would become the Federal Chancellor of the North German Confederation). Whilst the armies of Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg remained semi-autonomous forces, Prussia took control over the armies of absorbed states within the newly formed German Empire; within which Bismarck appointed himself to the position of Imperial Chancellor. Within the Constitution of the German Empire (16th April 1871) we see a change in references to the Federal Army to the Army of the Realm

¹³¹ Lorimer, J. G. (2005). IX. Why Would Modern Military Commanders Study the Franco-Prussian War? *Defence Studies*, 5:1, p.108

¹³² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1910-11, vol. XXVIII, p. 306. Cited in Pick, Daniel (1996). *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age*. Yale University Press, p.110-111

¹³³ Pick, Daniel (1996). *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age*. Yale University Press. cited in Bertrand, Taithe (2001). *Citizenship and Wars: France in Turmoil 1870-1871*. London/New York: Routledge. p.22

¹³⁴ Bertrand, Taithe (2001). *Citizenship and Wars: France in Turmoil 1870-1871*. London/New York: Routledge. P. 21

(*Reichsheer*) or German Army (*Deutsches Heer*). As the German Army increased in size, and developed strategies to respond to the impact of increasingly destructive methods of industrial warfare utilised during the Franco-Prussian War, it became clear that the 1869 pattern *Rekognitionmarke* required further refinement for use in any future war, though it would be some time before any amendments to the existing design were implemented, as we shall see.

In fact, the next development in the identity disc story takes place in France. Following the Napoleonic wars, there had been a reliance on long service volunteers, along with the hire of foreign mercenary regiments, filling remaining numbers through conscription by lot.¹³⁵ Between 1867-1869, Minister of War Adolphe Niel had begun to implement a broad series of army reforms, allowing for universal conscription along with the creation of a reserve force. Unfortunately, in 1869, during an operation to remove a bladderstone in Paris, Niel passed away, leaving his reforms incomplete ahead of the Franco-German War. The conflict destroyed much of the old imperial army upon which Niel's new structure would rest.

Following the conclusion of the war, the Third Republic began to remodel the French military structure around the Prussian model, bolstered by Nationalist ideologies which emphasised 'the ideal of the guarded, self-referential national schooled in the imperative of war', necessitating the training of men to ensure that the Army was training and ready to respond at all times. In 1874, Georges Morache, an army doctor now teaching at the Val-de-Grace military hospital, published *Traité d'hygiène militaire*.¹³⁶ Within this work, Chapter II which focuses on military life in times of war, informs us about the development of the French identity disc, however, it also allows us to explore cultures of learning from war, development for future wars, and military sanitation in the French Army. By examining French cultures before the First World War, we provide ourselves with another case study on the development and introduction of identity discs, and how they were implemented, which we can reflect upon when we arrive at the development of the British disc in Chapter Three.

Within Chapter II, there are two sections: the mobilization period, and the fighting period. The mobilisation section discusses the organisation of the army, and the need to be prepared for fighting, even in times of peace¹³⁷. This section helps us to understand the lessons learned by the French from the Franco-German War, and how they sought to respond to such challenges in future wars.

¹³⁵ Though the wealthier classes could often afford to facilitate exemption through the employment of paid substitutes

¹³⁶ Brown, Frederick (2010). *For the Soul of France: Culture wars in the age of Dreyfus*. New York: Knopf.

¹³⁷ A reference to the phrase *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, found in *De Re Militari*

Morache described that historically, campaigns were planned well in advance, with long intervals of time between the declaration of war, and the entry into the campaign, in times where hostilities were regularly suspended ‘either by an armistice or by an unspoken convention’, with these scenarios allowing time to ‘think of preparing the soldiers for the entry in campaign and to make them undergo real training’. Morache proposed that ‘it can and should be completely different’, putting forward suggestions to cut the length of time required for conscripts under the law of 1872, to two or three years, ‘at least for the infantry’, before sending the soldier into the reserves. This would not only increase the size of the Army in numbers, but would make it ‘even stronger in cohesion, by patriotism and certainly by health’.¹³⁸ In the event of war, soldiers’ would be trained, prepared, and well accustomed to military traditions such as long marches and ‘the special food’, leaving few surprises and reducing frustrations in the field.

To implement such changes in the organisation of soldiers would ensure that the cogs of the great machine are well calculated and...when the fatherland needs all its children...each will know how to take its rank; tactical units will arrive at the meeting point on time; the bodies will set off with this calm, this precision that only true power can offer; we will finally arrive in front of the enemy and, at that moment, we realise it will soon be worth what the soldiers on the battlefield are so prepared for!

In meeting military hygienists, we cannot therefore study a "period of preparation for war", this period is peace itself. This is why...while dealing with food, clothing, exercises, we have always considered the campaign period, to regulate according to it the functioning of peacetime.

Once in the field, or at least as soon as the army is concentrated, new conditions arise, however... it is not possible to prepare the soldier for, because they are all special; a few- some are almost fatal and partly inevitable. Others are fortuitous, the result of circumstances over which the military authority has no control, at most one can seek to mitigate the effects.¹³⁹

The first of these ‘morbific causes’ was fatigue, acknowledging the intense mortality rates experienced within the infantry particularly during the beginning of hostilities, when ‘we must expect to see the numbers diminish very rapidly in a proportion sometimes reaching a tenth of the total number’. However, it was still ‘necessary to foresee the fact and to seek to attenuate it, as far as possible, by multiplying hygienic precautions during the marches’.¹⁴⁰ ‘§II – Fighting Period’ has a focus on hygiene on the battlefield but focuses on issues which might not immediately spring to a civilian’s mind as issues of hygiene within a military context. The first of these issues is food.¹⁴¹ Morache acknowledged that ‘the doctor has no

¹³⁸ Morache, G. (1874). *Traité d'hygiène militaire*. Paris: J.B. Baillié and Son. P 933

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 934

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p.935

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p.936

role to play in such matters' as it could 'hardly attract the attention of the command, which alone can change the situation if, moreover, the administrative services have taken effective measures in advance'. This led to discussion about the transport of wounded from the battlefield, the organisation of field hospitals and the activation of the health service during way, acknowledging the vital and essential role of hygiene within these questions.

The battlefield itself presented several sanitary issues, requiring additional attention during peace time to ensure the army could respond in future wars. Hygienists needed to consider the impact of the army on the ground itself, with the presence of toxic gases, and the 'infection of the soil' and running waters by detritus such as food debris, fecal matter, the corpses of men and animals, and even 'by the blood spilled on the ground'.¹⁴² It was the task of the victorious army to restore the land and water to its natural state, or at the very least, remove the source of infection, with the assistance of the local population. Morache presented these issues as being of particular necessity for the army given the need to conduct the burials of its own soldiers, and those of the enemy, 'if only for humanity'. Sanitation was also of interest to the wounded of both armies, as it was 'difficult to say how much the mephitism of the battlefield influences the course of wounds... but this influence is undeniable'.¹⁴³

One method of maintaining good soil hygiene was the implementation of improved burial practices, with Morache reflecting upon recent experiences, describing that 'usually, after the fight, the military authority requisitions the local population for the establishment of large pits, in which the corpses are placed side by side, often on several layers of depth', with a 'tumuli' or raised mound of earth over the grave in order to create a 'great thickness of earth between the corpse and the outside air'.¹⁴⁴ The pits, or mass graves must be 'sufficiently deep', i.e. a minimum of 2 meters in depth, in order for the burial to proceed, as 'it is the one habit that has been preserved generally'.¹⁴⁵ Where it was possible to obtain a local permit, it was considered advisable to cover the area with quicklime, and 'fast-growing, nitrogen-hungry forage plants, such as clover or oats' should be planted on top of the tumuli, in order to 'activate the rapidity of the putrid decomposition'.¹⁴⁶ Part of this funerary worked included the requirement of officers to identify the soldiers, which was often very difficult for national

¹⁴² Ibid. p.937

¹⁴³ Ibid. p.937

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p.938

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p.939

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p.938

soldiers, and ‘almost impossible for the corpses of the enemy army’ (perhaps referring to the indecipherable coding system featured on the *rekognitionmarke*?).¹⁴⁷

Importantly, Morache acknowledged the impact of the changing style of warfare on battlefield burials, as battles increasingly ‘succeeded one another very rapidly’ as seen in the Franco-German War. Such intensive fighting and rapid movements had resulted in an inability to respond to the dead, as demonstrated after the fighting ‘around Metz’ between the 14th-18th August 1870, meaning that it was not always possible to conduct a deep put burial.¹⁴⁸

Morache described that in the ‘vast majority of cases, the burial of the dead is carried out under such conditions that soon it becomes almost illusory’, with shallow burials and collapsing tumuli allowing for the release of gases, risking deadly epidemics of various infectious diseases, which would rage upon the local populations. Morache engages with the experiences of recent battles and recent scholarship to describe the impact of various factors on the corpse:

We know that cold is a powerful means of preserving substances organic; in winter, the battlefields may therefore remain relatively harmless, but in spring and the following summer decomposition will resume its full strength. The drought acts in the opposite direction, and... the rapidity of the putrefaction remains proportional to the quantity of hygrometric water in the atmosphere. The nature of the soil does not have a less marked action; on the battlefield of Sedan, Crétor (sic) was able to verify, once again, the facts several times already reported.... The clay soils have the property of forming with the corpses a compact mass which dries very rapidly and then does not allow penetration of insects or moisture; in the sand and sandy soils, the putrefaction of corpses is also very slow, while it is active in friable soils, already laden with organic detritus. Clothes act as a protective covering and retard putrefaction, especially cloth and wool; by exhuming the corpses of the battlefield of Sedan, it was found that, on the same body, the hands and the figure were already unrecognizable, while the trunk and the legs were perfectly preserved; next to and in the same grounds, corpses coming from Ambulances, and wrapped in their shrouds, presented a much more complete decomposition.¹⁴⁹

Given the difficulties with burials, and the need to maintain sanitary conditions in the field, Morache described that a number of military hygienists had proposed the incineration of corpses on the battlefields, a process which was ‘frequently employed in antiquity’, but also more recently, e.g. during the Franco-Prussian war when Colonel Créteur instructed the engineers to create large pyres for cremation as part of the process to disinfect the battlefield

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 938. Morache recommended the following further reading (sic): Th. Pein. Test on battlefield hygiene. Th. Of Paris, 1873.; Guillery, Reasoned account of the sanitation of the battlefield of Sedan, Brussels, 1871; Cretor, Hygiene on the battlefield, Brussels, 1871; Frolich, Zuder Gesundheitspflege auf den Schlachtfeldern (Deutsche militärische-Zeitschrift, pp. 39, 1873); Roth and Lex, Handbuch der Militär, Gesundheitspflege, 1.1, p. 548, Berlin, 1872; Tardieu, New diction. de médecine. And practical surgery, Paris, 187 / i, article INHumATioN.

¹⁴⁸ Morache (1874) p.939

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p.940

after the Battle of Sedan (1st-2nd September 1870) .¹⁵⁰ This process took place months after the battle, leaving the corpses in various stages of decomposition. Bodies were exposed where necessary and covered with lime chloride and tar. Straw moistened in oil was added and set alight, leaving behind fragments of bone ‘more or less agglomerated by a layer of concrete resin’, having removed any cadaverous smells. The smoke had the added benefit of killing any insects which had colonised around the bodies.¹⁵¹ Following the cremation, the pits were covered with a mounted tumulus with plants sewn. Morache reflected that ‘the cremation of corpses has unfortunately not yet entered our customs, but it does not seem to be proscribed, if we place ourselves on a somewhat elevated philosophical ground; the peoples most respectful of the memory of the dead have practiced it at all times, and have been able to identify the idea of the immaterial principle of the soul, surviving the destruction of the envelope’.¹⁵² Cremation was not intended to oppose legitimate funerary traditions associated with religion, and so the ashes and bones, ‘piously collected’ should be preserved in monuments, which will mark the place where these heroes of duty fell.¹⁵³ This appears to refer to military ossuary’s. In order to mark the places where soldiers’ fell, it was necessary to implement a system to identify deceased soldiers, noting that ‘whatever the process carried out, burial or incineration, the interests of the families must be safeguarded by the recognition of the identity of the deceased’.¹⁵⁴

In order to respect the needs of the families, a process was required to identify the deceased. Morache proposed that the only way that this ‘operation’ could be effectively conducted on a regular basis was through ‘the adoption of the cards which, worn by each individual will be carefully removed by the officers or doctors charged with presiding over these sad duties’. Morache noted that identity cards had first been adopted in America during the American Civil War, where a ‘small parchment card’ was used.¹⁵⁵ As per the included illustration, the front of the card should include the soldier’s regiment and corps, along with the quote “God so loved the world that he gave him his son, so that he who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”.¹⁵⁶ The back of the card was to feature the soldiers’ name and address along with the instructions ‘hang this card around your neck using a cord above the shirt; during the fight, put it under the shirt’.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p.941

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p.942

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

Morache observed that the German army used a similar system, using a ‘small square of tinplate, abbreviated with the regimental number, the company number and the service number’, providing an illustration, as seen below:

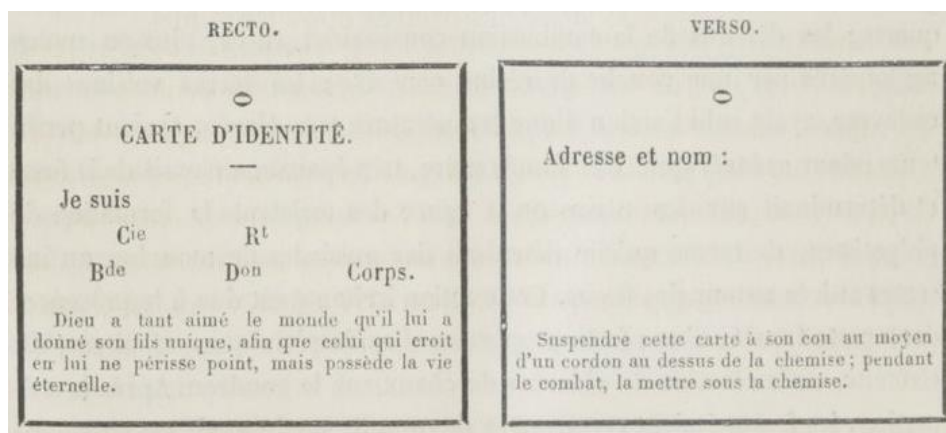


Figure 13 (above) Illustration for an identity card scheme proposed by Morache. Georges Morache (1874), *Traité d'hygiène militaire*, p.942

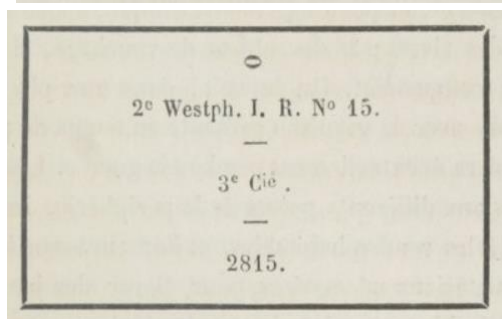


Figure 14 (left) Illustration of the identity disc of the German army, Morache (1874). P. 943

Morache proposed that the French Army could also adopt a similar scheme, with a similar model to the identity card he had proposed. The French discs (also commonly referred to as plaques) were to be made from vulgar metal, and would be prepared in advance by each corps, leaving space to add the name and serial number of the individual soldier who would receive his tag upon joining his regiment.¹⁵⁸ Each recruit would receive their identity card or plaque upon entry to the regiment, keeping it with them at all times, allowing for their identification in the event of death. The use of a cheap metal ensured that the plaques would not ‘tempt the greed of bandits...who, too often, strip the dead and disperse the booklets or clothing that could be used to identify’.¹⁵⁹ The victorious party would be able to identify the corpse, collecting items from their own men, along with the identifying items of the enemy dead, which would be sent to the opponent’s outposts.¹⁶⁰ Though this scheme seems a

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.p.943

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p.944

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p.943

practical solution to a multi-faceted problem, it would be some time before any such item was introduced in France.

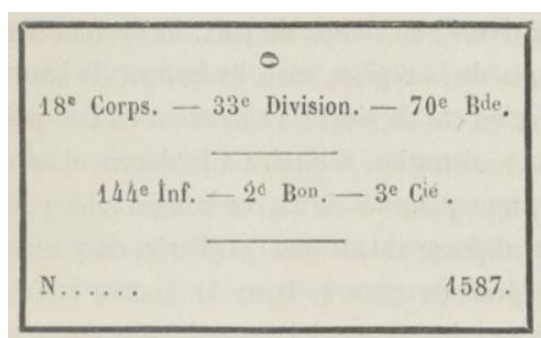


Figure 15 Proposed French identity card scheme, Morache (1874)

The next development took place in Germany. On 10th January 1878 Article 26 of the *Krieg Sanität Ordnung* (KSO -Wartime Health Service Regulations) introduced a new pattern of identity disc, the *Erkennungsmarke* (identification tag). The 1878 pattern discs were issued blank, meaning details would now all be stamped at regimental level. For each disc, the soldier's abbreviated regiment, company number and individual number was to be added.¹⁶¹ The following abbreviations could be featured on the discs:

<i>I.</i> or <i>J.</i>	for Infantry.
<i>R</i>	for Regiment or Reserve.
<i>L.</i> or <i>Ldw.</i>	for Landwehr.
<i>E.</i> or <i>Ers.</i>	for Ersatz.
<i>C.</i> or <i>K.</i>	for Company.
<i>B.</i> or <i>Bay.</i>	for Bavarian. ¹⁶²

Regiments from contingents such as Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg include the regional abbreviation to identify the regiment, for example *figure 16* includes the regimental information 'Bad 5 I.R.' which stands for Baden 5th Infantry Regiment. In July 1871, this regiment became the I.R.113 serving as part of the 3rd Baden Field Division in the Kombiniertes Württembergisch-Badisches Korps under the Prussian numeration system.¹⁶³



Figure 16 Rare example of an 1869 disc issued to a member of Baden regiment, Badische 5. Infanterie Regiment. In July 1871, this regiment became the I.R.113 serving as part of the 3rd Baden Field Division in the Kombiniertes Württembergisch-Badisches Korps (David O'Mara)

¹⁶¹ David Nash. (trans.) (2008). *The German Army Handbook of 1918*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Ltd

¹⁶² Ibid. p.153

¹⁶³ O'Mara 2016 p.23

The Bavarians retained their own numeration system, so the Bavarian 5th Infantry Regiment would retain the abbreviation Bayr. 5 I.R., though B. and Bay. are both also abbreviations seen on Bavarian tags. The national/state designation of the soldier was represented through the use of coloured cords from which the *Erkennungsmarke* was suspended.

The KSO included illustrations for two discs, without providing dimensions.¹⁶⁴ The first disc was rectangular and similar in shape to the 1878 pattern disc, with rounded (but not rolled) edges, with a single hole at the top for suspension from the cord. The second disc was oval, with two suspension holes (one on the left side, one on the right). The identification discs needed to be produced quickly, and in large numbers so the Ministry of War instructed clothing depots to order the discs from private firms. Manufacturers of metal products and military effects included Michael Hirschmann of Nuremberg, G. Heidenreich of Sonnenburg (Neumecklenburg), Anton Schweyer and Jos. Vierheiligen of Munich and A. Wunderlich Nachfolger in Berlin.¹⁶⁵ The average order was for around 40-80,000 units, at a cost of around 0.30 Marks per disc per 1,000 pieces.¹⁶⁶

Lalisse proposes that the first rectangular disc was intended as the ‘official’ disc, with the oval model used for ‘replenishing’ stocks, which contrasts with O’Mara’s theory that the 1878 pattern disc was produced by utilising surplus Bavarian 1875 pattern discs until supplies ran out.¹⁶⁷ Though neither hypothesis can be confirmed at present, what is clear is that both patterns were used as late as 1915, with a considerable number of variations in size and the number of/position of suspension holes.

Following a review of recent conflicts, Article 26 of the German Wartime Medical Regulations was published on 10th April 1878, which argued that it was necessary to issue a tag containing personal information to be issued to all soldiers, even in non-combatant units. At this time there were no internationally agreed laws of war which required any military force to provide a system of identification for soldiers on active service, or to provide the war dead with a marked grave.¹⁶⁸ In 1878, Adalbert Mila described the *Erkennungsmarke*:

To make it easier to determine the identity of the wounded who remained in battle or the wounded found unconscious, when they marched out into the field...each soldier has a metal tag to be worn on the bare body around his neck on a cord, which is provided with the number attached to the holder in the register of the unit and with the name of the unit itself. E.g. -75- Rh.Cur.R. 8 - 2. E (75 = personal

¹⁶⁴ Lalisse

¹⁶⁵ Vestiges Militaria (2014). *Les Plaques d’identité allemandes* [blog]. Accessed 20.02.2021 <http://humanbonb.free.fr/indexPlaqueid.html>

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Lalisse; O’Mara 2016

¹⁶⁸ Ganschow (2009). p. 32

number, Rh. = Rhenish, Cür. = Cuirassier, R. = regiment, 8 = regimental number, 2nd E. = 2nd squadron). " Originally, this brand was named "*Rekognitionmarke*" and had the shape of a rectangle; The war medical order of 10 January 1878 gave them the name "*Erkennungsmarke*" and an elliptical shape.¹⁶⁹

This text reiterates Loeffler's 1868 proposals to use the tag as a method to identify not only dead soldiers, but also wounded or unconscious soldiers. In practise, this would mean that the discs would be used by medical staff in addition to those tasked with the recovery, identification, or burial of the dead. Thus far, instructions for the three identifying tags had not described the point at which the disc should be removed, which created multiple opportunities for the removal of the disc and therefore an increased number of occasions when secondary identification was not possible. For example, if a wounded soldier brought into the field hospital was identified by his tag, which is removed by a medic after confirming his identity, and the patient then dies and his corpse is passed to another unit for burial without the identity disc. In such cases if his medical notes are not supplied then the burial team is unable to confirm the identity of the soldier at the point of burial.

In France, the proposal for a system of identity plates or discs was endorsed by Doctor-Major Schneider, which was ultimately adopted by the French Army.¹⁷⁰ The date of the approval by the Ministry of War is unclear, but the decision was circulated in French newspaper, *La Presse*, on the 8th September 1879,¹⁷¹ confirming the 'long-awaited measure' which had been taken by the Ministry of War in confirming the issue of identity discs to mobilised soldiers.¹⁷² The brief article described how field troops, and garrisoned soldiers, would carry an identity plate to ensure that soldiers who were killed or wounded on the battlefield could be identified; and describing the appearance of the discs, and the information which should be featured upon it. The discs were to be inscribed using virgin wax, a stylus and nitric acid. Interestingly, the article also informs us that the plate should be placed within a small bag made from leather, canvas or cloth, to be produced by each soldier.¹⁷³ It is possible that the timing of this development relates to preparations in anticipation of the French Conquest of Tunisia, which would take place in 1881.

¹⁶⁹ Mila (1878)

¹⁷⁰ Lempit, J. L. (2015). "*Known but to God*": *The Unverifiable Identities of Disparus in France, 1914-1924*. B.A. dissertation, Barnard College of Columbia University, p. 14. Accessed 18.09.2020:

https://history.barnard.edu/sites/default/files/lempit_disappeared_soldiers.pdf

¹⁷¹ Raymon, André (1879). 'Echos de Partout'. *La Presse*. Monday Sept. 8th, 1879. p.2. Accessed. 18.09.2020 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5430829/f2.item.r=plaque>

¹⁷² [*Ibid.*](#)

¹⁷³ [*Ibid.*](#)

2.6 Identification Practice during French and German Colonial War

The nineteenth century was defined by imperialism, with control over Europe and European settler states growing ‘to its full extent’.¹⁷⁴ In French history, the period between 1880 and the outbreak of the First World War is often referred to as *La Belle Époque*, a ‘Golden Age’ in the era of the French Third Republic, characterised by optimism, colonial expansion and innovation. Within this period Britain, France, and Germany each had colonial control of huge swathes of Africa. Each country had a tradition of recruiting native and indigenous soldiers into their Armies, with varying recruitment methods including (but not exclusively) conscription.¹⁷⁵ It is within this context that further developments to the French and German identification systems would occur, building upon existing practice, and refining the information featured in response to new military structures and realities. This is also the period within which the British would first conceptualise their identification system, introducing a card system during an episode of colonial, rather than national or intercontinental war, as had been the case for France and Germany. For this reason, the British system will be the focus of the following section.

The first development within this period was initiated by France in 1881. In 1881, the French Conquest of Tunisia took place, with the invasion taking place between 28th April -12th May resulting in the signing of a treaty of protection; and the second phase involving the suppression of a rebellion occurring between 10th June-28th October. During the second phase, France released information about their new identification system. On 2nd September 1881, the *Bureau de l'habillement* (Office of Clothing) revealed *De la decision ministérielle attribuant aux hommes de troupe une plaque dite plaque d'identité*, the Ministerial decision which formally announced the release of the disc to soldiers ‘with the goal of allowing the recognition of men killed or seriously injured, all of the military is to be equipped in time of war with a medallion known as an identification plate’.¹⁷⁶ The disc, known today as the

¹⁷⁴ Younis, Musab (2017). ‘United by blood’: race and transnationalism during the Belle Époque. *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 23(3), p. 484

¹⁷⁵ Moyd, Michelle R. and Glasman, Joël (2019). ‘Military and Police’, in Bellucci, Stefano and Eckert, Andreas (eds.). *General labour history of Africa: workers, employers and governments, 20th-21st centuries*. International Labour Organization: Boydell and Brewer, p.333-360; Pogge von Strandmann, Hartmut (2011). ‘The Purpose of German Colonialism, or the Long Shadow of Bismarck’s Colonial Policy’ in Langbehn, Volker Max and Salama, Mohammed (ed.s). *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany*. New York: Columbia University press, pp. 193-214; Jeffrey, Keith (1984). *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-22*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.3; Fogarty, Richard S. (2008). *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp. 15-54

¹⁷⁶ *Journal militaire official partie réglementaire* 1881 no 41. cited in Guelle, Jules Charles (1884). *Précis des lois de la guerre sur terre; commentaire pratique à l'usage des officiers de l'armée active, de la réserve et de la territorial*. Paris: G. Pedone-Lauriel. p. 282. Accessed 18.09.2020
<https://archive.org/details/prcisdesloisdel00pradgoog/page/n303>

Modele 1881 disc or Mle 1881, should be produced from maillechort nickel silver (a stainless alloy of nickel, copper and zinc) with the following dimensions: 35mm long by 25mm wide and 1mm thick. 2mm from the edge, a hole measuring 3mm in diameter should be pierced to provide a space for the suspension cord. The disc should be suspended from a length of cord inserted through this hole and worn around the neck or wrist. The cords of flat black cotton lace measuring 6mm wide should be cut into lengths of 800mm.¹⁷⁷

Each corps would be supplied with identity plates by the administration, but the cord should be purchased by the corps using their funds for clothing. Each soldier should be assigned a disc which should be marked up and stored, receiving his disc upon mobilisation to wear around the neck. This circular proposed that the plate should feature a fixed line to separate the soldier's information, allowing the wearer to make successive inscriptions in the event that their position or unit within the Army changed. According to the circular, inscriptions should start on the front side of the plate for the regular army, but the updated information of those serving in the reserves or the Territorial Army should add their updated details to the reverse of the tag as seen below.



Figure 17 Extraits de la Décision ministérielle du 2 septembre 1881 I attribuant aux hommes de troupe une plaque dite plaque d'identité, cited in Jules Charles Guelle (1884), *Précis des lois de la guerre sur terre; commentaire pratique à l'usage des officiers de l'armée active, de la réserve et de la territorial*, (Paris: G. Pedone-Lauriel), p. 282 <https://archive.org/details/precisdesloisdel00pradgoog/page/n303>

The disc was discussed in *Le Moniteur de la Gendarmerie*, published on 9th October 1881 under the heading 'La Plaque d'identité'. The article reflected upon the experience of the Franco-Prussian War, explaining that 'during the last war, in several corps we were unable to recognise the soldiers killed or seriously wounded'.¹⁷⁸ It described that some colonels had ordered their men to sew a square of white cloth containing personal information onto their uniform, typically inside the hood, on the shoulder or on the left side of the chest.¹⁷⁹ A commission appointed by the Ministry of War had agreed to supply 1,500,000 identity plates designed to the specification of the decree released on the 2nd September 1881. The report informs us that the foundry at Grenelle had been selected following tender and would produce the identity plates for the price of three centimes and three *millièmes* per plate.¹⁸⁰ Once received, the plates were to be distributed immediately, and stored within special boxes. On

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ 'La plaque d'identité' (1881). *Le Moniteur de la Gendarmerie: journal non politique créé spécialement pour la défense de l'arme paraissant le Dimanche*. 9th October 1881. p.252. Accessed 18.09.2020 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5600692r/f253.image>

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

17th November 1881, The Ministry of War declared the foundry of Grenoble as the contractor which offered the best conditions, awarding them a contract to supply 1,158,000 identity plates for the price of three centimes and three *millièmes* per plate. France had spent the best part of a decade discussing an identification system, following the publication of Morache's work. It seems likely that the events of the first phase of the Tunisian Conquest reiterated the necessity of an identification system, prompting France to finally implement the long-discussed system.

On 13th September 1882, an appendix was added to the previous instructions for identity plates, requiring the replacement of the regimental number on the plates of reservists with the place of mobilization.¹⁸¹ After being marked, the plates should be stored with the registration booklets in a box with compartments to store 250 plates.¹⁸² One month later on 13th October 1882, *La Presse* offered further information about these changes, and how they would be implemented, describing that during the past 'two years', the plaques had been marked with the number of the regiment that the soldier joined in the event of mobilisation, but when moved to another garrison, the number of the regiment had to be updated upon the plaques. Additionally, men in the reserves were always assigned to a regiment in the region that they came from, but moved into other regiments when mobilised, leading to additional requirements for corrections. In the future, discs would be marked with the place of mobilization, rather than the regimental number, except for reservists of the Zouaves, the Algerian riflemen, the hunters of Africa, the engineers (*du genie*), crew, staff secretaries, clerks, administrators and nurses who should continue to bare the same information as before.¹⁸³ Here we see the development of differential systems for those 'othered' from French soldiers, grouping African soldiers with non-combatant roles, like the administrators and nurses. It is a possibility that these updates were implemented during the planning for the Mandingo Wars against the Wassoulou Empire of the Mandingo people (1883-1886), or the First Madagascar expedition against the Merina Kingdom (1883); incorporating recent experiences learned during colonial exploits to develop the identification system in anticipation of building tensions or plans for expansion.

¹⁸¹ Guelle, Jules Charles (1884). *Précis des lois de la guerre sur terre; commentaire pratique à l'usage des officiers de l'armée active, de la réserve et de la territorial*. Paris: G. Pedone-Lauriel. p. 282. Accessed 18.09.2020 <https://archive.org/details/precisdesloisdel00pradgoog/page/n303>

¹⁸² *Note du 2 Septembre 1881* cited in *Recueil administratif à l'usage des officiers et sous-officiers des troupes coloniales. 2e édition mise à jour jusqu'au n° 25 inclus du B. O. de 1902*. (1902). Paris: Henri Charles-Lavauzelle. p.272-273

¹⁸³ 'Extérieur' (1882). *La Presse*, Friday Oct. 10th, 1882. p2. Accessed 18.09.2020 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k544198h/f2.image>

Another year later, on 12th October 1883, the Ministry of War released another, extremely detailed circular providing updated guidance on the identity discs.¹⁸⁴ The information provided by this circular provides clear guidance for the marking of the identity plates and allows us to see a clear administrative structure for the provision of, marking and storage of identity plates within the French Army. The Minister of War wrote that his ‘attention had been drawn to certain difficulties in the application of the previous ministerial decisions, as regards the marks to be affixed to the identity plates’. In order to ‘obviate the disadvantages’ of the current system, the Minister had searched for a more simple inscription system, which would allow the disc to follow the man ‘from his entry into the army until his liberation, whatever his changes and his various situations in the active army, the reserve or the territorial army’.¹⁸⁵ For classes 1882 and onwards, the plate was to be marked as follows: On the *recto* is to be stamped the soldier’s surname, first name, and the class to which he belongs [year of entry into service]; on the *verso* is to be stamped the subdivision of the region and the personal number given to the soldier at recruitment.¹⁸⁶

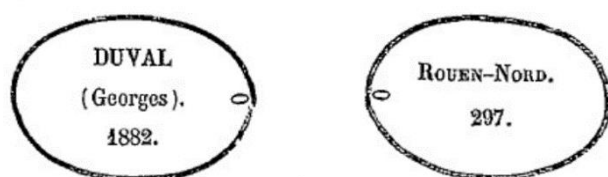


Figure 18 'Plaques d'identité', *Journal de la gendarmerie de France*, No. 1369, p.409

For voluntary employees, or conditional employees, the class year was to be replaced with the year in which their engagement began, preceded by the letters E.Y. or E.C. (the instructions do not confirm what these abbreviations stand for). The personal number was to be replaced by the number on the registration list, as seen below.

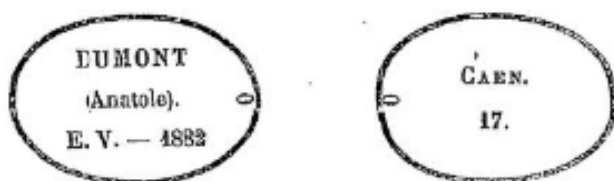


Figure 19 'Plaques d'identité', *Journal de la gendarmerie de France*, No. 1369, p.409

The marking of the discs was to be carried out by the soldier’s corps at the point of joining, and according to the markings shown within his booklet, the *Livret Matricule*. To avoid any errors, the outline of the plate should be drawn on the bottom of the cover of the *Livret Matricule* or registration booklet, and filled in with the inscriptions before the marking of the

¹⁸⁴ 'Plaques d'identité: Circulaire du ministre de la guerre au sujet des plaques d'identité' (1883). *Journal de la gendarmerie de France*, No. 1369, p.409. Accessed 18.09. 2020 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5766884n/f7.image.r=plaque%20identit%C3%A91883>

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

disc. The information featured within the drawing should be marked onto each soldiers' identity disc by the recruiting commanders.¹⁸⁷ The order noted that in future, the booklets would contain a pre-printed outline of the plate on the cover of the disc, examples of which can be seen in *figure 20*. All new discs should be marked according to this system, but soldiers' who already held discs, would keep the same disc until he moved to a new regiment, or passed into the reserve or territorial army, limiting the need for too many changes to the discs. If there were too many entries engraved upon a disc, dilute nitric acid and pumice could be used to scrub away the information, leaving space for the new details, but if this didn't work, a new disc could be issued.

Additional information was provided for soldiers who did not fit into the above categories. Discs were not to be provided for those who had already passed into the territorial army, nor the auxiliary services. The discs of men in the reserve of the active army were to be marked by the corps holder of booklets. Men at the disposal of the various classes would have their marked by their corps, only when they passed into the reserve.

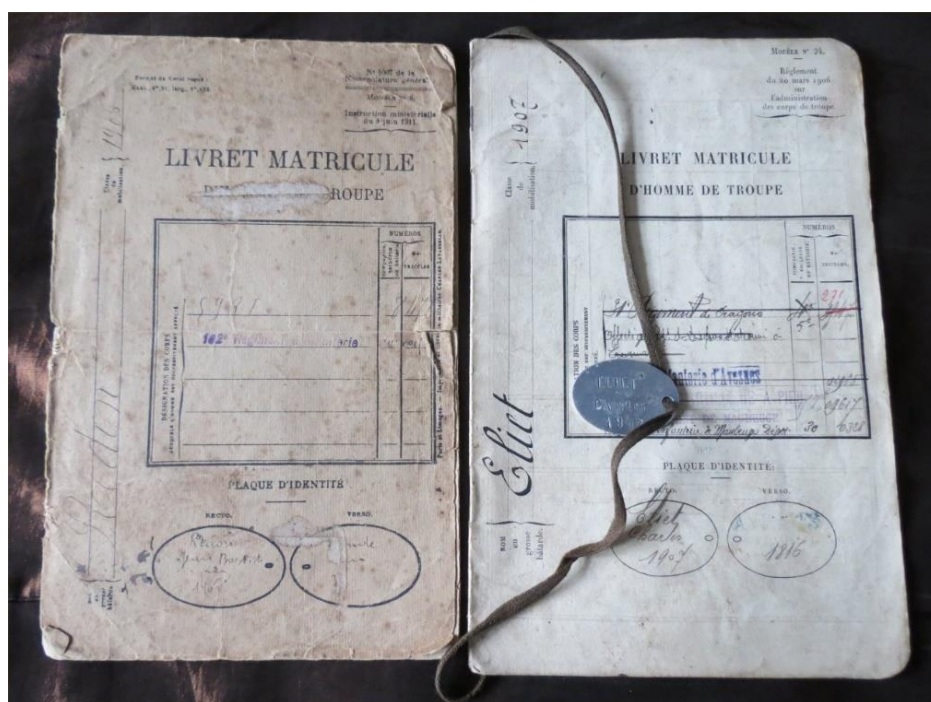


Figure 20 Examples of the Livret Matricule, personal collection of David O'Mara

All discs and cords were to be stored alongside the *Livret Matricule* within storage boxes. If a man moved into the reserves of the territorial army, their discs and booklets would be collected as a small package, forming a bundle for each man. Each year, the discs of classes which had been released from military services were to be returned to the administrative store, where the discs of deceased soldiers would also be sent. However, soldiers in the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

gendarmerie and the republican guard who left service before the age of 45 were to keep their discs until they reached this age, when they would then return the discs.

The oval discs, produced from maillechort, measured approximately 35mm by 25mm and were 1mm thick. The hanging hole was drilled on one side of the disc, 2mm from the side, with a 3.5mm diameter. The edges of the disc were softened, so as not to be sharp, including the edges of the hanging hole, presumably to prevent damage to the cord. Corps were to order their plates directly, and the resources required for the marking of the plates were to be paid by the corps using funds from their general mass of maintenance (2c portion). For the Recruiting Offices, the plates were to be ordered from the administrative magazine of the region, to buy them as and when they were needed. In these cases, plates were to be issued by the administrative departments of the clothing department as a loan to the Recruiting Office. Every year on December 31st, the heads of the recruiting office were to send a copy of the plates which had been prepared for soldiers to the bookkeeper from the administrative department. Until marked, the value of the disc was counted as an asset – once marked the plaques were removed from the accounts. In Recruiting Offices, the expenditure was attributable to the ordinary budget of the clothing funds, on the production of certified invoices along with a form completed by stewards as prescribed in the regulations of April 3rd 1869.¹⁸⁸ In the event of a soldier's death, the soldier's plate was to be returned to the administrative department, though the removal of the tag from the body is not explicitly stated in the two variants of the October 1883 circular which have been referred to within this chapter, indicating a lack of cohesion between the establishment of administrative practise and the development of associated practise in the field.¹⁸⁹

The following year, on 16th January 1884, a ministerial note was published on the inscriptions to be featured on identity plates, relating to the application of the circular of the 12 October 1883. From here on, the first name provided by the man must be the same as the first name provided on his civil documents, and the drawing of the plate must be affixed only to the registration booklet (the *Livret Matricule*). Unfortunately, these instructions illustrate that the notion that the family had a civil right to ownership over the body of a fallen soldier was not extended to all soldiers fighting on behalf of France. At the time, France was engaged with

¹⁸⁸ 'Plaques d'identité: Circulaire du ministre de la guerre au sujet des plaques d'identité' (1883). *Journal de la gendarmerie de France*, No. 1369, p.409. Accessed 18.09. 2020

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5766884n/f7.image.r=plaque%20identit%C3%A91883>

¹⁸⁹ See 'Plaques d'identité: Circulaire du ministre de la guerre au sujet des plaques d'identité' (1883). *Journal de la gendarmerie de France*, No. 1369, p.409. Accessed 18.09. 2020

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5766884n/f7.image.r=plaque%20identit%C3%A91883> ; 'Enfin est venue la circulaire du 12 octobre 1883, qui est ainsi conçue: (Extraits)' cited in Guelle, Jules Charles (1884). p. 282

the Mandingo Wars on the Ivory Coast of Africa (1883-1898) and the First Madagascar expedition, and the Sino-French War (1884-1885) was soon to erupt. The Second French Colonial Empire had already colonised Algeria and much of Senegal, and the recent successes in Tunisia had helped the French to expand their empire further, meaning that France now had to reconsider provisions for African soldiers fighting on behalf of France.

The discs provided for African soldiers were to be far less personal than the French discs, removing the surname. Instead, their discs were to feature an abbreviation of their corps, their matriculation number, and their date of entry to the service, as seen in the example below.¹⁹⁰ No information was included as to why the surname was to be removed, though it could perhaps be interpreted as a colonial act of racism, perhaps as a result of a refusal to record African names, or difficulties understanding or spelling them. The records of the French Defence Historical Service (*Service historique de la défense*) may provide further insight into this issue. The order also instructed that items required to print the facsimile of the identity plate onto the cover of the registration booklets should be purchased by commanders on their office expenses. Nothing was to change in the registrations of the recruits, but ‘these soldiers’ were to be registered to the class year preceding that of their engagement.

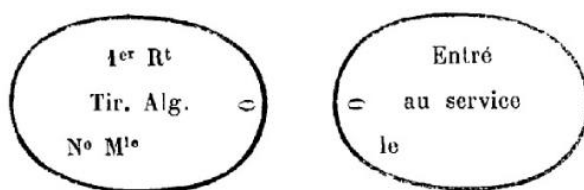


Figure 21 Discs for soldiers from Africa. Source: “No 19. Note ministérielle relative aux inscriptions à apposer sur les plaques d'identité. (5 ° Direction, Services administratifs ; Bureau de l'Habillement et du Campement.)” published 16 January 1884, cited in *Journal Militaire Officiel: Partie Réglementaire. Année 1884 No.5* <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5418004c/f1.item.r=plaque%20identit%C3%A91883.texteImage>

The method of marking was updated on 5th May 1888, further amending the ministerial decision of 2nd September 1881.¹⁹¹ The Minister had now decided that the plates should not be engraved with nitric acid but should instead be stamped using ‘four-ribbed prismatic steel punches’ which measured 75mm long and 7mm thick. Each corps would be provided with an alphabet of 26 capital letters measuring 3mm at a maximum cost of 5 25 francs, a set of numbers from 0-8 also measuring 3mm at a maximum cost of 1 75, an alphabet of 26 lower case letters at a maximum cost of 10 50.¹⁹² Individual letters and numbers were also available.

¹⁹⁰ “No 19. Note ministérielle relative aux inscriptions à apposer sur les plaques d'identité. (5 ° Direction, Services administratifs ; Bureau de l'Habillement et du Campement.)” published 16 January 1884, cited in *Journal Militaire Officiel: Partie Réglementaire. Année 1884 No.5*, p. 43-44. Accessed 21.09.2020: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5418004c/f1.item.r=plaque%20identit%C3%A91883.texteImage>

¹⁹¹ N° 215. Modifications à la décision ministérielle attribuant aux hommes de troupe une plaque d'identité. (D. Serv. adm.; Hab. Camp. Lits militaires et Inv.) [B. O., p. r., p. 56S.] (5 May 1888), *Journal Militaire*, 99c Année, Année 1888, Premier Semestre (Paris: Librairie-Militaire de L. Baudoin et C.), p. 703. Accessed 21.09.2020 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5460305q/f6.item.r=plaque%20d'identite.texteImage>

¹⁹² Ibid.

Corps were authorised to commission their chief *armurier* to produce these, or to obtain them from elsewhere providing the price did not exceed the maximum cost stated. Though no reason for this change is described, it is possible that issues with the legibility of engravings performed by hand had arisen, with stamps providing a reliable, uniform script which could be easily deciphered.

In order to produce a clear mark without deforming, or bending the plates, it was ‘absolutely necessary’ to strike the stamp into the plate laid upon a piece of smooth iron, ‘placed perfectly straight’, rather than a piece of wood. The circular advised that the marking of identity plates should be carried out by the corps under the direction of the chief gunsmith who would supply the necessary materials for the stamping.¹⁹³ Those tasked with stamping the discs that it was advisable to use a hammer, or preferably a hardwood mallet, though the head of this must not be too large to affect the vertical position of the stamp which was to be occupied at the time of marking. The soldier who carried out this work should receive 0,02 francs per plate marked in whole or in part, having not received payment previously. To erase the markings, the plate should be hammered and straightened with a soft file. The expense of the stamps and the labour associated with marking the discs should be charged to *la masse d’habillement et d’entretien* (mass of clothing and maintenance).¹⁹⁴

It is at this point that we see Germany refine her identification system, a decade after introducing the 1878 *Erkennungsmarke*. Updated Regulations were published in November 1888 providing more clarity on how the discs should be used, instructing that ‘immediately before the burial, the plates and booklets of the dead are removed and sent to the authorities or units keeping the registers of deceased personnel’.¹⁹⁵ Information was also provided about death notifications, dictating that ‘doctors must not remove identity cards and individual booklets from soldiers who died in the aid stations or fell on the battlefield’, and they should only be removed ‘by the military detachment responsible for digging the graves. The chief collects the identification plates and the individual booklets and forwards them, if possible, to the units concerned or has them forwarded by his own unit’.¹⁹⁶ For ‘those who have died at the main or during transport to the latter, the medical company’s commander shall ensure that the identification plates and individual booklets are removed and that the unit concerned is

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ §4 point 3 - Anon (1904), Deutsche Wehrordnung vom 22.november 1888: Neuabdruck unter Berücksichtigung der bis April 1904, Berlin; E.S. Mitler. p.11-12. Accessed 21.09.20 <https://archive.org/details/deutschewehrord00germgoog/page/n29>

¹⁹⁶ §5 point 2 Anon (1904), Deutsche Wehrordnung vom 22.november 1888: Neuabdruck unter Berücksichtigung der bis April 1904, Berlin; E.S. Mitler. p.12-13. Accessed 21.09.20 <https://archive.org/details/deutschewehrord00germgoog/page/n29>

notified thereon.¹⁹⁷ These instructions made it clear who should and should not be removing the identity discs in a variety of situations, explaining where they should be sent and who should be notified. The timing of this development coincides with building tensions in Zanzibar between Germany and the Arab and Swahili populations in what is known as the Abushiri revolt (1888-1889). There were no further developments in either Germany or France for eleven years.

The final development was undertaken by France. On 16th May 1899 a French circular was released providing information about the plates which could be used by officers in the field and in Africa, following a similar scheme to that which already existed for soldiers of other ranks.¹⁹⁸ The plates and the cord should be made to the specification described in the ministerial note of 2nd September 1881, but should be stamped differently. The front of the plate should feature the first and surname of the soldier beneath the word *officier* (officer). The reverse of the plate should be marked with the place and date of birth. The discs and cords should be purchased by ‘the interested parties (officer and assimilated of the active army, the reserve and the Territorial Army)’, who were also responsible for the stamping of the tags. Tags could now be purchased in silver and could feature mechanical engravings.¹⁹⁹

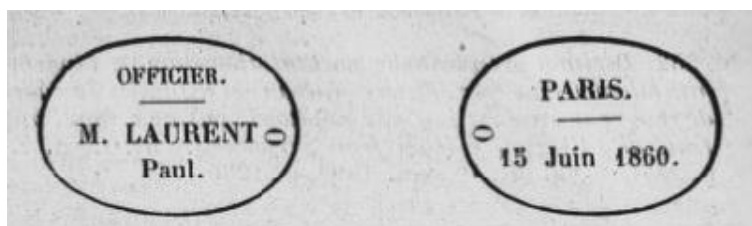


Figure 22 Illustration of the disc for French officers. Source: Bulletin du Service De Sante Militaire, No 48 Annee, Decembre 1899 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6273025c/f185.item.r=%20plaque%20d'identite>

This circular was revoked within weeks, with a more detailed circular released on 11th July 1899.²⁰⁰ The plates of officers, along with the cords, were now to follow the model adopted in the Ministerial Note of 2nd September 1881, with specific markings to make clear their officer status. The front of the disc should feature *officier* followed by the first and surnames, the reverse of the disc should include the place of birth and the date of birth. The circular also provided new instructions for the marking of the discs of African officers, with two variants depending on the place of birth. These designs featured part of the officer's name, a dignity

¹⁹⁷ §5 point 3 Anon (1904), Deutsche Wehrordnung vom 22.november 1888: Neuabdruck unter Berücksichtigung der bis April 1904, Berlin; E.S. Mitler. p. 12-13 <https://archive.org/details/deutschewehrord00germgoog/page/n29>

¹⁹⁸ Trouvetout Détection (2019). *Les Plaques de soldats* [blog]. Accessed 21.01. 2021 <http://trouvetout-detection.over-blog.com/2019/03/les-plaques-de-soldats.html>

¹⁹⁹ Ibid

²⁰⁰ ‘Circulaire portant description des plaques d'identite attribuees aux officiers et assimiles’ (1899). *Journal Militaire - 110 Annee, Annee 1899: Deuxieme Semestre*. Paris: Librairie Militaire R. Chapelot et Co, p.42. Accessed 21.09.2020 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54153247/f7.item.r=description%20des%20plaque%20d'identite%20.zoom>

denied to African soldiers beneath the rank of officer as evidenced by the circular released on 16th January 1884, but not the whole name.

Officers of African descent who were born in civilian territory and were registered should feature the word *officier* on the front of their plates, along with their paternal surname and their year of birth. The reverse of the tag should include the place of birth, and their matriculation number. Officers of African descent who were born in military territories and were not registered were instructed to provide their name, with no specifications as to the inclusion of both first and surnames, and their year of birth. The reverse should feature the territory that they were born in, and their matriculation number. The purchasing of plates and cords, and the subsequent marking of the plates was the responsibility of the officers themselves, and a supplier could be provided upon request. The plates were to be delivered for free via the administrative store, and marked by the gunsmiths, following the process of the other ranks.²⁰¹

French identity discs were intended to assist with military processes such as the confirmation of death, burial, and the confirmation to the family, ensuring that the civil rights of the family were not breached. Yet the removal of names from the discs of African soldiers fighting for France provides further evidence that these rights were not applied equally to individuals from colonised lands.

2° Elles recevront, *au recto*, l'indication du nom et du premier prénom avec le mot « officier » ; *au verso*, le lieu et la date de naissance ; exemple :



Pour les officiers indigènes d'Afrique, les inscriptions à porter sur les plaques sont les suivantes :

Officier né en territoire civil et recensé. — Incrire *au recto* de la plaque le nom patronymique et l'année de la naissance.

Au verso, le lieu de naissance et le numéro du registre matrice ; exemple :



Officier né en territoire militaire et non recensé. — Incrire *au recto* de la plaque le nom et l'année de la naissance.

Au verso, le territoire de la naissance et le numéro matricule au corps ; exemple :



Figure 23. Inscriptions for officer plaques.

Source: No 174, Circulaire portant description des plaques d'identité attribuées aux officiers et assimilés, 16 May 1899, published in *Journal Militaire*, 110 Année, Année 1899: Deuxième Semestre (Paris: Librairie Militaire R. Chapelot et Co, p.42 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54153247/f7.item.r=description%20des%20plaques%20d'identite%20zoom>)

²⁰¹ Ibid.

French identity discs were intended to assist with military processes such as the confirmation of death, burial, and the confirmation to the family, ensuring that the civil rights of the family were not breached. Yet the removal of names from the discs of African soldiers fighting for France provides further evidence that these rights were not applied equally to individuals from colonised lands.

Each of these developments appear to be implemented in response to, or in anticipation of episodes of colonial war, during a period of relative peace and prosperity within Western Europe. By situating these developments within the context of these episodes of colonial war, we are able to observe the development and implementation of identification systems; but the information presented also forces us to recognise that colonial soldiers were employed within an imperialist framework of colonial expansion, within which respect for familial and civil rights were not equally applied. These were the final developments to take place before the First World War, and thus these were the principles and systems of marking employed during the First World War. Whilst 1888-1889 marks a pause in development of the French and German systems, it is at this point that we see the British begin to conceptualise their own identification systems, beginning their period of development and implementation of identifying objects.

2.7 British Colonial War, The South African War (1899-1902), and the Recording of Graves as an Expression of Imperial Humanitarianism

Following the Crimean War, Britain had fought almost continuously, with Strachan noting that only one opponent between 1815-1914 was European.²⁰² Like France and Germany, Britain was immersed in the ‘scramble for Africa’ of the 1880’s and 1890’s, engaging in the Ninth Xhosa War (1877-1879), the Anglo-Zulu War (1879), the Mahdist War (1881-1899), and the Ekumeku Movement (1883-1914), alongside various campaigns in Asia. Though it remains unclear when this system was introduced, or the reasoning for its introduction, it seems sensible to deduce that Britain was aware of the French and German identification systems, particularly given Germany’s efforts to raise the issue at the inaugural Geneva Conventions. However, Britain would introduce a vastly different system, featuring the use of a form, or card for the purpose of identification, as opposed to a physical item worn about the person.

²⁰² Strachan, Hew (1985). *From Waterloo to Balaclava: Tactics, Technology, and the British Army, 1815-1854*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

The first reference to the form can be found in the description of the field kit of the Medical Staff Corp in Appendix No. 56 of the 1890 edition of the *Regulations for Army Medical Service* (part I), which lists ‘A description card (Army Form B. 2067) will be sewn into the clothing of every man going into the field’.²⁰³ The same item can also be found listed within the 1899 *Manual for Field Service (Provost-Marshals and Military Police)*, issued alongside Army Orders from the 1st May 1899. Appendix III describes the Field Kit of the Military Foot Police, featuring Army Form B. 2067, demonstrating that the form had been incorporated across different sections of the army by this point.²⁰⁴

The form was printed onto a glazed white calico material with the title ‘Description Card for Active Service’. It included personal information about the soldier, including his name, number, rank, regiment, next of kin, and place of residence, along with a signature from the Officer Commanding the battery or company. The forms were filled in by hand, though we are not told if the forms were to be filled in by officers on behalf of ordinary ranked soldiers, as in the French system.

Once mobilised, the form would be sewn into one of the interior pockets of the frock or tunic, with the “first field dressing” (FFD) first aid kit held in the opposite pocket.²⁰⁵ The pockets were sewn shut until mobilization, when the stitches would be picked open to deposit the FFD kit and Army Form B. 2067. The introduction of the FFD to the British Army, following the observation of a Prussian field first aid kit during the Franco-Prussian war shows us that Britain was observing global conflicts, and adopting examples of good practice for its own use. It has not been possible to locate any military orders which describe the introduction or use of the form, or documents which provide information as to why the British chose to introduce such a system. However, the facts presented do allow us to reflect upon how little the form appears to have been featured within military documents and civilian newspapers, in contrast with the French and German systems, which are described in a variety of surviving formats, as presented within this chapter. The omission of public discussion is perhaps indicative that the British system was inspired by the use of identification systems within the sole context of military operational procedures, such as sanitary burial processes; as opposed

²⁰³ War Office (1890), *Regulations for Army Medical Services (Part I)*, London: HMSO. p412. Accessed 21.09.2020: <https://archive.org/details/regulationsforar01grea/page/412/mode/2up?q=2067>

²⁰⁴ ‘Appendix III. Field Kit of Military Mounted Police’ (1899). *Manual for Field Service. Provost-Marshals and Military Police (issued with Army Orders, date 1st May 1889)*. London: HMSO. p.13-16 With thanks to Toby Brayley for providing scans of his personal copy of the publication.

²⁰⁵ Benton describes that the idea for the first field dressing had been adopted during the Franco-Prussian War, with the British Army introducing the concept in 1884, an example which demonstrates how Britain observed wars and learnt from positive examples of practice. See Benton, Edward H. (1977). *British Surgery in the South African War: The Work of Major Frederick Porter. Medical History*. vol.21, p.280

to an introduction necessitated by the experience of mass loss, resulting in civilian pressure to recognise the right of the individual soldier and the rights of their families as in France and Belgium.

As a result of the limited textual evidence relating to the description card, it is necessary to refer to the discipline of material culture, studying objects rather than written sources to learn more about how this system was used and developed. Whilst the form does include text, they are described within military documents as being part of the field kit, allowing us to view them as a material object in the same vein as the French and German identification discs. However in this case, the absence of explicit military instructions means that we must learn more about the forms, and how they were used to identify dead soldiers by the information that surviving examples of the form present to us. Whilst we have identified that the form was mentioned in the 1890 *Regulations for Army Medical Service*, David O'Mara has been able to assert that these forms saw issue in the Sudan in the 1890's during the Mahdist War (1881-1899), having observed examples issued from 1890 onwards.²⁰⁶ Figure 25 depicts one of these forms issued in 1897.



Figure 24 1890's Kersey Frock pictured inside out to show the sewn pockets design to store the first field dressing and Army Form B 2067. Source - Personal collection of Toby Brayley (with permission)

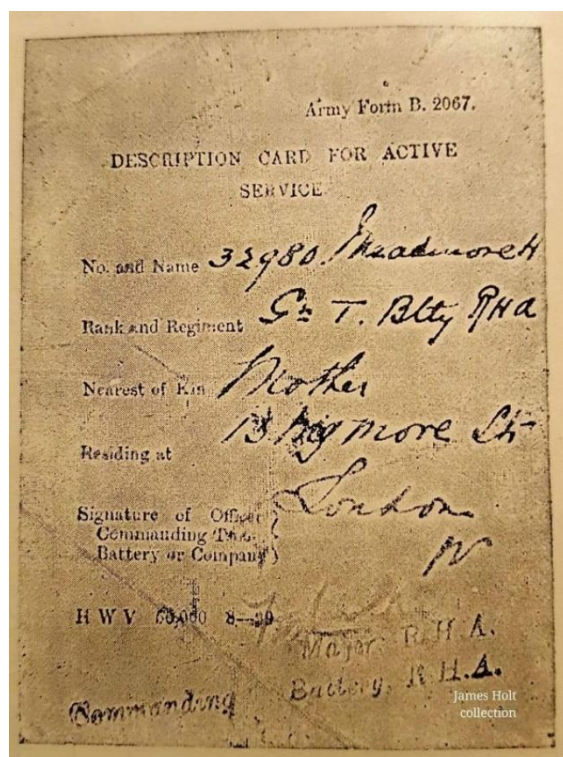


Figure 25 Army Form B 2067 Description Card for Active Service from 1897, personal collection of Jim Holt (with permission)

²⁰⁶ O'Mara, David (2019); Bodsworth, J. B (2010). *British Uniforms and Equipment of the Great War, 1914-18: Vol. 1 Clothing and Necessaries*. Derbyshire:MLRS, p.303-304

As identified in the section on the Crimean War, there were already existing military cultures of removing clothing and equipment from the dead within British Army culture, and so it is practical to deduce that the form was intended to be removed from the deceased along with the jacket at the usual point of ‘processing’, sewn to the pocket to prevent it from becoming lost, allowing for the confirmation of the death at an appropriate time.

More can be learned about the forms through the study of the South African War, which marks a pivotal point in military burial traditions, as cultures of grave marking and registration developed as an act of imperial humanitarianism which would come to shape British expectations of burial provision in the years before the First World War. Army Form B. 2067 was also used in this war, though few examples of the calico forms have survived. The few examples that remain can be used to fill in the gaps in our understanding about how these forms were used to identify soldiers. O’Mara reported that the description card can be encountered across Commonwealth and Empire forces, a theory evidenced by *fig 26*, a calico description card issued to Australian soldier Ebenezer Barron of the 2nd Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen, who fought in South Africa between 1901-1902.²⁰⁷ The Australian War Memorial holds at least three of the forms. *Fig 27* depicts the description card of 747 shoeing smith Samuel Mullen Woods who served with A Company, 2 Battalion, Australian Commonwealth Horse in South Africa between February and July 1902.²⁰⁸ The form is attached to the back of the wrapper of the first field dressing, usually held in the opposite pocket to the form. Such a combination can only leave us to imagine whether this could be an example of adapted use of the forms, perhaps to prevent loss; whether the form was attached to the field first dressing when Woods returned his kit after demobilisation; or whether this action was performed by a family member or archivist.

Intervention by unknown third parties is something that should always be considered when looking at items such as this, as evidenced by the third Australian example, *fig 28*, the description card of Otto Techow. which is headed by a handwritten title ‘Identification card in case of death’. Whilst it is possible that Otto himself wrote this, it seems more reasonable to assume that this note was added as a descriptive aid at a later date by an unknown individual. Interestingly, Dianne Rutherford (Curator of Military Heraldry and Technology at the AWM) observed that all three examples are folded, and no sewing holes can be observed, suggesting that at least in the later stages of the war, or perhaps specifically in colonial forces, it was no

²⁰⁷ O’Mara (2019)

²⁰⁸ AWM PRO5088 Barron, Ebenezer ‘Edward’ (Corporal, b.1866-d.1940. Australian War Memorial. Accessed 21.09.2020 <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1281762>

longer common practise to sew in the form, with the wearing of the form in the pocket being considered sufficient.²⁰⁹

Figure 26 Description Card of Barron, Ebenezer 'Edward' (Corporal, b.1866- d.1940), AWM PR05088

Figure 27 Description Card for Otto Techow, image provided by Di Rutherford at the Australian War Memorial, Pers. Comms. 19.03.2020



Figure 28 Description Card of Shoeing Smith Samuel Mullen Woods, AWM RELAWM17155

It is difficult to assess how consistently these identifying forms were used given how few have survived to the present day owing to the fragility of both card and calico, particularly in warm environments. Uniforms and non-uniform textile items in this war were produced from fabrics including cotton drill, wool, flax, jute, calico, sisal, hemp and kapok, heavy materials which degraded quickly in the presence of moisture, insects and bacteria.²¹⁰ One item which suggests that some soldiers may have been aware of the fragility of their AFBs is a Huntley &

²⁰⁹ Di Rutherford Pers. Comms 19.03.2020

²¹⁰ Scott, R. A. (2000). 'Textiles in defence' in Horrocks, A. R. and Anand S. C (2016). *Handbook of Technical Textiles*. Woodhead Publishing: Cambridge, p. 426

Palmer's match case known to belong to Private H. Saunders of the Duke of Wellington's regiment (*fig 29*). Folded inside the match case was Saunders' Army Form B 2067. [Like the Australian examples, the form has no sew holes. Whilst this act ensured that his form survived for us today, providing a rare example of the calico forms, had Saunders died on the battlefield, the inability to quickly locate the form may have resulted in the inability to confirm his death or provide a marked burial had time allowed. The identification card can also be encountered during World War One, despite the use of the identity disc by this point, which will be described in Chapter Three.



Figure 29 DWR 1990.13/5 Huntley and Palmer's match case containing DWR 1990.13/6 Identification form., Private H. Saunders (Bankfield Museum, Halifax)



Despite the introduction of this card, advances in battlefield hygiene which acknowledged the corpse as a major vector for disease, and civilian debates around respectful and hygienic burials, the burial of a soldier on the battlefield remained an operational duty relating to the sanitation of the field and maintenance of hygienic conditions, rather than being an emotive, religious or civic act, and so the practice of burial appears to have remained tied to historic trends for the British Army. Burials would still take place after a battle, where possible, but only after the wounded had been recovered and if time and resources allowed. Whether through instruction or through order, British burials from this conflict tend to resemble those of Crimea, with a focus on the officer class in terms of grave marking, and a preference for

mass or trench burials for the ordinary ranks, though in this conflict we start to see the development of some memorials which feature the names of ordinary ranked soldiers more prominently than in previous wars.

During this conflict, both traditional and guerrilla tactics of warfare were observed, resulting in different patterns of burial at different points during the war, with some areas receiving high numbers of bodies in a low number of concentrated pits (mass/trench burials or cemeteries), and other areas housing scattered graves across a broader landmass. Some graves with flimsy wooden crosses, or other markers made from whatever resources were available, but many of these were not durable, meaning that the only grave markers that have survived to the present day are typically the privately funded memorials that were erected during and after the war, or the more durable steel crosses often presumed to be British issued by uninformed guessers. Whilst it is true that the British Army did pay for some durable steel crosses some years after the war, much of the work to record, mark and preserve the graves of British and allied soldiers during the South African War was undertaken by a voluntary organization of women based in South Africa known as the Guild of Loyal Women (GoLW) who developed the first system for military graves registration as we know it today. The work of the Guild is significant as it provided a blueprint for the work of Fabian Ware, founder of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, a connection which we will continue to explore throughout chapters Two-Five. The experience of loss at distance and concerns over the care of cemeteries following the South African War was reminiscent to many of the aftermath of the Crimean War, reinvigorating the politicisation of military graves. Civilian responses to the care of graves during and after the South African War would further shape the British expectation of war graves less than two decades before the First World War, meaning that this conflict is pivotal to the military cultures associated with death that we observe during the First World War, despite our lack of knowledge on the role that Army Form B 2067 played within these processes as of yet.

The Guild was formed by a group of women who met in the home of Mrs John van der Byl, at Klein Westerford, Newlands on 24th February 1900. The outbreak of the war meant that many ‘imperial minded’ British women were now residing in South Africa, accompanying their officer or administrator husbands’. The group formed allowed Dutch and English loyalist women to work together ‘to maintain and foster the spirit of loyalty to the Queen and fidelity to the British Empire’. In March the GoLW of South Africa was launched at a garden party at

the Arderne family home known as The Hill in Claremont, Cape Town.²¹¹ 400 people were said to attend the launch, with 'a substantial number of distinguished men' present in support of the Guild, making the launch rather remarkable for its time.²¹² The Guild included prominent Captetonian women like Violet Cecil, Dorothea Fairbridge, Margaret Ardene, Mrs J. B. Currey, Miss Mary H. Currey and Mrs Beaumont Rawbone, amongst others. Van Heyningen and Merrett describe that a key supporter for such an organisation, who 'almost certainly' discussed the idea in advance of the launch was the Governor of the Cape and High Commission for South Africa, Sir Alfred Milner. The Guild, offered women the opportunity to express notions of loyalism and imperialism, allowing them to have a political voice in the absence of political power (despite claiming to be non-political), and a way to engage with the ongoing war in a format which was deemed acceptable to the ruling classes. The Guild expanded quickly throughout South Africa, replicating the Canadian movement in January 1900 from which the Imperial Order, Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.) was formed. Despite some initial clashes with the I.O.D.E. over who had formed the idea first, it was a letter from the I.O.D.E. secretary, written on 18th April 1900 which would inspire the main focus of the work of the Guild for the duration of the war. The request read:

Already we have graves of our sons in South Africa, and it is our sacred privilege to cherish these. In this duty we hope you may be of use to us, perhaps in locating our graves, or in some such way and please consider us as waiting and eager to do anything we can for you.²¹³

One of the Guild's motives had been to promote goodwill between the British and the Afrikaners living in South Africa, and this provided the perfect opportunity for the guild to provide a remedial service to those who had fallen during the war, as a feminine expression of imperialist loyalty to be recognized across the Empire. The Guild dedicated their time and resources to the task of caring for war graves, decorating them with flowers and ensuring they were well cared for and presentable. In keeping with their motives, the Guild declared 'in a spirit of reconciliation' that it would provide this service for both sides of the war, including the graves of Dutch settlers or Boers.

By September 1900, the Guild had developed a voluntary system to ensure flowers were laid on military graves at regular intervals. In Kimberley, graves were visited four times a year, with railways providing free travel passes for the women to aid their work. This work was soon found to be time both consuming and demanding as flowers quickly wilted in the heat of

²¹¹ Van Heyningen, Elizabeth and Merrett, Pat (2003). 'The Healing Touch': The Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa 1900-1912. *South African Historical Journal*. Vol. 47. P.24

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ CA, A 333, Cape Colony annual meeting, *Cape Times*, c. 7 Jan. 1904, Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p30.

summer; consequently, visits were reduced two times a year, as in the case of Natal.²¹⁴ The Guild had to adapt their work, taking it further from their original intention, reducing the number of visits to one per year, a tradition which came to be known as Decoration Day.²¹⁵ In an attempt to maintain the beauty of the cemeteries, which were maintained in the style of the English country cemetery, the Guild began to plant ‘shrubs, trees and hardy bulbs’, a tradition which the CWGC also adapted and uses to this day.²¹⁶ The Guild’s ability to improve the appearance of cemeteries was limited, as the decoration of graves was voluntary, and collected funds were not used for this purpose, a point which the guild was keen to impress upon the Victoria League.²¹⁷ The railways gave the women free passes to travel between burial sites and districts, however the work soon proved to be more demanding than anticipated, causing the Guild to reassess their intentions.²¹⁸ The guild decided to modify their work, planting shrubs and bulbs in the cemeteries in place of depositing bunches of flowers which quickly wilted in the heat of Summer.²¹⁹

Following the fall of Pretoria and Bloemfontein, it was anticipated that the war would end in the last few months of 1900. Instead, the style of warfare transformed into guerilla warfare, resulting in more scattered graves across the landscape of war. The Guild began to receive letters written by the relatives of fallen soldiers requesting the location of graves.²²⁰ In order to respond to these requests, the Guild needed to begin keeping detailed records of the location of each grave, with the occasional assistance of helpful individuals such as Mr Melville who had visited the battle site at Paardeberg and taken the time to photograph and record the British graves, complete with a sketch of the area.²²¹

The women of the Guild visited the battlefields to record the location of the graves with a labelled sketch, providing a grave marker if required, and photographing the grave- an overwhelming task with over 25,000 graves to locate and care for.²²² They would ultimately open 2,000 files responding to inquiries for information about a grave.²²³ Eventually it would

²¹⁴ Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p30.

²¹⁵ CA, A 333, Letter from Margaret Paulson Murray, *Cape Times*, 23 May 1900. Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p30.

²¹⁶ Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p30.

²¹⁷ CA, A 2065, Central Graves Committee, minute book, 2 June 1902. Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p31

²¹⁸ Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p30.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p.31

²²¹ CA, A 333, Central Graves Committee final report, *Cape Times*, c.30 Mar. 1909. Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p31

²²² KAL, Guild of Loyal Women, minute book no 1, 30 Nov 1900. Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p31, and CA, A 333, Central Graves Committee final report, *Cape Times*, c.30 Mar. 1909. Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p31

²²³ Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p34

become clear that this work required additional support, and the government and military authorities began to work with the Guild. Military authorities could establish military cemeteries, typically in urban locations, though there was no provision of continued care. In outlying areas, colonial governments were supposed to enclose the cemeteries, though this did not always occur. In practice, van Heyningen and Merrett describe that the Guild would have to locate the graves and identify them before raising the funds for the work.²²⁴

Between late 1900-1901, the bereaved families and regiments of British, Canadian, and Australian soldiers began arranging for headstones and memorials to be shipped from their respective countries to be erected in South Africa, a trend that would continue until the conclusion of the war, and for years after. As in the Crimean War, some memorials were dedicated to specific regiments and funded by private groups or public subscriptions. Many sites deteriorated quickly, with overgrown plants and reports of damage caused by predators, resulting in Act No 14 of 1900 enacted by the Cape government to take ownership of the graves of both the heroes and victims of war – however first a land survey was required, a task which was not completed until 1905.²²⁵

The Guild began to produce their own grave markers in 1905, deciding to purchase locally produced iron crosses as a durable alternative to the original wooden crosses, which rapidly decayed.²²⁶ Each of these would feature a personalized plaque. The British South African Police would provide the lists of the names of graves that they had located. The Guild would then compare this information with their records, before preparing a list of names to be sent to a foundry to be cast. The round, iron cast included the motto of the Guild “For King and Empire” – Michael Tucker notes that the graves of those who died prior to the death of Queen Victoria 22nd January 1901 are marked with “For Queen and Empire”.²²⁷ The crosses were estimated to cost 30s each, a price later reduced to 25s, representing a sizable expense for the Guild. Van Heyningen and Merrett reported that the War Office, discovered ‘by chance’ that they were able to contribute 10s to the cost of each cross. The Victoria League agreed to provide another 7s 6d per cross, with the remaining 7s and 6d to be found by local branches

²²⁴ CA, A333 Letter of Mary H. Currey, *Cape Times?*, 9 Sep. 1903. Cited in Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p34

²²⁵ CA, A 333, Central Graves Committee final report, *Cape Times?*, c.30 Mar. 1909. Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p32

²²⁶ Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p35

²²⁷ Tucker, M. (2016). ‘Fort Hill and the Cemetery at Hartley Hills goldfield’. *Contact! Contact! A Rhodesian Services Association Inc. Publication*. December 2016, p.18. Accessed 21.09.20200
<http://www.rhodesianservices.org/user/image/publication12-2016.pdf>

of the Guild of Loyal Women.²²⁸ Work began to compile registers to list each grave and the details of the person within it.



Figure 30 Grave marker of Tpr. J. H. Stoddart, here misspelt as Studdart at Paradise Plot cemetery. James Hastie Stoddart is actually buried at Ruzawi School approx. 6km away. Source: Anon, 'Anglo Boer War graves at Paradise Plot Cemetery, Marondera', accessed: <https://zimfieldguide.com/mashonaland-east/anglo-boer-war-graves-paradise-plot-cemetery-marondera>

Figure 31 (below) Logo of the Guild of Loyal Women, Cited in van Heyningen & Merrett (2003), p.50



Michael Tucker identified the Gregory Iron Foundry in Cape Town as a producer of the plaques, noting that mistakes were made in the castings.²²⁹ British South African Police would be responsible for erecting the grave markers in the correct place, however not always on the correct grave, meaning that the positioning of a grave today should not be treated as confirmed without doubt.²³⁰ Rob Burrett provides an explanation for how errors might occur, reporting that many casualty reports came from the Rhodesian Field Force (Rhodesia is now known as Zimbabwe) base at Marandellas, rather than from the place where the person had died, so when a location was in doubt, 'Marandellas' was provided as a substitute, resulting in confusion when it came to marking graves at a later date.²³¹

²²⁸ Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p35

²²⁹ Tucker (2016, p.18

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Burrett, R.S. (2000). Rhodesian Field Force (Anglo-South African War) graves in Zimbabwe. *Heritage of Zimbabwe*. No. 19, p. 22-45



Figure 32 Boer War: rows of graves of enteric patients at Intombi, Ladysmith. Halftone, c. 1900, after a photograph. Credit: Wellcome Collection.

Where it was not possible to provide a cross, a cairn of stones was to be provided. This method would also be used to mark mass graves commonly used for the burials of ordinary ranked soldiers, and possibly in areas where a rapid clearance of the dead was required to limit the spread of disease, such as the area behind a field hospital as seen in *Figure 32*. One example of a marked and cared for mass burial can be found at Spions Kop. *Figure 33* shows a shallow pit filled with British casualties following an unsuccessful attack led by General Sir Charles Warren's 5th Division on 23rd January 1900. The photograph was taken three days later on 26th January. The site was designated as a Provincial Heritage Site, a place of historic of cultural importance for the province concerned, in 1978.



Figure 33 British dead in a shallow trench on Spion Kop, 26 January 1900. NAM.2010-11-12-10

Despite the promise to care for graves of soldiers from both sides of the conflict, the Guild later acknowledged that it had neglected to care for Dutch graves, as it would not ‘presume’ to remove the ‘sacred duty’ of caring for the dead from the Boer people.²³² Van Heyningen and Merrett argue that the Guild did, however, ‘co-operate extensively with local Afrikaners’ to identify unmarked graves.²³³ Engagement with Afrikaner communities is a topic worthy of further investigation, particularly for cases where bodies were discovered on Afrikaner land. One difficulty which prevents detailed study at this point is the lack of access to South African historical resources. Many South African academic journals are published in hard copy only, with no digital uploads of the papers, and few subscriptions from Western Universities. Access to South African archives, building upon the items cited by Van Heyningen and Merrett, may provide further information, however it is important to recognize that many of the sources cited are imperial publications, written in English for other settlers and administrators to read, as opposed to representing the views or perspective of black South Africans. In addition to a lack of scholarly engagement with African research, Western scholars are limited by a lack of engagement with community knowledge within South Africa which has been preserved through non-written sources, such as oral histories. Such engagement, ideally obtained in partnership with South African scholars, presents the opportunity to gain a new perspective about the Afrikaner experience of death and burial, and Afrikaner engagement with the British in relation to clearing the dead.

There is a lack of extensive research into the practicalities of the work of the Guild of Loyal Women,²³⁴ which means that it is not possible to comment upon the success rate of Army Form B 2067 in the identification process. As the process of identification and commemoration was not a requirement of the British Army, and the work was carried out by a voluntary organisation, it is possible that information about the successes or failures of the Army Forms may have never been recorded. The absence of information is concerning, particularly due to both historical and contemporary reports of the theft of these crosses for reasons such as the use or sale of the material, or youth-based damage associated with contemporary politics.²³⁵

²³² A 333, Central Graves Committee final report, *Cape Times*, c.30 Mar. 1909. Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p31

²³³ A 333, Central Graves Committee final report, *Cape Times*, c.30 Mar. 1909. Cited in Van Heyningen & Merrett 2003 p31

²³⁴ Note- within British scholarship. The issue may have been studied more closely by scholars working within Africa itself

²³⁵ MacGregor, Tom (1996). ‘Neglected in South Africa’. *Legion*. 1st May 1996. Accessed 21.09.2020 <https://legionmagazine.com/en/1996/05/neglected-in-south-africa/>;

The work of the GoLW is also an interesting area of study, with the potential to reveal more about Fabian Ware's relationship with war graves prior to 1914. Van Heyningen and Merrett have drawn upon the works of Longworth and A. Thompson to conclude that Fabian Ware was likely familiar with the work of the Guild, having worked in South Africa as a colonial administrator during and after the South African War.²³⁶ Ware worked for Milner, who had supported the launch of the Guild, showing continued attention in their work. This attention was returned by the women of the Guild, who reportedly passed frequent motions of support for him within their own meetings.²³⁷ Milner was said to have spent much time in the company of well-connected women, with Dorothea Fairbridge, and would later go on to marry Violet Cecil.²³⁸ Ware was in the perfect position to observe the response to the South African War, and in the appropriate social circles which would allow him the opportunity to converse with such women, with or without the help of Milner, who Ware remained friendly with even after returning to England, where he returned to England to become the editor of *the Morning Post* newspaper in 1905. Milner had a powerful influence on Ware's 'ideas of imperial co-operation' and 'sense of Britain's global destiny', which would come to shape his approach to war graves, particularly in the second half of the First World War.²³⁹ Crane argues that it was under the influence of Milner that Ware 'honed his doctrine in the subordination of the individual to the collective', an approach which would prove critical in the management of the response to mass death during the First World War, thus shaping the memory of the conflict to this day.

Following the South African War, instructions were released providing information on the care of soldiers' graves in the Transvaal, explaining that the military would have control over the graves and cemeteries of soldiers in South Africa, taking the time to specifically note Pretoria, Middelburg, Barberton, Standerton and Potchefstroom.²⁴⁰ The British Army accepted a formal responsibility to the dead for the first time, assigning the Royal Engineers the task of burying the dead and recording the locations of their graves. They were supplied with iron crosses to mark unmarked graves, paid for from military funds at a cost of 10 pounds each.²⁴¹ Despite this development, the majority of the work continued to be

²³⁶ Van Heyningen and Merrett, p. 36; Thompson, A (2000), *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880-1932*. Harlow, p.65

²³⁷ Van Heyningen and Merrett, p. 26

²³⁸ Reidi, Elizabeth (1998). 'Imperial Women in Victorian Britain: The Victoria League 1899-1914'. PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, p. 48 cited in van Heyningen and Merrett, p. 26

²³⁹ Longworth, p.I; Crane, p.20

²⁴⁰ Garrett, J. P. (2018). *Tribute to the Fallen: The Evolution of Canadian Battlefield Burials during the First World War*, PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, p.53. Accessed 21.09.2020

<https://ir.lib.uw.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7184&context=etd>

²⁴¹ Ibid. p.54

undertaken by the Guild of Loyal Women. Unfortunately, this was the extent of the Army's provision for the deceased, and no orders were made to maintain the graves despite the public concern over the provision of and care for British war graves following the Crimean War. Three years after the conclusion of the War, in 1905, the British Government 'began to supply steel crosses for graves which had not been privately given their memorials', demonstrating a change in attitude to the fallen soldier in lower ranks, though little is published on this issue.²⁴²

The article by van Heyningen and Merrett acts as one of few scholarly sources which focuses on the grave work of the Guild, despite the politics of imperial women in South Africa being the focus of a number of historical studies.²⁴³ The archival sources presented in the article should be followed up, along with a review of newspaper articles and archival materials, in both the United Kingdom and South Africa to investigate the issue within both a South African context, and the broader, international context. Efforts should be made to source documents which illustrate how the Guild communicated with national armies, and black Africans in order to perform their work. The information presented will help us to understand the expectations held by the public during the First World War, which as this thesis will demonstrate, the recently restructured British Expeditionary Force of 1914 was not prepared to respond to.

2.8 Laws of War

This journey through some of the major Western wars in the mid-late nineteenth century has provided a series of brief case studies which allow us to see how attitudes to fallen soldiers on the battlefields changed, as national armies observed international conflicts, learned from their

²⁴² Longworth, Philip (2003). *The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*. Barnsley: Pen and Sword, p.xxi

²⁴³ Van Heyningen, Elizabeth and Merrett, Pat (2003). 'The Healing Touch': The Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa 1900-1912. *South African Historical Journal*. Vol. 47, pp. 24-50; Hasian Jr, Marouf (2003). The "Hysterical" Emily Hobhouse and Boer War Concentration Camp Controversy. *Western Journal of Communication*, vol. 62(1), pp.138-163; Boucher, David (2018). 'Sane' and 'insane' imperialism: British idealism, new liberalism and liberal imperialism. *History of European Ideas*, vol. 44(8), pp. 1189-1204. doi: 10.1080/01916559.2018.1509226; Gill, Rebecca and Muller, Cornelis (2018). The limits of agency: Emily Hobhouse's international activism and the politics of suffering. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, vol. 19(1), pp. 16-35, doi: 10.1080/17533171.2018.1404744; Gill, Rebecca (2013). *Calculating compassion: humanity and relief in war, Britain 1870-1914*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 143-167; Gill, Rebecca (2012). Networks of Concern, Boundaries of Compassion: British Relief in the South African War. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 40(5), pp. 827-844, doi: 10.1080/03086534.2012.730836; Reidi, Eliza (2002). Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire: The Victoria League, 1901-1914. *The History Journal*, vol. 45(3), pp. 569-599; Theron, Bridget (2006). Victorian women, gender and identity in the South African War: An overview. *African Historical Review*, vol. 38(1), pp. 3-24, doi: 10.1080/0023208060853

own experiences of mass loss, and responded to public expectations in order to transform practice and develop the appropriate responsive systems.

In addition to the major conflicts in which Britain was involved or sent medico-military assistance, it is also necessary to be aware of other conflicts, that are lesser known to the British public today, such as the Philippine-American War (4th February 1899-2nd July 1902), in order to examine how the burial traditions of the American Civil War developed or were enhanced in advance of the First World War; or the earlier Russo-Japanese War (8th February 1904-5th February 1905, the first conflict in which an Asian armed force would defeat a European armed force, resulting in the publication of a number of reports on the conflict in England. Many of these publications include some rather brutal casualty and mortality statistics, and some include a smattering of uncomfortable reflections relating to the treatment of the dead on the battlefield, which would intensify debates about the boundaries of the ethics of war.

Towards the end of the period of study, the treaties and declarations of the Hague Convention of 1899 acted as some of the first formal statements regarding the international laws of war and what constituted as a war crime. During the Final Act of the Hague Peace Conference, within which the Convention was discussed, a desire for a special conference to be convened for the purpose of the revision of the 1864 Geneva Convention was expressed. Despite the interval between the proposal and the 1906 Geneva Conference, correspondence concerning the conference from 1901 informs us that the issue of dead on the battlefield was considered for some time. On the 4th April 1901, J.B. Pioda, Minister of Switzerland, wrote to the U.S. Secretary of State, John Hay, on behalf of his government to request that the Secretary would inform if ‘whether the Government of the United States of America thinks that the time has arrived for a revision of the Geneva Convention (Conference), according to the wish expressed by the conference at The Hague, and whether it is disposed to be represented at a conference to be convoked by the Swiss Federal Council for this purpose, in the course of the present year’. Six printed copies of the “Statement of some ideas to be examined for the revision of the Geneva Convention” were supplied.²⁴⁴ Pioda noted that the statement ‘is but a cursory view of the questions to which my Government now desires to call the attention of the Governments, without pretending to limit the deliberations of the conference’.²⁴⁵ The first proposal was to declare persons employed in sanitary work neutral, an important distinction

²⁴⁴ United States Department of State. Gesandtschaft. U.S. (1906). *Correspondence: [chiefly the Swiss minister] concerning the Geneva Conference to be held in June, 1906*. Washington. p.1. Accessed 21.09.2020 <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015011714816&view=1up&seq=7>

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

given that many of the developments observed within this chapter were driven from a sanitary or hygiene focused perspective. More importantly, section B, entitled ‘Sundry propositions’, proposed for the adoption of requirement to a) conduct a careful examination of the dead before inhumation or incineration, b) that every officer and soldier should carry an identifying mark in order to establish his identity, and c) that lists of the dead, wounded and sick who have been taken by the enemy should be sent by the enemy to the relevant army or authority with as little delay as possible.²⁴⁶

Months later, on 12th August 1901, the Swiss Chargé d’Affaires, Charles L. E. Lardy, wrote to the Assistant Secretary of States, Alvey A. Adey, in America with an update. Lardy described that the Government of Great Britain, though supportive, had requested that the conference be postponed ‘so as to be able thoroughly to examine the various questions connected therewith and also utilize the experiments recently made in South Africa and China’, a reference which may refer to the use of the Description Card, Army Form B.2067. Germany had conveyed that it would not be in a position to be represented within the present year, and Austria-Hungary had not yet returned a positive answer, and so the Federal Council of Switzerland had decided ‘to forego for this year, the execution of the project’. Attempts were made again in 1903 and 1904 to organise a conference, but in 1904 the plans were postponed again ‘on account of the war which has broken out between Russia and Japan’. These prolonged plans for the Convention may explain what appears to be a more intense period of observation by the British during the Russo-Japanese War, resulting in the seemingly large number of British reports which focused or reflected upon this war, as each country began to collate evidence relating to concerns to be raised during the conference to amend the 1864 Geneva Convention.

2.9 Conclusion

Though the findings of this chapter represent a shift in humanitarian and sanitary cultures in modern armies, they are entirely absent of, and perhaps seemingly unrelated to existing accounts of the British identity disc. Conversely, the identification and treatment of the dead have rarely featured in the historiography of humanitarianism, which has tended to focus on the wounded. However, the findings of the chapter introduce what is a rather complex history of military burial and identification practices, and their development during a transitional period of warfare, with rapidly evolving industrial weaponry which required the development

²⁴⁶ Ibid. p.2

of new battle tactics, sanitary formations and medical structures. An important distinction in the British narrative, is that the conflicts which seem to have acted as a catalyst for change were not fought on home soil, with an increasing amount of space between the battlefield and the home front as Britain focused on colonial concerns; this demonstrates a lag in the dissemination of information relating to the treatment of war dead during and following war, with information taking weeks or months to reach the newspaper headlines, which would ensure that parliamentary debate and therefore public interest was maintained for substantial periods of time as opposed to the ability to rapidly respond to the needs of the dead on British soil, as seen in historical wars such as the English Civil Wars (1642-1651).

Whilst historians such as Summers have argued that British burial traditions developed in response to the advent of medicine, this chapter has demonstrated that civilian improvements in burial hygiene were not immediately transferred to the British Army in the way that one might imagine. Rather, the burial traditions of the British Army continued to reflect the burial traditions of British society, particularly in the use of shared, or mass graves. British identification practice is difficult to evidence, in contrast with the well reported systems of France and Germany. This reflects that the British system was not introduced in response to the national experience of mass loss during intercontinental war, and thus was not driven by immediate public and political concerns relating to the civil rights of the soldier. Though the Crimean War had resulted in a political response to the need to maintain the graves of soldiers, an organised operational effort to mark and maintain graves cannot be observed during the South African War.

The 1864 Geneva Convention and the 1899 Hague Convention had forced national armies to work to meet a minimum set of values agreed at an international level, forcing even the most distant of military leaders to consider the more humanitarian aspects of war which did not historically been of concern to senior military or government officials, such as the burial and identification of ordinary ranked soldiers. In the South-African War, the British Army and Government allowed NGO's such as the Guild of Loyal Women to provide this service for them as an expression of imperial humanitarianism, allowing them to temporarily defer responsibility (and inevitably expense) until the conclusion of the war, when a national effort was necessitated.

Today, it is easy to view the identity disc as a particular example of Anglo-American military culture, or the built legacy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as a decisively British achievement; however, this chapter has demonstrated that the British identity disc is only a later contribution to a wider international narrative, and the practice of graves

registration was not developed in the fields of France, but in South Africa. This statement is not an attempt to undermine the important work and legacy of Fabian Ware, which will be introduced in the following chapter, but rather to reposition his legacy within a broader, transnational learning curve which began before the First World War.

Chapter 3. Identifying Marks: The 1906 Geneva Convention and the development of America, British, French, and German identifying marks during the First World War (1906-1915)

During the nineteenth century, national armies began to develop new procedures for the sanitary disposal of fallen soldiers on the battlefield, including systems for the identification of the deceased. Though the British Army had introduced the Description Card (Army Form B.2067), which could allow a man to be identified, the system was not as robust as the identity disc systems developed by countries such as France and Germany; systems which had benefitted from the experience of use during wars fought close to home. The ratification of the 1906 Geneva Convention (GC) resulted in the adoption of identity disc systems for British and American armies. The British aluminium disc introduced in 1907 is an important design, despite having been officially replaced one month before the outbreak of the First World War, because it was still issued until existing supplies ran out. Though not as common as the 1914 fibre disc, the 1907 disc can be encountered for the duration of the First World War, as shall be explored in this chapter. The development of international law will be situated alongside a discussion of the political value of identification in Britain in the immediate period before the First World War. It will do so with reference to a transnational learning curve between French, German and British identification practices, and through a discussion of the pivotal role of Fabian Ware.

To interrogate the influence of the 1906 Geneva Convention on the development of the British identity disc, this chapter will begin with the Conference which led to the establishment of the Convention. The first Geneva Convention in 1863 had been one of the first examples of international law relating to war, along with the 1899 Hague Convention. Contemporary reports of the Convention will allow us to understand how the codified convention was translated and incorporated into British military culture. The Convention brought the issue of fallen soldiers on the battlefield into the political spotlight, forcing both national militaries and national leaders to engage with this operational requirement and to create an agreed conduct for future wars. Though, as this chapter will demonstrate, this was not the only political value of the motions agreed.

Following a review of the convention and the resulting British identity disc, this chapter will move forward to the outbreak of the First World War, which necessitated the design of a new identity disc to be used by the newly restructured British Expeditionary Force, created under the Haldane Reforms. Within weeks, Fabian Ware had arrived in France to take command of a mobile unit of the Red Cross. Documents from the archive of the now Commonwealth War

Graves Commission (CWGC) build upon existing histories of the Commission, providing new insights into the development and expansion of Ware's unit into the Imperial War Graves Commission between 1914-17. The CWGC archive, based within their headquarters in Maidenhead, Berkshire, holds some of the most detailed records pertaining to British identity discs used in the First World War.²⁴⁷ It allows us to understand the practicalities of identifying fallen soldiers during an ongoing war, and the reasons why so many would become unknown soldiers in the post-war cemeteries which dominate the former western front today, and how so many joined the sacrosanct phenomena of 'the missing'.

The issue of identification was not as simple as the removal of the dog tag to confirm death. The identity disc moves through a great number of military structures before it is even given to a soldier in the event of mobilisation as it is purchased, distributed, stamped and stored. The occurrence of death causes the identity disc to move through different kinds of administrative structures, to allow the relevant force to account for the death, to inform the family and to provide details relating to burial to name but a few processes. As the war progressed, these administrative structures changed, particularly as Fabian Ware's work expanded, and became incorporated into the British military machine. As a result, this chapter, and the following chapter, will consider not only the design and implementation of the identity disc used during the First World War, but its use in practice, in order to explain how so many British and Commonwealth soldiers became unknown or missing soldiers.

This chapter will focus on the identity discs developed by Britain between 1906-1915 but will also consider the discs produced by France and Germany for the duration of the First World War. This will introduce a number of key models which would influence the British developments to be described within Chapter Four, including the British 1916 double identity disc. This structure allows for reflection upon immediate national responses to the requirements of the 1906 Geneva Convention, and international developments which would influence British military practice. Between 1906-1915, we see national armies develop their own distinct designs, along with their own distinct systems of search & recovery, and identification practice. During the first months of the First World War, each force was still grappling with the requirements of the present war, whilst many systems were yet to be fully established, meaning that many structures and processes, particularly those associated with death and burial, were performed in an *ad hoc* manner until best practise was established. This differs slightly from the period 1916-1918, to be explored within Chapter Four, where the

²⁴⁷ Greet, M. (2017), 'An Archival Case Study: Preservation and Access at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, MLitt thesis, University of Dundee

British, French, and German systems begin to share greater similarities, such as double/half disc schemes. Additionally, during this later period, the structures designed to respond to dead, unidentified bodies on the battlefield were more firmly established, with greater co-operation between armies and relevant NGO's such as the national denominations of the Red Cross, improving efficiency.

Focusing on this earlier period of disc development allows for exploration of the learning curve experienced by the British Army regarding death, identification and burial, and the influence of allies, enemies and high-profile individuals such as Fabian Ware, on British military equipment, planning and operations during the first half of the First World War. This information will allow us to address the politics of the identification of mobilised soldiers, situating the official introduction of the British identity disc to soldiers in January 1907 within the timeline of developing medico-legal humanitarian values on the battlefield internationally whilst observing associated changes within British military culture. As one of the later major Western combatant nations to adopt an identifying mark or disc, the British entered the First World War in 1914 in a position of inexperience when it came to the use and administration of identity discs to identify and bury the bodies of soldiers of all ranks *en masse*, and the preservation of their graves, particularly when compared with the French or German armies. For this reason, this chapter will focus on the introduction and use of British, French and German identifying marks between 1906-1918, exploring their development, implementation, and use in the field in order to provide examples of transnational learning and the exchange of knowledge between combatant nations in order to refine and improve identification systems.

3.1 The 1906 Geneva Convention

Following years of delays, the conference called for by the Swiss Federal Council to review the International Convention of 22nd August 1864 for the Amelioration of the Condition of Soldiers Wounded in Armies in the Field was organised to take place in Geneva, with the first meeting taking place on 11th June 1906. Each nation was invited to appoint plenipotentiaries to attend the conference on their behalf, with Great Britain and Ireland electing to send four representatives: Major General Sir John Charles Ardagh, K.C.M.G., K.C.I.E., C.B., Professor Thomas Erskine Holland, K.C., D.C.L., Sir John Furley, C.B., and Lieutenant-Colonel William Grant Macpherson, C.M.G., R.A.M.C..²⁴⁸ Between the 11th June and 6th July, a series of meetings were held to discuss the text of the Convention and decide upon any

²⁴⁸ Sperry, C. S. (1907), The Revision of the Geneva Convention, 1906. *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*. Vol. 3, p.49

required amendments, being ‘equally animated by the desire to lessen the inherent evils of warfare as far as within their power’.²⁴⁹

There was discussion about the role of Voluntary Aid Societies such as the Red Cross, but also discussion about the operational need for armies in the field to identify and bury the war dead as a sanitary precaution. The nineteenth century had borne witness to a series of conflicts defined by the ‘spectacle of bloodshed and desolation of war’, with battlefields ‘strewn with dead and wounded’, and inadequate medical structures and supplies for the injuries and illnesses incurred.²⁵⁰ Brigadier-General George B. Davies, Judge-Advocate-General of the Army of the United States of America, who represented his country at the Convention, presented the advances in military sanitation and medicine as a significant motivator for the amendment of the 1864 Convention, describing that ‘in the march of improvements in medicine and surgery, the interval which separates the Italian campaign of 1859 and the Manchurian operations of 1904 is vastly greater than that which separates the medical service of the great Frederick from that of the third Napoleon’.²⁵¹ There was an international recognition that the nature of warfare had changed, and Convention needed reframing in order to amend ‘much of the inexactness of expression which characterized the old undertaking’ to re-examine the application of the terms ‘neutral’ and ‘neutrality’ and their application to cases of internment and to the personnel of volunteer aid societies (VAS’s).²⁵² Davies considered that ‘the privileges conferred upon volunteer aid societies by the terms of the convention’ were ‘not only extremely liberal’, but were ‘in harmony with the most advanced humanitarian views in respect to the treatment of the sick and wounded in time of war’.²⁵³ The 1906 Geneva Convention marks a pivotal point in the story of identification systems, as the event which forced the British and American armies to create and distribute a system of identity tags; yet this key component of the convention, which undoubtedly contributed to the transformation of burial traditions during and after the First World War, has not yet been fully explored.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p.47

²⁵⁰ Davis, George B. (1907). The Geneva Convention of 1906. *The American Journal of International Law*. Vol. 1 (2). p.409

²⁵¹ Ibid. p.411

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid. p.413

²⁵⁴ Best, Geoffrey (1983). *Humanity in warfare: the modern history of the international law of armed conflicts*. London: Methuen; Hutchinson, John F (1989). Rethinking the origins of the Red Cross. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 63 (4), pp. 557-578; Crossland, James (2010), Expansion, Suspicion and the Development of the International Committee of the Red Cross: 1939-45. *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, vol. 56(3), pp.381-392; Crossland, James (2010), Expansion, Suspicion and the Development of the International Committee of the Red Cross: 1939-45, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 56(3), pp. 381-392

Internationally, anxieties over the strength of military forces and large numbers of casualties incurred during the wars of the nineteenth century fuelled the development of shared humanitarian ideals: A confluence of a form of enlightened self-interest from participating governments but also a commitment to civilising war amongst philanthropic agencies.²⁵⁵ The impact of artillery and small arms with increased effective range had led to a widening interval between trench lines, often creating an ‘impassable’ zone littered with wire entanglements, mines, trenches and more, creating new difficulties in responding to the deceased.²⁵⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, it had become common practice for nations to publish reports relating to wars in which they had not participated, reflecting upon the lessons learned. These books were published in relation to policy, for military education and planning, and for the affording public, with many books published on the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and the Russo-Japanese War in particular.²⁵⁷ Whilst the general focus of such literature is on strategy and the results of war, rather than the experience of the average soldier in the field, occasionally, there are more detailed snippets relating to instances of shocking, scandalous or sacrilegious behaviours. For example, two British reports of the Russo-Japanese war include references to the maltreatment of corpses, with accounts of piles of bodies being catapulted into enemy lines and even frozen bodies built into trench walls, evidencing the need for international protocol to protect the remains of fallen soldiers on the battlefield.²⁵⁸ Of course, the only true way of protecting a corpse from plunder, environmental damage or scavenging was to bury the body. Before the Conference, there were no international laws or binding agreements which made reference to the treatment of the dead, despite the efforts of Germany during the second (unratified) Convention in 1868. However, as evidence in the preceding chapter, the Swiss Federal Council had made efforts to encourage a third Geneva Conference to amend the existing convention as early as 1901, circulating documents including proposals for the adoption of new requirements relating to

²⁵⁵Gill, Rebecca (2014). “The origins of the British Red Cross Society and the politics and practices of relief in war, 1870-1906”. *Asclepio*, 66 (1), doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3989/asclepio.2014.03> cited in Ashbridge, Sarah I. (2020). Military Identification: Identity Discs and the Identification of British War Dead, 1914-18. *British Journal for Military History*. vol. 6 (1)

²⁵⁶ Sperry (1906), p.37.

²⁵⁷ Some British examples: Anderson, J. H. (1912). *The Austro-Prussian War in Bohemia, 1866: Otherwise known as the Seven Weeks’ War or Needle-Gun War*. London: Hugh Rees. [2019 reprint. Sussex: Naval Military Press]; Anon (1906). *The Russo-Japanese War, Part I*. London: HMSO; Anderson, J. H. (1911). *The Russo-Japanese War on Land 1904-1905, Up to the Battle of Liao-Yang*. London: Hugh Rees; Wilkinson, Spenser (1895). *The Brain of an Army: A Popular Account of the German General Staff*. Edinburgh & London: A. Constable & Co; Anderson J.H. (1910). *Russo-Turkish War, 1877-8 In Europe*. London: HMSO

²⁵⁸ Great Britain. Committee of the Imperial Defence. Historical Section (1920). *Official History (Naval and Military) of the Russo-Japanese War. Vol. III. San-de-Pu, Mukden, The Sea of Japan*. London: HMSO, p. 433, copies provided by Aldershot Prince Consort’s Library; Great Britain. Committee of the Imperial Defence. Historical Section (1912), *Official History (Naval and Military) of the Russo-Japanese War. Vol. II. Liao-Yang, The Sha Ho, Port Arthur*. London: HMSO, p. 302

both the wounded and the deceased. Though the final ratified version of the 1906 GC is readily available via the International Commission of the Red Cross's website, it has not been possible to locate any minutes taken by the British representatives present at the Convention, thus far. This makes it difficult to interrogate the discussions which led to the adoption of new articles into the existing convention. However, we can mitigate this to an extent by exploring British and American reports on the Convention, published after the event. The American reports by Sperry and Davies provide more contextual information about the ratified convention, along with the British papers relating to the Convention prepared for Parliament. The first article introduced was article 3 of chapter 1, which stipulated that:

After every engagement the belligerent who remains in possession of the field of battle shall take measures to search for the wounded and to protect the wounded and dead from robbery and ill treatment.

He will see that a careful examination is made of the bodies of the dead prior to their interment or incineration.²⁵⁹

The article requires the victor of the field to search for the wounded, but also to protect the wounded and dead from ill treatment, making them significant as the first articles written to specifically address the dead. The article describes that this search must take place prior to interment or incineration, in acknowledgement that some nations would cremate battlefield bodies as a sanitary precaution, an issue which we will return to later within this chapter. The article does not explicitly require the victor of the battlefield to perform the interment or incineration. Article 4 (chapter 1) followed, instructing that:

As soon as possible each belligerent shall forward to the authorities of their country or army the marks or military papers of identification found upon the bodies of the dead, together with a list of names of the sick and wounded taken in charge by him.

Belligerents will keep each other mutually advised of internments and transfers, together with admissions to hospitals and deaths which occur among the sick and wounded in their hands. They will collect all objects of personal use, valuables, letters, etc., which are found upon the field of battle, or have been left by the sick or wounded who have died in sanitary formations or other establishments, for transmission to persons in interest through the authorities of their own country.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Chapter 1: The sick and wounded – art. 3, Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field. Geneva (1906). 6. July 1906, accessed 21.09.2020: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/180-170004?OpenDocument>

²⁶⁰ Chapter 1: The sick and wounded – art. 4, Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field. Geneva. (1906). 6. July 1906. Accessed 21.09.2020: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/180-170005?OpenDocument>

This article required that identifying marks or military papers be removed from the body of the deceased and returned to their combatant nation –requiring adequate systems for the processing and transportation of personal effects, but not specifically dictating the requirement for each belligerent to provide their own soldiers with an identifying mark. An important distinction in the codification of military law. In 1908, a report named ‘Sick and Wounded in War: Papers relating to the Geneva Convention, 1906’ was presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty.²⁶¹ The report described the new provisions for treatment of the dead ‘of whom there was no mention in the old Convention’, before expanding further on the requirements of the new articles, providing us with an insight into the political attitude towards fallen soldiers at the time.²⁶² The author raised the following concerns in response to articles 3 and 4 of Chapter 1:

(2) After every engagement, the commander in possession of the field is obliged to take measures to search for the wounded and to protect both wounded and dead from pillage and maltreatment. He must also arrange that the dead are carefully examined before burial (Article 3). This imposes rather an onerous duty on the victor, which, however, has been carried out in recent wars. It was mentioned in the British project (Articles 2 and 3 of the *Règlement*).

(5) Each belligerent must also collect the military identification marks or tokens on the dead, as well as the articles of personal use, valuables, letters, etc. found on the field of battle, and forward them to the authorities of the countries interested (Article 4). The duty to forward identification marks is altogether new; its performance may require the formation of a very large special staff, and may prove difficult to carry out. Although mentioned in the British project, it was not there made obligatory (Article 3 of the *Règlement*). What relates to valuables, letters, &c. (sic), is taken from Article 14 of the Hague *Règlement*, where it is laid down that the “Information Bureau” should undertake the work.²⁶³

These excerpts inform us that the British had made increased efforts in recent wars to search the dead before burial, making this a *requirement* of war made the task seem ‘onerous’. Whilst the British had introduced the Description Card (Army Form B.2067) for use in Sudan and South Africa, this had been an optional development, not one bound by an international agreement. The card helped the British to govern the deaths of soldiers fighting on behalf of England, however there was no obligation, nor a codified international standard agreed relating to the treatment of the enemy dead. The 1906 Convention now required the captor of the field to not only search the enemy dead but bury them and to forward their personal items

²⁶¹ Parliament. House of Commons & Lords (1908), *Sick and Wounded in War: Papers relating to the Geneva Convention 1906* (Cd. 3933), London: The Stationery Office. Accessed 13.11.2020 <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pgpdocumentview?accountid=11526&groupid=103319&pgId=82013918-4b08-4cac-aa49-6f8fba43c81d&rsId=175280B034F>

²⁶² Ibid. p.27

²⁶³ Ibid. p.27

to the relevant offices. In spite of the repeated references to the Hague *Règlement*, the ‘Summary of the proceedings of the Committees and the full sessions’ included within the ‘Sick and Wounded in War’ report demonstrate a negligent attitude to the identification of soldiers remains. In the Third Meeting of the First Committee (tasked with discussing matters associated with the wounded, sick and dead) on the morning of 16th June 1906, the following points were confirmed:

The senior Dutch Delegate proposed to forbid categorically the use of wounded men as cover. He found no supporter except from the delegate representing Greece.

The Principle that the burial, or burning, of the dead should be preceded by a careful examination of their bodies was voted unanimously.

The question, “Is it necessary to state in the Convention that every soldier shall carry a mark of identity?” was negated by 14 to 7, Great Britain voting in the majority.

It was decided unanimously that the marks of identity found on the dead should be sent to the military authorities.

It was decided unanimously that lists of the enemy’s sick and wounded prisoners should be sent to their authorities as soon as possible.²⁶⁴

This information informs us that the British were willing to engage with practices associated with identification but were actively against the provision of an identifying mark as an enforceable requirement following the ratification of the convention. The passage does demonstrate some form of respect for the dead, and a British acknowledgement of the need to identify the dead, and to engage with the relevant belligerent to ‘process’ this death, however the opposition to the provision of an identifying mark and the proposal to forbid the use of wounded men as cover demonstrates that the individual rights of soldiers as men, and the rights of their family to their corpse or at the very least the right to the knowledge of the burial location of their fallen family member were not an explicit concern for the British Army at this time.

Despite voting against the formal implementation of an identifying mark, in a winning motion, Britain would design an identity disc only months after the ratification of the Convention, approving pattern 6444/1906 on 26th August 1906. Understanding the context of the introduction of the identity disc in terms of both international law and domestic military culture is vital in order to understand the failures of the system during the First World War. For this reason, this chapter will first describe the development of the first British identity disc

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p.36

between 1906-1913, before pausing to reflect upon the social reform of the British Army between 1906-1912 in order to probe the relationship between the social structure of the army and attitudes towards the military body. This will allow us to consider how these ideologies and social barriers resulted in an underdeveloped system for responding to the issue of the dead on the battlefield, both operationally and administratively during the First World War as the chapter progresses. The introduction of the British identity disc decades after the German and French discs, alongside a history of failing to provide adequate, durable marked graves (see Chapter 2), in combination with a tradition of informal learning, meant that the British entered the First World War from a position of inexperience when it came to the processing of death *en masse* at distance, with less than seven years having passed between the formal release of the identity disc and the declaration of war in August 1914. This lack of experience resulted in an *ad hoc* response to the issue of unburied soldiers during the First World War, leaving us today with archival evidence which can appear to be contradictory at times, thus requiring careful extrapolation. The timing of their introduction is also important, with a demonstrated reluctance from the British to be held legally accountable for providing identifying items, despite a willingness to use them, as evidenced by the use of identity card systems.

The discussion of the Geneva Convention allows for reflection upon the particular challenges facing armies at this juncture in time, as wars became increasingly industrialised, and public opinion about deaths incurred in war would increasingly come to shape national, and international policy. International developments in public health and sanitation resulted in the necessity for the reform military of sanitary structures, to reduce the number of soldiers dying from disease rather than of direct causes of war, such as injury. To improve the sanitation of the battlefield itself it was necessary to prepare for the sanitary disposal of the dead on the battlefield. Countries such as France and Germany with cultures of conscription would argue that the respectful treatment of the corpse was a civil duty to the fallen soldier, regardless of his rank, merging operational duty with civilian obligations. This was a position that Britain would come to share during the latter half of the First World War, however, at the point of the ratification of the Convention, Britain still lacked a formal identifying object, relying on a calico form, in spite of having an established precedent for the Government taking responsibility for the care of war graves, following the South African War. Henceforth, this chapter will explore the development of identity discs introduced following the ratification of the Geneva Convention, and during the first years of the First World War, as a means of responding to the requirements of the Convention. Additionally, the rich collection of archival and photographing evidence relating to the French and German identity discs allows us to

understand more about the challenges of identification on the battlefield, how different nations responded to the same problems, and how allies and enemies learned from one another during an ongoing war.

3.2 The 1906 Pattern Identity Disc

The pattern for the new disc, referred to as ‘Disc, identity, aluminium’ with the reference 6444/1906, was approved by the British Army on 29th August 1906.²⁶⁵ This date falls only weeks after the ratification of the 1906 Geneva Convention, during which the British had voted against the mandatory provision of an identifying mark. The introduction is indicative of a willingness to implement the findings of the Convention voluntarily, but an aversion to being held to them in terms of accountability. It is possible that the design of an identifying mark as described during the convention coincided with preparations for the publication of *Regulations for Mobilization 1906 [Promulgated by Army Orders, dated 1st December, 1906]* which undoubtedly incorporated the new practices required by the 1906 GC.²⁶⁶ The approval of the disc pattern corresponds with the date of the amended pattern for the Service Dress jacket, which saw the removal of the pocket designed to hold Army Form B 2067, illustrated in Chapter 2.²⁶⁷ The pattern approval for the identity disc supposedly specified that the disc was to contain no less than 98% aluminium.²⁶⁸ The 42 inch cord from which the identity disc was to be suspended was introduced with pattern 6453/1906 on the 19th September 1906.

The disc was formally introduced in Army Order 9, published on 1st January 1907, having ‘been approved for use on active service’.²⁶⁹ The aluminium identity disc was “to be worn around the neck under the clothing...in lieu of the identity card (Army Form B 2067)”.²⁷⁰ The disc was round, with a protrusion to allow it to be worn threaded along the cord. The disc was to be stamped with the soldier’s number, rank, name, regiment, and religious denomination, as per a sample illustration included in the order. The stamps used to mark the discs, “stamp s steel, for 1/8 inch” could be ordered using an indent (purchase order type document) forwarded to the Army Ordnance Department. Indents for discs and cords, however, should be forwarded to the clothing depot supplying the district. The cord used to suspend the disc was issued in bulk and cut into shorter lengths of 42 inches once it reached the regimental

²⁶⁵ Described within the 1914 List of Changes, the only known copy of which is held within the MoD for internal access only.

²⁶⁶ War Office (1906). *Regulations for Mobilization 1906*. London: HMSO

²⁶⁷ though it does not appear that AFB 2067 was immediately discontinued across all regiments and forces as examples can be found from the First World War period

²⁶⁸ Sweeney, Joe (2007), Les plaques d’identité et documents du soldat britannique, *Militaria Magazine*. No.258. p.37

²⁶⁹ War Office (1908). *Army Orders 1907*. London: HMSO, p.8

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

depot. The lengths of cord would be stored with the discs. If a soldier changed rank, he would receive a newly marked disc, though the order does note that the stamping of the disc of recruits would be covered by the allowance for marking the free kit, in other cases, a charge of 1/4d. each would be permitted. It is unclear if 'other cases' refers to discs marked for promoted soldiers or if the charge was intended as a deterrent against loss.

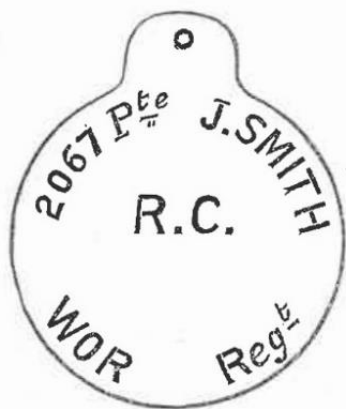


Figure 34 1907 illustration of the aluminium identity disc. War Office (1908). *Army Orders*, 1907. London: HMSO, p.8-9

Identity discs were to be regarded as an “article of kit” rather than equipment and were to be stored by officers commanding units until mobilization.²⁷¹ Alternative instructions were given to provide for various types of soldier. Discs were to be stored by officers commanding units of serving soldiers at home and abroad. Officers commanding units of reservists who would rejoin units directly. Reservists who rejoined at depôts would store their discs with their necessities, but in the case of reservists belonging to a Cavalry regiment stationed abroad would have their discs held by the officer commanding the affiliated regiment at home. When both regiments of a group were stationed abroad, the discs of their serving soldiers at home, and of their reservists were to be held by the officer commanding the provisional depot. When a soldier transferred into the Army Reserve, their identity discs were to be passed by the officer commanding their unit to the officer in charge of records, who would forward the disc to the depot or unit that he was to rejoin on mobilisation.²⁷² Despite this rather detailed administrative information, the order was missing two vital pieces of information from a historical: when the discs would be available for purchase and use (as the order merely

²⁷¹ The use of the term ‘kit’ rather than equipment perhaps explains the large absence of identity discs in British collector’s books and appears to cause some frustration amongst academics based on feedback in response to the author’s conference presentations and reviewers of peer reviewed work. This is the term used in military documents of the time.

²⁷² War Office (1908). *Army Orders 1907*. London: HMSO, pp.14-15

describes the approval of the disc), and how the discs should be used to identify a soldier who has died whilst on active service.



Figure 35 Illustration of the 1907 aluminium identity disc marked according to A.O. 102, May 1907. War Office (1908). Army Orders, 1907. London: HMSO, p.14-15

On 1st May 1907, Army Order 102 was released, cancelling Army Order 9 of 1907. The order removed the requirement to include a soldier's rank on the discs, presumably to limit the number of new discs issued due to a change in rank. The illustration included no longer featured the use of smaller, italicised letters on the abbreviated regiment. The order provided more detailed instructions on where the discs were to be stored:

- (i.) For serving soldiers at home and abroad, by officers commanding units
- (ii.) For reservists who rejoin at depots on mobilization, by officers commanding depots.
- (iii.) For reservists who rejoin units direct on mobilization, by officers i/c records.²⁷³

Upon mobilization, identity discs held at record offices were transmitted to the unit which the soldier had been allocated to. Army Order 83 of May 1908 provided instructions for the stamping and storage of discs issued to soldiers in the Special Reserve. For every special reservist, a disc would be marked with the name of the unit then stored by the officer commanding the unit. 'On mobilization being ordered', the disc would 'be completed' by stamping the special reservist's regimental number, name and religious denomination.²⁷⁴ Still, no lists of religious abbreviations were provided. Army Order 38 of February 1909 instructed that officers commanding units of the Territorial Force should also ensure that their soldier's discs should be partially marked for completion upon mobilization. 'In peace', the discs of 'every officer, non-commissioned officer and man on the establishment, including the permanent staff' would be stamped with the name of the unit and held by the officer commanding the Territorial Force unit. Once mobilized, the disc would be completed with the regimental number, name and religious denomination.²⁷⁵

²⁷³Army Order 102.1907. In War Office (1908). *Army Orders, 1907*. London: HMSO, p.14-15

²⁷⁴Army Order 83. 1908. In War Office (1909) *Army Orders, 1908*. London:HMSO

²⁷⁵Army Order 38.1909. In War Office (1910) *Army Orders, 1909*. London:HMSO

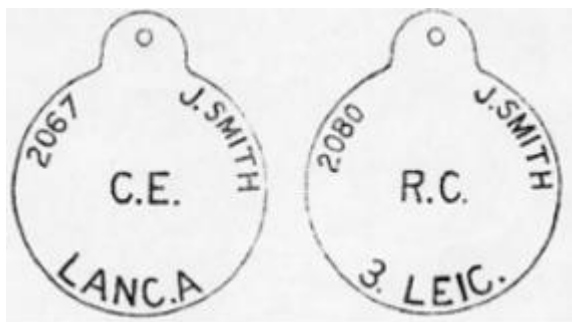


Figure 36 Identity discs for the Special Reserve with stamping carried out as directed in AO 102 of 1907 as illustrated in Army Order 83 1908. War Office (1909). Army Orders 1908. London: HMSO.



Figure 37 1907 pattern identity disc, personal collection of David O'Mara

Army Field Service Regulations Part II (FSR) was released in 1909, introducing instructions on the burial of soldiers, and the use of identity discs during this process, within Chapter XVI: 'Office Work, Casualties, Invaliding, Despatches, Diaries, Code and Cipher'.²⁷⁶ The administrative duties assigned to the Adjutant General's branch of the staff at general headquarters included the custody of personal effects of the enemy's dead, and the supply of the 'necessary information required by the Hague and the Geneva Conventions as regards prisoners of war and the enemy's dead'.²⁷⁷ The chapter outlines how the regulations of these Conventions were to be upheld in military practice, and who would be responsible for responsibilities including casualty reports and burial of both own and enemy dead. For the first time, the British Army was acknowledging its responsibility to the dead, having failed to do so following the public reactions to the treatment of war dead in Crimea and South Africa. Though these regulations were basic, the Army could no longer view the burial of the dead as an afterthought without breaching international law, requiring the formalisation of new practices to ensure each British soldier who was killed in action would receive an appropriate burial complete with a grave marker, regardless of rank.²⁷⁸

Section 133 (3) stipulated that: 'Anyone concerned in burying a soldier, or finding a body after an action, will remove the identity disc and paybook...and will note the number of the equipment and rifle, or any other means likely to assist identification'.²⁷⁹ Information about men reported as dead, wounded or missing was to be entered on to Army Form B 103. Once a

²⁷⁶ *Field Service Regulations, Part II, Organization and Administration* (1909). [Reprinted with amendments 1913] London: HMSO, p.162

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.164

²⁷⁸ Spark, Suemas (2011). 'Lessons of History: British War Dead in the 1940s and Public Protest', Oxford Research Group, p.2 Accessed 21.09.2020: <https://www.everycasualty.org/downloads/ec/pdf/Lessons-of-History--British-War-Dead.pdf>

²⁷⁹ *Field Service Regulations, Part II, Organization and Administration* (1909). [Reprinted with amendments 1913] London: HMSO, p. 167

confirmation of death had been confirmed, the information should be reported on Army Form B 2090a which should be rendered to the proper authorities, with the will of the deceased if available.²⁸⁰

The pay book and identity disc of a deceased soldier, and any personal effects of sentimental value, would be sent 'by the officer under whose immediate command he was when he became non-effective, to the A.G.'s [Adjutant General] office at the base'. The officer in charge of the A.G.'s office at the base was 'responsible that the pay book, small book, if any, and all available documents and effects are searched for a copy of the will left by the deceased....The other effects will be forwarded to the officer in charge of records concerned'.²⁸¹ These items would eventually be returned to the families, though this could sometimes take months. The removal of these items from the deceased would leave the body without any form of identification unless alternative identifying objects remained upon the body until the subsequent burial or secondary burial during the process of concentration into a secondary grave. Army Order 76 of 1911 made further amendments to instructions for the storage of identity discs, though a copy has not yet been located.²⁸²

In May 1913 the *Indian Medical Gazette* published service notes regarding the distribution of identity discs to British and Indian soldiers. The note, entitled 'Identity Discs' was derived from Army Department letter no. 5844-1 (Q.M.G-8), dated 13th February 1913, which made reference to India Army Orders No. 403 of 1908 and No.110 of 1910, which notified that the Government of India had sanctioned the use of identity discs. The note described the provision of a free identity disc with cords to the following officers: Staff Officers, British officers with British and Indian Units, Indian officers, and Officers of the Royal Army Medical Corps, Indian Medical Services, Army Veterinary Corps and the Ordnance Department.²⁸³ The first identity disc was issued free of charge, but any replacements would be issued at the expense of the officer. The discs of regimental officers were to be stamped regimentally, whilst the discs of other officers would be marked in Army Clothing Factories.

In addition to the provision of a physical identifying 'mark', FSR demonstrated a chain of accountability for the forwarding of the personal effects of deceased soldiers in order to confirm the death of a soldier. The identity disc was now embedded into both the regulatory framework and the administrative procedures of the British Army ideologically. In theory, the

²⁸⁰ Ibid. p.168

²⁸¹ Ibid. p.169

²⁸² Information courtesy of the late Joe Sweeney

²⁸³ Service Notes. (1913). *The Indian medical gazette*, vol. 48 (5), p.205. Accessed 21.09.2020: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/issues/281716/>

1907 introduction date meant that the British Army had at least seven years of experience in using identity discs before the declaration of war in August 1914, however the British Army was not actively fighting any wars between 1907-1914, meaning that the number of losses experienced by the British Army during these period would have been small (from a military perspective), and likely irregular, resulting in limited opportunities to demonstrate flaws with the identity disc system and to implement change in response to these flaws. Whilst the introduction of the identity disc may appear to be a progressive change, in practise, the British Army was unable to test the efficiency of the identity disc system before the outbreak of war; Resulting in the maintenance of nineteenth century burial traditions in the professional pre-1914 Army, which typically reflected the social status of the individual buried.

3.3 The United States' 1906 Identification Tag

Britain was not the only nation which chose to formally introduce an identification disc following the ratification of the Geneva Convention, despite the lack of formal requirement to do so. The United States would also formally introduce their own identity disc system within months of the Convention, with the War Department publishing General Order no. 204 on 20th December 1906 sanctioning the use of a small aluminium disc.²⁸⁴ The order described the disc as follows: 'an aluminium Identification Tag, the size of a silver Half Dollar, stamped with the name, rank, company, regiment or corps of the wearer; it will be worn by each Officer and Enlisted Man of the Army whenever the field kit is worn; it will be suspended from the neck, underneath the clothing by means of a cord or thong passed through a small hole in the Tag; it is further described as being part of the uniform'.²⁸⁵ The disc was to remain in the soldier's permanent possession, but was only to be worn when the owner was on active or simulated field service. Further information was provided in the 1907 annual Quartermaster General's report: 'Seventy-five thousand of these tags have been procured from the Ordnance Department at a cost of \$750, and request for purchase of 50,000 additional have been made upon the chief of Ordnance. Each tag is to be stamped with the name, rank, company, regiment or corps, of the wearer, and steel dies for stamping the tags are furnished by the Ordnance Department for each organization commander'.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ David O'Mara (2019). Note – the date of the pattern approval has not yet been located, but information may be available within an American archive, such as the collection of the Library of Congress. It is not clear whether this design was submitted and/or approved before or after the British design.

²⁸⁵ Wiggins Jr., Kennard R. (2015). *Delaware in World War I*. Charleston: History Press, p. 147

²⁸⁶ United States War Department (1907). *Annual Report of the Quartermaster-General to the Secretary of War for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30 1907*. Washington: Government Printing Office, p. 42

The Magazine *Popular Mechanics* featured information on the tag in their November 1907 issue, along with an image showing how the completed tag should look (fig. 39), commenting that it was 'strange that so simple of a method of identifying killed and wounded soldiers should not have been adopted before this date'.²⁸⁷ The tags were readily welcomed by the Association of Military Surgeon Generals of the United States, who described in their journal that 'these disks will render the long rows of unknown dead such as are seen at Gettysburg, Antietam and other battlefields practically impossible in another war, should one occur'.²⁸⁸ The following year, Captain Louis C. Duncan wrote an article entitled *Mathematics and Medicine* for the same journal, discussing ways in which to quantify various ratios of disease, injuries and death, reflecting on a number of international wars which occurred during the long nineteenth century.²⁸⁹ The article notes that the 'idea of comparing disease with battles arose some years ago when the world, and more especially the taxpayer, was not convinced of the necessity for organised medical departments for armies', acknowledging both international developments in military medicine and the increasing ways in which the civilian public could attempt to influence military policy.²⁹⁰

He compared the American experiences of death following war during the nineteenth century conflict, with the German experience of death after war: 'They say the Germans in 1870 had three-fourths (3/4) as many deaths from disease as from wounds, while we in 1861-65 had four times as many deaths from disease as from wounds. Ask them the relation between the battle losses, and they do not know; do not even think this is important'.²⁹¹ This statement does not seem to tarry with the advances made by the German Armies in the areas of sanitisation and identification in the period 1866-1878, during which substantial developments were made, reminding us of the necessity of applying careful caution when reading individual military accounts. The development of the US disc allows us to observe different national responses to newly implemented international law(s). The Geneva Convention did not determine the way in which military bodies should be marked in order to work within the requirements of the new articles relating to identification, allowing each nation to develop their own system based on their own experiences of war. The similarities between the British and American designs are indicative of either shared intelligence, or a shared example of good practise referred to during the design process (as seen with the French

²⁸⁷ Anon (1907). The Army Identification Tag. *Popular Mechanics*. issue 119,000. p.1215

²⁸⁸ Anon (1907). The Identification Tag of the United States Army. *The Military Surgeon: Journal of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States*. Vols. 20-21. p.383.

²⁸⁹ Duncan, Captain Louis C. (1910). Mathematics and Medicine. *The Military Surgeon: Journal of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States*. Vols. 26-27, pp. 371-375

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 375

²⁹¹ Ibid. p. 374

1878 design process, for example). As there is already an extant literature on the American discs describing the adaptations to the American design in 1910, and later between 1916-18, this thesis will not focus on the American discs any further.²⁹²



The United States Army Identification Tag in Place.
From a Drawing by Sergeant, First Class, J. Leiblinger, H. C.

Figure 38 The United States Army Identification Tag in Place, featured in Anon (1907), 'The Identification Tag of the United States Army', *The Military Surgeon: Journal of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States*, vols. 20-21, p.383



Figure 39 The markings of the 1906 pattern tag, featured in Anon (1907, Nov), 'The Army Identification Tag', *Popular Mechanics*, Issue 119,000, p.1215

The focus of this thesis from henceforth is the Western Front, with the aim of providing a detailed history which is useful for archaeologists tasked with the recovery of soldiers from the First World War. As the United States adopted a policy of repatriation for all soldiers recovered, it is less common to encounter the remains of American soldiers on the Western Front today, compared with the presence of the remains of British and German soldiers who have become part of the archaeological record in France and Belgium. Consequently, the thesis will cease to provide an international narrative to the story of identification practices among major combatants of the First World War, this thesis will now give precedence to the development and use of the British identity disc during the First World War, with a view to assessing the effectivity of the British identity disc. It will interrogate the ways in which identity discs were used by soldiers during their lives, how they were used in relation to

²⁹² Wiggins Jr., Kennard R. (2015). *Delaware in World War I*, Charleston, USA: The History Press, p147; Cucolo, Ginger (2012). *Dog Tags: The History, Personal Stories, Cultural Impact and Future of Military Identification*. USA: Allen House Publishing; Michael Sledge (2005), *Soldier Dead: How we Recover, Identify, Bury and Honor Our Military Fallen*, (New York: Columbia University Press). These works are complemented by extensive collector's publications which regularly feature soldier pins and identity discs.

British military burial procedures, and how they moved through various administrative processes in order to confirm the death of a soldier. Nevertheless, this will include examples of transnational learning, requiring us to engage, upon occasion, with the developments of French and German discs to understand the significance of these knowledge exchanges.

3.4 The 1914 Pattern Identity Disc

On 4 August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. Earl Kitchener was appointed Secretary of the State for War on 5 August 1914, and on the next day, he sought parliamentary approval to increase the size of the army by 500,000 men.²⁹³ On the 7 August, Kitchener appealed for 100,000 men to join the army, which was quickly renamed the ‘First New Army’ by the War Office.²⁹⁴ The appeals for volunteers, recruited in five waves of 100,000 were met with such a great response that additional recruiting offices were opened to speed up the process, and within three months, the final recruitment drive was complete, and the ‘5th New Army’ was sanctioned.²⁹⁵ The order to mobilize meant that the pre-marked aluminium identity discs were to be brought out of storage for the first time, and stamping completed where appropriate. New recruits would also receive an identity disc. On 21 August 1914, pattern 8111/1914 for a new fibreboard identity disc was approved. Though a copy of this pattern approval has not yet been located, it is possible that the information is held in the List of Changes, which can be accessed in file WO 359/15 at The National Archives. The MoD also hold copies of these lists, with the volumes rebound in 2020, though they are only accessible to internal personnel. The new disc measured approximately 35mm in diameter and was produced from vulcanised asbestos fibre.

The disc was to be hung from a cord and worn around the neck, as with previous models, stamped in accordance with Army Order 102 of 1907. The disc was red in colour, though brown examples can be found. It is not clear if brown dye was used as substitute for red, or if the brown colour is the result of the degradation of the red dye over time. Though the appearance of the disc had changed, the practical use of the disc remained the same. They were to be worn beneath the uniform, and if a fallen comrade was discovered, his identity discs should be removed and returned to the officer commanding the unit, thus beginning the administrative process to confirm the soldier’s death. The decision to produce identity discs from compressed fibre rather than aluminium has proven a source of confusion for modern

²⁹³Holmes, Richard (2005). *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front*. London: Harper Perennial. p. 138.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 138

²⁹⁵ Ibid. p.139

historians. In 2009, David O'Mara initially reported that fibre was selected to replace aluminium when 'it was realised that it would be practically impossible to keep up with the demand (and expense of) aluminium discs', and so fibre was introduced as a cheaper alternative.²⁹⁶ However having checked the costing for materials provided in the '*Priced Vocabulary of Clothing and Necessaries (including Materials)*' of 1913 and 1915 published by HM Stationary Office, O'Mara has more recently confirmed that this is incorrect, and that vulcanised fibre was in fact more costly than sheet aluminium.²⁹⁷

An explanation for the adoption of a more expensive material for this essential piece of equipment is provided within the minutes from a meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission held in April 1920. During the meeting, Chairman Fabian Ware proposed that the new material was adopted as a result of concerns raised by army doctors.²⁹⁸ Ware went on to explain that 'The metal ones were abandoned by the British Army some time in 1915. At the time I drew attention to the fact that these others would not last, but for military reasons and other reasons, it was considered wiser to use the fibre; it inflicts less of a wound. The doctors were altogether against the use of a metal disc, and these fibre discs were introduced'.²⁹⁹ When questioned by Sir Thomas Mackenzie on whether the wounds were caused when the bullet struck the metal of the disc, Ware responded 'Yes, and the doctors were all against it. I had this fight out at the time. The doctors were very strongly against the use of the metal ones for that reason... They were often struck'.³⁰⁰

Though it might seem incomprehensible that such a thin metal disc should contribute to a soldier's wounds, examples of this do exist. When Lieutenant Mason of the 3rd Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment was killed during the Battle of the Aisne on 14th September 1914, it was found that the force of the piece of shrapnel which wounded him had driven a portion of his identity disc into his lung'.³⁰¹ Mason's college magazine, *the Malvernian* also reported his death, describing that 'the force... had driven the metallic identity disc into his lungs'.³⁰² After the approval of the fibre pattern, the new discs were put into production but it appears that they were distributed to new recruits once existing supplies of the aluminium

²⁹⁶O'Mara (2009); O'Mara, David (2018). pers. Comms.

²⁹⁷ O'Mara (2019)

²⁹⁸CWGC_2_2_1_22 Minutes of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission held at The Office of Works, St. James's Park on Tuesday, 20 April 1920, p. 40.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ RG 35/36, General Register Office: Miscellaneous Foreign Death Returns, 'Lieutenant Rowland Charles Mason', *Roll of Honour Vol. 1*, p.258. The UK National Archive (TNA)

³⁰² *Malvernian* (1914). Cited in Bridge, William (2018). *Malvern College First World War Casualties*. Published Independently. p.359. The section on Mason can be viewed here (accessed 23.09.2020): <http://www.stanwardine.com/cgi-bin/malvernww1.pl?id=275>

identity had been depleted. Small quantities of aluminium identity discs continued to be issued to newly enlisted soldiers until supplies ran out, which Ware believed to have been in mid-1915.³⁰³ Future researchers may wish to investigate the timescale for the transition from aluminium discs to fibre discs in Commonwealth countries, to see if there were any delays or differences in distribution.

The 1914 pattern British disc is the British design that we know the least about. It is not clear if any living historian has seen the pattern approval for the disc, following the passing of the late Joe Sweeny, an amateur researcher known for his meticulous attention to detail. There are no known notes from 1913 or 1914 which describe the motivations for the change of material away from aluminium, nor which describe the reason for selecting the fibre. It is possible that the review of the aluminium identity disc coincided with the work to prepare the 1914 amendments to the 1909 Field Service Regulations, though it may not be possible to confirm this due to the difficulties in obtaining information pertaining to this disc. It has not yet been possible to confirm the names of any organisations which produced the discs, and as though these omissions of knowledge were not enough, it has not been possible to locate the army order which introduces the new fibre disc to soldiers. It is possible that a copy exists in a bound copy of orders within a smaller archive, or individual collection, but it is also possible that an order was simply not released. The disc was still a round object, stamped with the same regulations and worn in the same way, and the *Field Service Manual, 1914. Infantry Battalion (expeditionary force)* simply described the disc as ‘Disc, identity, with cord’ in the Field Kit sections, listing the disc as a piece of clothing to be worn, rather than describing it as ‘other personal effects’ as one might have expected given the 1907 use of the term ‘kit’ to describe the disc, along with contemporary forensic terminology which might categorise an identity disc as a personal effect today.

Unlike the French and German Armies, the British Army had not introduced their discs in response to the experience of loss on the battlefield. As demonstrated earlier within this chapter, it seems that the British introduced their discs in response to the agreements ratified following the 1906 Geneva Convention. Perhaps consequently, the British do not appear to have undergone the process of refining and improving their identity disc system to the same extent as the French and German armies, as demonstrated by the seemingly brief Army Orders. Whilst the development of the British discs can appear slow and unresponsive in

³⁰³CWGC/2/2/1/22, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission held at The Office of Works, St. James’s Park on Tuesday, 20 April 1920, where Fabian Ware states that the metal discs were totally ‘abandoned by the British Army some time in 1915’.

comparison to the French and German processes, the process of innovation and adaption witnessed during the period 1914-16 is not inconsistent with the broader cultural experience of learning and development in the British Army during this period.

Learning is a process, rather than a curve, with positive change often resulting from failure rather than success, as was the case in the development of identity discs. The failure to anticipate and respond to significant numbers of casualties before and during the early months of the war resulted in a response from Fabian Ware and his mobile unit, which would ultimately transform military burial cultures, graves registration practise and the British identity discs; and on whom our focus shall soon turn to. Fox argues that the process of learning in the British Army during this time was inherently uneven, resulting in variation across units.³⁰⁴ In order to interrogate the process of learning with regards to identity discs, one must consider the impact of both external and internal influences. Externally, the British Army was responding to the actions of the enemy that resulted in unknown dead or wounded soldiers, along with allied belligerents such as the French in order to develop a shared approach to the need to clear the battlefields. Both the Army, and Fabian Ware's unit, were limited in their ability to enforce change by the need to engage with senior figures within the Army, such as General Macready, and at various points with government figures, both in England and abroad as the issue of the dead became increasingly about the need to maintain morale at home and in the field.

The effect of this would perhaps not be felt by the soldiers themselves, for whom the realities of death had not changed, but rather those tasked with the recovery or identification of the dead, particularly Ware's developing unit and the Royal Engineers. Staff in this line of work would also be affected by the limited availability of equipment required to search bodies for their identity discs before recovery, (as well as shrouds), materials to make temporary crosses, shovels and gloves; particularly during the post-war 'clearing of the battlefields'.³⁰⁵ The First World War presented new challenges relating to the burial and identification of the dead, and the administration of death. These themes are complex, often building upon *ad hoc* cultures in the field, which became accepted as examples of best practice, meaning that change was slow. This is in comparison to the war cultures of the French evidenced within Chapter Two, which show that the French were quick to incorporate soldier-led practice into official military practice if it was beneficial to the broader armed forces. Even if Britain had decided to adopt

³⁰⁴ Fox, Aimeé (2019). *Templer First Book Prize Lecture: Dr Aimee Fox on 'Learning to Fight'*. Society for Army Historical Research, King's College London. 12 September 2019

³⁰⁵ Hodgkinson, Peter (2007). Clearing the Dead. *Journal of First World War Studies*. Vol. 3(1). accessed 23.09.2020: <http://www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/clearingthedead.html>

such an approach, the identity disc had only ever been used for soldiers mobilised in colonial territories. Simply put, Great Britain had no recent experience of continental war, nor sustained war in a neighbouring territory. The closeness of the Western Front undoubtedly resulted in a shift in expectations as to the possibility of repatriating the dead, or visiting a grave, for those who could afford such rituals, given the significant reduction in distance compared with previous wars in Crimea and South Africa. This leads us to our next area of focus, the arrival of Fabian Ware in France in 1914.

3.5 Fabian Ware and the Development of Graves Registration Practise

Major-General Sir Fabian Arthur Goulstone Ware is well known for his role in the founding of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which started its life as a mobile unit of the Red Cross. Though Crane and Longworth have written two wonderful organisational histories of the Commission, known to be based on the CWGC archival collection, the books are not referenced, and do not engage with Ware's involvement in the development of identity discs during the war.³⁰⁶ The only publication to do so is Gibson and Ward's 1989 *Courage Recovered*, which includes a single sentence on the issue.³⁰⁷ This is interesting given the framing of Ware's work, particularly by Crane and Longworth. Crane, writing in 19142, described that to Ware 'the Empire was not just the political cause that he had espoused in the pages of the *Morning Post* but a religion for which the war and its cemeteries had provided the Holy Places'.³⁰⁸ This depiction of individual graves housed within CWGC cemeteries as a physical embodiment of Ware's imperial manifesto fails to engage with the realities of identification practice, or to reflect the full extent of the process of learning and adapting that Ware's unit encountered.

Similarly, Longworth described Ware's organisation as having 'cleared up the desolate remains of battles', having 'consoled the bereaved' and having 'endowed most of the world with reminders of the horrors of war'.³⁰⁹ This summary neglects to consider how the Unit's processes of search and recovery, identification and graves registration were affected by the British identity disc system; thus generating the need to develop methods of commemorating those whose fate or final resting place could not be confirmed. The focus on identification

³⁰⁶ Crane (1942) and Longworth (2003).

³⁰⁷ Gibson, T.A. Edwin and Ward, G. Kingsley (1989). p.46; Interestingly, Crane refers to the discs as 'Ware's double identity discs' within his conclusion, though there is no discussion of Ware's significant role in the development of the double identity disc which shall be addressed in the following chapter.

³⁰⁸ Crane (1942), p. 235

³⁰⁹ Longworth (2003), p.130

within this thesis creates a space to provide further context to the development of the CWGC. Interrogating cultures of identification practice used by soldiers in the field is helpful in identifying gaps between policy and practice which contributed to the creation of the Missing and the unknown soldiers who frame our contemporary memory of the war. Ware's war time work can be considered an example of public relations management during war time and allows us to interrogate the adaption of military administrative systems during active fighting. The history of Ware and his graves registration project allows us to witness how and why identity discs developed, and how the politics of identification shaped military burial practise throughout the war.

This research provides a new perspective to key historical works focusing on memory, grief, commemoration and the legacy of war in relation to the First World War, such as the seminal *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* by Jay Winter, and international works by scholars such as Bart Ziino, Aravind Ganachari and Capdevila and Voldman.³¹⁰ Additionally, the findings of this thesis build upon the findings of recent popular histories which explore the themes of the Missing and unknown soldiers of the First World War, such as Richard Van Emden's *Missing: The Need for Closure after the Great War* or Jeremy Gordon Smith's *Photographing the Fallen: A War Graves Photographer on the Western Front 1915-1919*.³¹¹ These works touch upon issues of identification, the public demand for information about fallen soldiers, and the impact of loss, but do not consider the reasons why so many men would become unidentifiable. This thesis provides an explanation for how the Missing and Unknown came to have this administrative and emotional status and such iconic places in British memory of the First World War. There has been little interrogation of Ware's pre-war relationships and how his administrative work in colonial South Africa inspired his works, and framed his desire to expand into an international, imperial organisation in 1917- this context is crucial for understanding how identification happened during the First World War. Though an idealistic imperialist, Ware also held many socialist views, with an extensive employment background in education and educational reform in England, Germany, Paris and

³¹⁰ Winter, Jay (1995). *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Ziino, Bart (2007). *A Distant Grief: Australians, war graves and the Great War*. Perth: University of Western Australia Press; Ganachari, Aravind (2020). *Indians in the First World War: The Missing Link*. New Delhi, California, London, Singapore: SAGE Publications; Capdevila, Luc and Voldman, Danièle (2006). *War Dead: Western Societies and Casualties of War*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (original work published in French 2002); Van Emden, Richard (2019). *Missing: The Need for Closure After the Great War*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword; Dyer, Geoff (2011). *The Missing of the Somme*. New York: Vintage; Hanson, Neil (2005; 2007 edn). *The Unknown Soldier. The Story of the Missing of the Great War*. London: Corgi Books

³¹¹ Van Emden, Richard (2019). *Missing: The Need for Closure After the Great War*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword; Gordon-Smith, Jeremy (2017). *Photographing the Fallen: A War Graves Photographer on the Western Front 1915-1919*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military

South Africa.³¹² These experiences undoubtedly influenced his desire for equality of treatment for all soldiers which would become the main ethos of the Commission. Though Ware's work was not originally performed on behalf of the British Expeditionary Force, his unit would soon become incorporated into the military machine as both the British Armed Forces and the British government 'realised that the conditions of warfare in which the British Empire was involved demanded an attention to the dead less perfunctory and more systemic than could be paid by the existing army organization, strained beyond the limits of its means and powers'.³¹³

On 5th August 1914, the day after the declaration of war in England, *The Times* published an advertisement on behalf of the Hon. A. Stanley, the chairman of the executive committee of the British Red Cross between 1914-1943: 'The Royal Automobile Club will be glad to receive the names of members and associates who will offer the services of their cars or their services with their cars either for home or foreign service, in case of need', as part of the effort to unify the services of the Red Cross and St John's Ambulance, following decades of 'institutional bickering'.³¹⁴ Despite concern and skepticism from the Army over the involvement of civilians in military affairs, in September 1914, Kitchener declared that he could see 'no objection to parties with Motor Ambulances searching villages that are not in occupation by the Germans for wounded and to obtain particulars of the missing and to convey them into hospital'.³¹⁵ Fabian Ware learned about the advertisement for volunteers for this service one afternoon whilst in the company of his former employer, Lord Milner, the same Lord Milner who had supported the Guild of Loyal Women in South Africa in response to the South African War.³¹⁶ With the assistance of Milner, Ware secured an interview with the British Red Cross (BRC) and was given control of a mobile unit.³¹⁷

Ware was amongst the first of the BRC volunteers to arrive in France, leaving Boulogne at 10am on 19th September to 'take control of the work of the Mission' in Lille and Amiens, 'and to determine from local circumstances the best plan of work in this district', assisted by

³¹² Ware was a social imperialist with a focus on social reform. See Morris, A. J. A. (2008). Ware, Sir Fabian Arthur Goulstone (1869-1949), newspaper editor and founder of the Imperial War Graves Commission. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Accessed 09.11.2020:

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-36741>.

See also Crane, D. (1942). pp 17-19

³¹³ Ware, F. (1937). *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission during Twenty Years, 1917-18*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.24

³¹⁴ Crane, D. (1942). p.31

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Van Velzen, Marianne (2018). *Missing in Action Australia's World War I Graves Services, an astonishing story of misconduct, fraud and hoaxing*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin. p. xiv

³¹⁷ 'The Graves Registration Commission', CWGC WG 1708 cited in Jarboe, Andrew Tait and Fogarty, Richard S. (eds.) (2014). *Empires in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in Global Conflict*. London, New York: I. B. Tauris, p.357; Longworth, P. (2003), p.1; Crane, D. (1942), p.31

Messrs Cazalet and Brooke along with Dr Kelly.³¹⁸ The party arrived at the Hotel d'Europe where they met Messrs Tubbs, Harrison, D'Anbrunevil and Barrett, along with Mr Tubb's chauffeur. Three cars were available between them, along with a 'splendidly equipped ambulance' reportedly designed and brought over from England by Mr Tubbs, gaining the unit quite the reputation amongst the military and Red Cross authorities.³¹⁹ Before their arrival, the members of the unit had begun to scout the local area, establishing friendly relations and interviewing the authorities, coming to the conclusion that it appeared that no British remained in the district, but they were unable to make the required systemic inquiries to confirm this because of 'maurading parties of Uhlans' [polish light cavalry units] along with 'more formidable bodies of German troops'.³²⁰ Ware and Tubbs called upon the British Consul, Mr Walker along with the Prefet, M. Trepont and the Mayor who were keen to reiterate a previous offer made to Mr. Tubbs to keep a large number of beds available for British wounded at their 'admirably equipped' local Hospital. At this time, A. Curtis, a servant of Captain Beville, offered his services, which were gratefully accepted, along with his motor side car.

In the evening, the group agreed that a systemic search for wounded or graves must be paused until the Germans had withdrawn, to avoid bringing their cars into fire, or even worse, having them seized. However, they also observed that the Germans typically took the wounded as prisoners, 'with the possible exception of those who cases that were desperate' – this necessitated the establishment of the identity of any wounded soldiers in German hands. Owing to the risks involved, the unit considered a relocation to Amiens, but decided to stay in Lille, and rethink how to approach the issue of identifying the wounded in enemy hands. The group were able to agree upon a set of instructions to be carried by each member of the party.³²¹

The following day, on the 20th September, Ware met with Dr Calmette, a celebrated French physician who had been given the rank of General and given the responsibility of managing the combined French Red Cross work being done in Lille. Dr Calmette provided Ware with some helpful suggestions on how to conduct his enquiries, before requesting, along with Mr Rosset, the Secretary of the Red Cross Committee, that Ware's ambulance would travel to

³¹⁸ 'Report as to the work of the Mission in the Lille and Amiens District' entry dated 22 Sept 1914, by Fabian Ware in CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Instructions to Officers making inquiries (Lille and Amiens District) in CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

Bapaume to fetch in four French wounded, a request supported by a French priest. This gave Mr Tubbs the opportunity to utilize his own ambulance to carry to wounded between the battlefield and the Catholic hospital in Lille. Already, Ware was growing frustrated that the identification of graves could not be conducted, due to the risk of losing the unit's vehicles to the Germans. As a result, on the 21st Sept the unit began its journey to Amiens, with Ware taking a detour to visit Captain Lindsay in Boulogne to discuss future plans. There were various difficulties with the cars, which caused Ware to reflect on how well these cars were suited to both the terrain and the work at hand, owing to their ability to attract unwanted attention.

Despite these mobility issues, Ware's meeting with Lindsay proved fruitful. On the 14th October, Lindsay wrote to the General Officer commanding the French Army at Amiens on the 14th of October, acknowledging a recent telephone message requesting English doctors to assist the wounded at Ameines. In response, Lindsay was sending six English doctors, who had been instructed to provide all the help required, before reporting to the British Red Cross office in Paris when they were no longer required. A letter held in the same CWGC file, addressed to 'Sirs', but presumably sent to Ware's unit instructs the reader to proceed to Amiens 'with all possible speed', reporting to the French General Officer Commanding to inform him that they had been sent out by the British Red Cross Society in England to help to tend to the French wounded. Daily reports of the work done were to be sent to the BRC office in Paris.

The Unit's doctors, Kelly, Hebblethwaite and Braithwaite worked relentlessly to assist and replace the exhausted French doctors working in the dressing stations, who were dealing with over 2,000 wounded per day for a number of consecutive days.³²² These events led to the unit being formally attached to the 10th Army Corps in the French Army, who they followed to Hesden, continuing their work to support the French between Bethune and Lens.³²³ During this time, hundreds of wounded French soldiers were carried from the dressing stations to the field ambulances or evacuation hospitals. It was during this period of attachment to the French Army that Fabian began to refine the works of his unit, deciding that the most valuable service would be a 'small mobile hospital thoroughly equipped with its own mean of transport

³²² 'Col. Stewart's report of his visit to Major Fabian Ware's Unit, Graves Registration Commission' in 'Report as to the work of the Mission in the Lille and Amiens District' entry dated 22 Sept 1914, by Fabian Ware in CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

³²³ Ibid.

and thus enabled to be rushed up at short notice to any point where it might be necessary to supplement the usual Army Organization'.³²⁴

By the start of October, Ware's unit had expanded to include the following staff.

Major Fabian Ware, Commissioner

A.A. Messer, Sub- Commissioner

J.R. Brooke, Adjutant

Doctors O.R.M. Kelly, A.C. Hebblethwaite, Capt. J. J. Boswell and Mr. C.M. Vevers on the Hospital Staff.

Mr C.H. Cazalet, J.R. Macdonald, W. McMullen, Dr. Braithwaite, Mr. Carlile, Mr. B. Williams, and C. Benez on the Transport Staff

One Staff Sergeant and 14 Orderlies, two French soldiers lent to the Hospital, 23 Drivers and 2 Mechanics.³²⁵

Over the month, the unit began to expand in terms of both staff numbers, and the vehicles available, with the recruitment of new voluntary members and the provision of several motor ambulances in the middle of the month. This naturally resulted in an expansion in the works performed. Ware worked well with his French counterparts and maintained good communications with both French and British military authorities, who he would meet with to discuss his ideas informally. This led Ware to decide that, with the approval of the BRCS, that his unit would include a light hospital, to form part of the regular work of the unit, requiring the recruitment of two new surgeons and four hospital dressers (medical students from St. Thomas's) to the staff, along with the appropriate orderlies, appliances and stores.³²⁶ The hospital unit was moved to Merville, where the Unit had contacts with both the French and British, and here it remained for nearly a month, before continuing further North to Bailleul, Steenvoorde, Ypres, Poperinghe, Vlamertinghe, Dickebusch etc, even 'carrying wounded often right up to the hospital ships at Dunkirk'.³²⁷ The ambulance-car work that the Unit provided helped the team to build 'close and friendly relations with the French', with the *Premier Corps de Cavalerie* under the command of General Conneau proving to be

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ 'Untitled report of the British Red Cross and St. John Ambulance with handwritten notes 'Private copy' and 'Spring 1915?' in CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

³²⁷ Note – whilst at Bailleul, the Unit's services were considered to be of such use that General Conneau recommended that the Commanding Officer and the Principle Medical Officer (Dr. Kelly) for the Cross of the Legion of Honour. 'Untitled report of the British Red Cross and St. John Ambulance with handwritten notes 'Private copy' and 'Spring 1915? And Col. Stewart's report of his visit to Major Fabian Ware's Unit, Graves Registration Commission' in 'Report as to the work of the Mission in the Lille and Amiens District' entry dated 22 Sept 1914, by Fabian Ware in CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

particularly valuable allies, who made arrangements to supply the Unit with French Army rations, petrol and oil from late October. This arrangement was maintained for some time, despite a movement of the Unit's headquarters on more than one occasion. October was also the month that the Unit was formally asked to work with the 2nd French Army Corps, resulting in Ware being promoted to the position of Commissioner.

At Steenvoorde, one of the Unit's medical staff responded to a British request to provide medical care for a large number of Belgian soldiers who had been temporarily employed to assist with road-making.³²⁸ These works allowed the Unit to bring British wounded back from French lines, whilst also returning French from British hospitals, helping to build strong Anglo-French relations in these areas, and gaining a great deal of respect for the Unit's work. This work provided Ware's staff with much practical experience in search and recovery, which would lead to the Unit 'taking up another most useful piece of work, via: the identification of places in which British killed have been hastily buried, and the placing of crosses on the spots this identified, with inscriptions designed to preserve the rough records which in many cases are already in danger of becoming obliterated'.³²⁹ With Ware's mobile hospital and supporting vehicles now providing a broad range of medical and support services, along with the marking and recording of graves, building close relationships with the French and British armies on behalf of the BRCS, the Unit's work and positioning would become increasingly political.

Ware was particularly sensitive to the political aspect of managing the public response to death, having served as the editor of *The Morning Post* between 1905-1911- beginning his position the same year that the British Government had begun to supply the durable steel crosses to mark the graves of soldiers buried in South Africa. Ware had begun contributing to the Post in 1899, around the time he finished his time as a school master at Bradford Grammar School and was later offered the role as editor-in-chief in April 1905 by Lord Glenesk. As editor, Ware reoriented the newspaper to focus on colonial issues, an area from which he could draw upon his prior experiences working in the reform of education in South Africa as part of 'Milner's Kindergarten' between 1901-1905. It was in South Africa that Ware began to work with Alfred Milner, the man who had secured him the interview with the BRCS, who appointed Ware as the assistant director of education in the Transvaal in October 1901. He would become acting director of education in early 1903, joining the Transvaal

³²⁸ 'Untitled report of the British Red Cross and St. John Ambulance with handwritten notes 'Private copy' and 'Spring 1915?' in CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

³²⁹ Ibid.

Legislative Council in June of that year, before becoming the permanent Director of Education in the Transvaal in July. Ware had been present in South Africa during the latter part of the South African War and is likely to have been aware of the debates around the graves of soldiers, given his proximity to Milner.

In an untitled report of Ware's Unit's work, typed on 'British Red Cross and St John Ambulance' headed paper, possibly written by Ware himself (who often referred to himself in the third person), acknowledged that the works of the unit 'must have a considerable political value'.³³⁰ The report forms only three of over one hundred documents held within one archival box alone, the contents of which allow us to see Ware begin to assert the value of his work, often referring to the merits of the close relationship built with France, or connecting his works to a broader political aim, never forgetting to remind the recipient of the individuals or institutions which supported his works. Today, Fabian's communications style might earn him the nickname of a 'name dropper', yet as this thesis progresses, it will become clear how Ware's self-positioning and alignment with prominent figures in the military and civilian worlds would be instrumental to the expansion of his unit into an imperial organisation, and his dominance over those who sought to rival his works.

Attempting to understand the history of rivalries between the Red Cross and Medical Services of the Army, or Fabian Ware and political characters such as Arthur Stanley, allows for reflection upon inter-personal politics, and how the actions of individuals had the opportunity to effectively reshape national military policy, if the appropriate military support was obtained.³³¹ These rivalries are a reminder of the need to be attentive to domestic context, and not simply international protocols when assessing military policy and practice, with some developments being led from beyond military institutions. Thus, the study of identity discs can allow us to learn more about military cultures of the time, and the role of 'mavericks', amateurs and volunteers in the national response to war.

Though FSR, and the 1914 amendments, had described the processes for the burial of the dead, and how reports and personal effects should move through the various military structures, in practice, the processing of the dead was a chaotic and overwhelming task, resulting in an almost immediate 'backload' of casualties. In addition to the unhygienic and

³³⁰ Untitled report with 'Spring 1915?' annotated in pencil by a previous member of CWGC staff. In CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

³³¹ Meyer, Jessica (2015). Neutral Caregivers or Military Support? The British Red Cross, the Friends' Ambulance Unit, and the Problems of Voluntary Medical Aid in Wartime. *War & Society*. Vol. 34(2), pp.105-120

demoralising task of dealing with the dead, the British Expeditionary Force did not have a system to allow them to deal with this effectively on the battlefield.³³² Ware noticed the absence of policy and structure to accommodate the marking of graves and the recording of their location *en masse*. Gibson and Ward describe how, at the time, ‘dead servicemen’s graves were marked with wooden crosses after burial by their comrades, but no set official record was kept’.³³³ However, field burials were typically only performed as and when the conditions of the field permitted, resulting in scattered graves near the front line, and more organised burials near the field hospitals and casualty clearing stations. To Ware, it was clear that many of the grave markers were at risk of obliteration in the field, meaning that it was essential to record the location of every grave.³³⁴ To remedy the issue of poor-quality markers, the Unit began to ‘get rough but strong durable wooden crosses built, and stenciled the necessary inscriptions thereon’.³³⁵ However, the battlefield was not the only place where soldiers were buried. Mr. Broadley reported that where graves were found on the roadside, in a field, or a private garden, the unrecorded graves were often marked with a ‘very rough cross usually made from pieces of soap boxes with the inscription written in pencil’.³³⁶ These crosses would be replaced, with a new, more durable cross provided by the unit, which would be ‘neatly painted’ with the details of the fallen soldier in hope that these would ‘preserve the records’.³³⁷

As early as October 1914, Ware, responsible for commanding the Amiens section, began to receive reports from his search parties which identified a number of issues which hindered this work and caused administrative issues. On 15th October, Mr C. H. L. Cazelet of the Unit provided a report of the search party sent out between 10th-14th October 1914:

At Compiègne, Identification plates etc sent to the Offices of the Commandant de la Place by various Sous Prefetshad not all found their way into the same department, some having been retained in the Main Office and others sent up to the Office of the Commandant de Recrutement. Those retained in the Main Office had been handed over to an English Officer with a request that he would take charge of them, but no receipt was asked for or given. In view of the risk entailed by the above method of dealing with identification plates etc of lost British soldiers I ventured to suggest to the Comdt de la Place that all such papers and Plates of Identification received at his Offices should at once be forwarded to the

³³² Gibson & Ward (1989), p.44

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ ‘Col. Stewart’s Report on his \Visit to Major Fabian Ware’s Unit on 4th March 1915 , Graves Registration Commission’ in ADD/4/1/2 Copies of Documents Enclosed with Mrs Hutton’s Letter Box 2028, CWGC.

³³⁵ ‘Fabian Ware’s Unit. Registration of Graves’ in CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

³³⁶ ‘British Red Cross Society. Mobile Unit. – Report from Mr. Broadley. 27th November. 1914.’ In CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

³³⁷ Ibid.

Commandant of the British Red Cross, 32 Avenue d'Jena, Paris; and this suggestion and address was noted.³³⁸

In spite of the re-issue of FSR in 1914, which described where items such as the identity discs should be sent within the administrative frameworks of the British Army, this report demonstrates that these processes were not adhered to in practise, resulting in an inability to consistently and reliably move identity discs through the appropriate administrative processes. This could result in an inability to confirm the death of a soldier. Confusion over the confirmation of death could prevent the release of official documents, preventing widows from claiming a widow's pension or from remarrying, leaving the families of the missing were left in limbo until their loved one was found- dead or alive. This provided another reason to record graves, ensuring that as much information was recorded as possible in order to confirm the death of a soldier. On 17th October 1914, Ware wrote a letter to the Chief Commissioner in Paris. Less than one month after taking control of his mobile unit, Ware was already using his position to petition for changes to procedures relating to the deceased.

I have the honour to send you herewith Mr Cazalet's report on inquiries made by himself & Mr D'Ambrunil as to British and wounded dead. I enclose a map showing the District covered by the enquiry and propose to send you from time to time coloured tracings of other Districts completed which may be similarly affixed in your Office to this map.

After this enquiry, it may be taken that there are no other British, wounded in the earlier stages of the war, in this District.

With regard to the offer of the Sous-prefets of Compiègne and Senlis to exhume the British buried in their districts for the purposes of identification and reburial the matter appeared to me, when Mr Cazalet returned and reported verbally, to involve as in greater responsibilities than we were justified in accepting.³³⁹

Ware reported how he had thanked the two Sous-prefets for their "kind reception" and promised to communicate their offer to the British Authorities before continuing:

I gather however that the Sous-prefets may not consider the consent of the British Government necessary and may, in the interests of their own Districts, exhume and rebury, incidentally as far as possible establishing identity.

Should the British Government be able to go so far as to say it did not object to this course, I would suggest that an Officer of the British Red Cross, preferably Mr Cazalet or myself already known to the

³³⁸ CWGC CWGC/1/1/1/3 Early Letters about Graves 4/10/1914 - 10/5/1915 Note - It is not clear from this report whether the terms 'plates of identification' or 'identification plates' used within this report refer to identity discs or the metal plaques used to mark temporary graves.

³³⁹ CWGC CWGC/1/1/1/3 Early Letters about Graves 4/10/1914 - 10/5/1915

Sous-prefets should proceed with the least possible delay to the districts in question and supervise, perhaps necessarily unofficially, the exhuming and reburial.³⁴⁰

Before drawing to a conclusion, Ware informed the Chief Commissioner that “pending your decision on this matter I am sending a copy of Mr Cazalet’s report and of the map to London, so that they may immediately inform the Authorities of the identities established”.³⁴¹ Ware sent Mr Brooke to deliver the letter to Paris, with instructions to “discuss fully” the procedures to be followed as to the forwarding of further papers relating to the issue. On 14th November, Ware wrote to the Honourable Arthur Stanley, M.V.C., M.P., describing the work of his unit in continuation of his 'last interim statement'. Here we begin to see Ware's unique style of negotiation begin to shine through:

I would particularly draw your attention to General Conneau's letter, acknowledging the first of these reports which I know will prove of interest to you. The other documents speak for themselves and give in the most precise form possible a brief account of the nature of our work for the French.

It is a matter of satisfaction to all of us here that this connection the French authorities are trusting us so far as to authorize us to carry out all necessary formalities as regards the wounded and deaths to which, as you are aware, great importance is attached by the French. I mention this matter as I know it will be of interest to you and the Executive Council. It is, of course, hardly a matter for publicity, or even perhaps for adoption on at all an extended scale, since it is dependent so largely on personal contact between individuals and it is only by obtaining the confidence of the French authorities step by step that we have been entrusted with this work. Indeed, I think there might be a danger of their withdrawing from us the authority with which we are more or less informally entrusted, if publicity was to be given to the fact and they felt that this individual case might be used to establish a precedent.³⁴²

Here, Ware diplomatically put forward the issue of burial as a point of general interest for the British; an opportunity to gain favour with the French, who assigned such value to the formalities associated with death, though this work. Ware seems to imply that this work should continue to develop in order to maintain diplomatic relations, rather than promoting the care of fallen British soldiers as the leading focus. Ware would maintain this tone throughout many of his communications relating to his work, particularly in the post-war period. At some stage, Ware’s innovative work recording the graves of soldiers was brought to the attention of General Sir Neville Macready, Adjutant-General of the B.E.F., who was concerned about the growing public demand in Britain over the care of and access to war graves, remembering the ‘distress caused by neglect of British graves in the recent South

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid.

African War'.³⁴³ In the aftermath of the South African War, Macready, another former imperial figure who had worked in South Africa, had told a War Office committee that a lot of the scandal over the soldier's graves 'would have been avoided had a proper organization been created to meet the need at the commencement of the war'.³⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, Macready would become a close ally of Ware as the war progressed.

The Unit learned rapidly from their experience, writing regular reports of their work, describing in November 1914 that the main method of finding graves was to make 'ceaseless enquiries of everyone' met in a district where there had been fighting of a nature which would likely result in a pattern of scattered graves.³⁴⁵ Information could be received from the local Curé, from children, from officers, but 'no report would be complete without a word as to the valuable help of "Tommy" who has frequently come on a tramp across the country "grave hunting" and has always rendered me signal assistance on these occasions".³⁴⁶ This information would inform the search of the area. The units search duties began to include the search for known graves within a specific area, with this task being undertaken 'almost exclusively' by Mr Broadley for 'some weeks'.³⁴⁷ This work allowed Broadley to observe emerging traditions of grave marking which deferred from the traditional wooden cross, describing 'another and very ingenious method of recording the names of fallen soldiers is by writing their names on a piece of paper and placing them in a corked bottle'; having come across a bottle which included a list featuring the names of thirty men of the Royal Scots killed in action along with a note from the Chaplain, Reverend Gibbs confirming that he had officiated at the burial of the men. Broadley recommended that this method should be used where there was not time to erect a well inscribed cross, as it would greatly simplify his work = as long as indelible pencils were used, of course.³⁴⁸ The development of this battlefield culture of burial bottles meant that the Unit's graves work expanded again, meaning that they now took responsibility for the search for graves, the marking of graves, the recording of existing burials and burial bottles, and the forwarding of this information. As the Unit's graves work continued to expand, a crucial relationship would begin to change, which would prove a pivotal point for graves registration in the First World War.

³⁴³ Gibson and Ward (1989), p.44

³⁴⁴ Crane (1942), p. 49

³⁴⁵ 'Report from Mr. Broadley, 27th November 1914', in CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (File MU 1)

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ 'Col. Stewart's Report on his Visit to Major Fabian Ware's Unit on 4th March 1915 , Graves Registration Commission' in ADD/4/1/2 Copies of Documents Enclosed with Mrs Hutton's Letter Box 2028, CWGC.

³⁴⁸ 'Report from Mr. Broadley, 27th November 1914', in CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (File MU 1 Box 2028)

In early December 1914, the 1^{ier} Cavalry Corps of the French Army had ceased active operations, and so Ware's unit was given the option of either 'sharing their inactivity' or working for the 10th Army Corps of General De Maud Nuy's Army.³⁴⁹ The BRCS granted permission for Ware's Unit to continue with such work on the 16th of December. However, Ware had already begun working to reposition his unit, in order to regulate building tensions with the R.A.M.C., leading him to visit General Sir Horace Smith Dorrien, who sent him to visit General Macready at the British Headquarters in St. Omer. Macready requested that Ware confer with the Head of the R.A.M.C., also based at St. Omer, to determine 'the best means of rendering the Mobile Unit of use to the British Army'.³⁵⁰ This resulted in a proposal from Ware to extend the medical and transport divisions of the unit. Whilst these conversations were ongoing, the Unit was formally attached by the Grand Quartier General to 1^{ier} Cavalry Corps by the Grand Quarter General on 12th January 1915, following an invitation, on the condition that the Unit should still be allowed to assist the British wherever they could be useful. However, in a letter dated 6th Feb 1915 Messer described that the attachment to the French was 'only as a means of keeping together a Unit which has become an effective force, in order that we may be of use to our own folk when the call comes'.³⁵¹

Macready had been convinced of the merits of an organisation dedicated to the recording of soldiers graves, and was supportive of Ware's idea to create Graves Registration Units, prompting him to request that the Commander-in-Chief, Sir John French, to obtain approval from the War Office in London for permission to create an organisation which focused on graves registration as 'an integral part of the Army in the Field'.³⁵² Consequently, in March 1915, the Unit was given official recognition and support by the War Office, and brought under the command of the British Army. Though this movement would prove to be of advantage to Ware, it appears that he was particularly keen to emphasize his wish that the unit should not be recognised as a unit of the British Army organisation, having Macready send out a note expression this wish. The note is copied in more than one archival file in the CWGC archive, suggesting that Ware made sure sufficient copies were made.³⁵³

3.6 The development of the French 1915 *plaque d'identité*

³⁴⁹ 'Col. Stewart's Report on his Visit to Major Fabian Ware's Unit on 4th March 1915 , Graves Registration Commission' in ADD/4/1/2 Copies of Documents Enclosed with Mrs Hutton's Letter Box 2028, CWGC.

³⁵⁰ CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

³⁵¹ 'Copy letter Messer to Brade, 6th Feb. 1915' in CGWC/1/1/1/3 (MU 3)

³⁵² Van Velzen (2018), p. xvii; Gibson and Ward (1989), p.44

³⁵³ CWGC/1/1/1/1 Narrative Letters and Reports (file MU 1)

Within weeks of his deployment to the Western Front in September 1914, Fabian Ware would find himself working closely with the French, as has been described. Ware's unit learned many lessons about search and recovery during this time, and Ware himself built a strong working relationship with many French military officials which would last for the duration of the war, later allowing Ware to consult with the French Armies when collecting information relevant to British developments, for example his presentation of information about the French identity disc system to the British Army in 1916, during the development of the British double identity disc, which shall be described in Chapter Four. As British identity discs and graves registration practice during the First World War are so intimately intertwined with the practices of the French Army, it is necessary to understand the French systems of identification, and the relevant French individuals who would help Ware to achieve his aims over the course of the war.

On 30th July 1914, the French Commander-in-Chief Joseph Joffre had warned the Ministry of War of Germany's declining relationship with Russia, and its impending approach towards France, recommending the implementation of Plan XVII. This would allow the Army to call up their reserves who would then be transported to the country's borders in a defensive position. Joffre's intelligence proved correct, as the following day, Germany entered a state of war and closed its borders. The French government agreed to start the order of General Mobilisation on the 1st of August. The gendamerie were tasked with informing rural villages of the news, and telegrams were sent to the head of every corps, to prefects and to mayors to share the news. The first poster was displayed between the Place de la Concorde and the Rue Royale in Paris at 4pm on the 1st August.

In 1913, a law had been passed which specified that all men over the age of 21 (the legal age of adulthood in France at the time) would be required to participate in military service for a period of three years. As a result, the French Army had always incorporated and reflected the views and experience of men from all classes of society. As France mobilised, existing soldiers would receive their identity plates which would be stored whilst not on active service, and blank discs would be marked up for new recruits.

Though the French appear to be the nation who invested the most time in refining and communicating their system of identification since its formal approval in 1881, it appears that, like the British, they did not have a robust plan in place to deal with the number of casualties incurred during the first three months of war. In September 1914, Fabian Ware was deployed to the Western Front with the control of a mobile unit of the Red Cross (as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5), and almost immediately began working with the French

Army at Albert. Ware and his colleagues had assisted with the recovery of wounded soldiers from the battlefield, moving them between dressing stations and field hospitals.

The British Expeditionary Force had based their Advance Base in Amiens, though it was soon captured by the German Army on 31st August, before being recaptured by the French on 28th September. During this conflict, the French experienced temporary shortages of the *Service de Sante* and required assistance from Ware's unit. In a report dated 8th March 1915, local captain Langston Cazalet of the mobile unit reported to Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart that there were a number of consecutive days where over 2,000 wounded men had required assistance each day.³⁵⁴ The demand for such work did not decline, and so Ware's unit was informally attached to the 10th Army. Ware continued to work with the French Army for some weeks, whilst also attending to his original duties of searching for lost British Officers and men. It was during this time that Ware began to develop a positive working relationship with the French that would later allow for a number of allied agreements, the formation of temporary and permanent allied cemeteries, and inter-theatre learning with regards to the development of identity discs as the First World War progressed.

During the first few months of the Great War alone, the French Army experienced significant losses. Between August and December 1914, 300,000 men were killed, with 27,000 falling on the 22nd August alone.³⁵⁵ The French Army was still using the Mle1881 *plaque d'identité*, worn around the neck, suspended from a black cord. The *service de santé* had intended that the burial of fallen soldiers would be carried out by troops under the control of sanitary officers after fighting had moved on.³⁵⁶ The Great Retreat from Mons (24th August-28th Sept 1914) interrupted these plans, leaving the German Army to bury the French dead. Following the battle of Marne (6th-10th September 1914), sanitary operations resumed, but soldiers were now met with a new challenge: as the front began to stabilise, the process of evacuating the battlefield to advance to the next location happened with declining frequency, removing the possibility of approaching the battlefield to bury the dead.³⁵⁷ The historical tradition of providing communal, or mass graves for ordinary soldiers was still enforced, with General Joffre giving orders to bury the dead in mass graves containing up to 100 bodies.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ 'C.H. Langston Cazalet's Report on the Mobile Unit, 8th March 1915 , Graves Registration Commission' in ADD/4/1/2 Copies of Documents Enclosed with Mrs Hutton's Letter Box 2028, CWGC

³⁵⁵ Marchal, Eric (2014). *Le corps identifié. Corps*. 12 (1), pp.37-40 (own translation)

³⁵⁶ Pourcher, Yves (1993). *La fouille des champs d'honneur. la sépulture des soldats de 14-18. Terrain*. No. 20, pp.37-56. (own translation).

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Marchal, Eric (2014), pp.37-40 (own translation)

Once the *plaque d'identité* had been removed from the soldiers placed within the mass grave, they were rendered unidentifiable unless care had been taken to record the individuals within the grave and their location, particularly in cases where multiple layers of corpses had been deposited within the cut. However, 'custom is borne out by the behaviour of the soldiers', who would attempt to bury their friends and comrades in an individual grave wherever possible.³⁵⁹ Consequently, individual, scattered, graves began to appear across the battlefields, as soldiers were buried where they fell. If this was not possible, the soldier could be moved to regimental posts, a spot next to the trenches, or even placed within a shell hole to ensure that he would not be disturbed. Operationally, the French were struggling with both a lack of safe access to the deceased, but also the proliferation of scattered, individual graves which were not always recorded.

In addition to these logistical problems, the use of the *plaque d'identité* had become inconsistent in terms of its physical location upon the body, and this, amongst other factors, affected the ability of the army to identify the bodies of fallen soldiers. Many soldiers began wearing their plates around their wrist, mounted as a bracelet. For some, this was attributed to a fear over reports of decapitation by shrapnel shellfire, whilst others considered the black cord to be both flimsy, rotting quickly, and unhygienic, soon becoming dirty and full of bacteria.³⁶⁰

The risk of loss of the identity plate, or separation of the plate from the body was not the only cause for concern that soldiers had regarding their identity plates. At some point between 1899 and 1914, the French had begun to produce their identity plates from aluminium (though the design remained the same). The aluminium tags were quick to corrode, particularly when following burial, which could make a secondary identification impossible if the burial were to be re-concentrated at a later date. Some soldiers refused to wear it at all, either out of superstition or general negligence.³⁶¹ The lack of consistency with regards to the use of the identity disc by soldiers contributed to the high numbers of unidentified soldiers who would remain unknown, known as *la disparus* in France.

The combination of the logistical issues surrounding the recovery of the fallen, the inconsistent use of the *plaque d'identité* by soldiers, the absence of an identifying object upon

³⁵⁹ Prost, Antoinette (2011). The Military Cemeteries of the Great War, 1914-18. *Le Mouvement Social*. Vol. 4 (237), p.136

³⁶⁰ Hourseau, Alain (2014). *La première guerre mondiale vécue par les habitants de Bouilly (Aube)*. Paris: Books on Demand; On Ne Passe Pas. 'Les plaques d'identité'. accessed 23.09.2020
<http://www.onnepassepas.fr/pages/le-barda/livret-et-plaque-militaires.html>

³⁶¹ Anon. 'objets d'identification'. accessed online (23.09.20). Available at https://crdp.ac-amiens.fr/pensa/1_4_case1.php

the body of a soldier who had been buried according to procedure, and confusion caused by the use of mass internments created a situation which had the possibility to disrupt both the sanitary conditions of the field, as soldiers struggled to avoid making contact with the dead on a regular basis, but also the morale of soldiers— two issues of great concern to military leaders. As a result, the French Ministry of War decided to introduce a new, more durable tag to be worn in addition to the existing 1881 model disc already in the possession of soldiers.

On 14th May 1915, a second, duplicate *plaque d'identité* was announced. The new disc was to be stamped as per the soldier's existing plate, but also featured a second cord hole at the opposite end of the plate, allowing it to be worn as a bracelet around the wrist. The discs were now to be produced from maillechort (a zinc and copper alloy, also known as German or nickel silver), which would last longer than aluminium once buried. If a dead soldier was discovered, one disc was to be removed from the body along with the *Livre Matricule*, leaving one disc upon the body to ensure that a buried body, or a body which could not be immediately buried, remained identifiable. The introduction of a second form of identification directly responded to concerns around decapitation, or the loss of limbs, ensuring that one identifying item would remain upon the body in death. On 27th April 1916, an order was circulated to announce that the discs would now be produced from maillechort, rather than aluminium, improving the durability of the discs. The Mle.1881 design was later adopted by Serbia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece and Siam.³⁶² Privately purchased discs modelled on the Mle.1881 were used by the U.K., the U.S.A. and Portugal during the First World War.³⁶³



Figure 40 Plaque d'identité of Jean-Baptiste Amédée Bardin, [FRAD063-219](#), [Europeana 1914-18](#)



Figure 41 Identity bracelets can be seen on the wrists of Guillaume Candiel in the centre, and the man to the left, 'Mon arrière-grand-père, Guillaume CANDEIL, "cuistot"', [Europeana 1914-18](#)

³⁶² O'Mara 2009

³⁶³ Ibid.

In May 1918, a new disc was introduced, and formally announced in *Le Bulletin officiel des Ministères de la guerre, des travaux publics et des transports du ravitaillement général, de l'armement et des fabrications de guerre* on 12th July 1918.³⁶⁴ The disc had been trialled during 1917 after it became apparent that many soldiers had not been wearing their second disc, having been designed by Leon Bosrodon in 1916.³⁶⁵ This disc, known as the Mle.1918 appears to have taken inspiration from the German system of discs, featuring a larger disc (4.2cm by 3.3cm), with three cord or chain holes. Just below the middle of the disc, ten holes were drilled to create a snap line, whilst also allowing for the duplication of information on both sides. As with the German model, if a soldier was killed, the lower half of the disc was to be snapped off, leaving the upper half of the disc upon the body, with stamping according to the most recent regulations issued for the Mle.1881. This design was used until 1951.

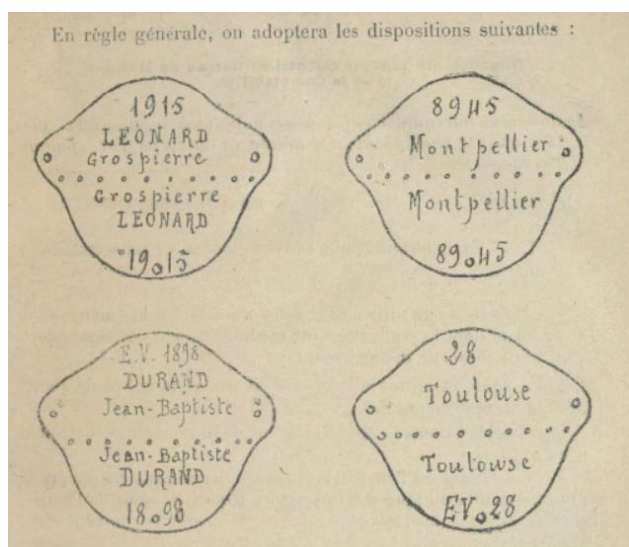


Figure 42 Scheme for the 1918 plaque d'identité (1918). *Bulletin officiel des Ministères de la guerre, des travaux publics et des transports, du ravitaillement général, de l'armement et des fabrications de guerre : parties permanente et semi-permanente*. Vol. 3 (26), p.2273



Figure 43 1918 French plaque d'identité (collection of David O'Mara)

3.7 The Development of the German 1915 *Erkennungsmarke*

The German identity discs of the First World War are not only interesting because of their influence on the French system. The German discs can seem more difficult to decipher, and there are sub-cultures of re-using and adapting historical discs making it difficult to immediately confirm the date of a disc with certainty if knowledge about the German

³⁶⁴ *Direction de l'Intendance militaire; Bureau de l'Habillement, du Campement et du Couchage. Instruction sur le marquage, le port et la fourniture de la plaque d'identité à segment amovible. Le 12 juillet 1918 (1918). Bulletin officiel des Ministères de la guerre, des travaux publics et des transports, du ravitaillement général, de l'armement et des fabrications de guerre : parties permanente et semi-permanente*. Vol. 3 (26), P.2272-2273

³⁶⁵ Viet, V. (2015), *La santé en guerre, 1914-1918. Une politique pionnière en univers incertain*, Paris, Les Presses de Sciences

numeration systems is not already held. In spite of these potential difficulties, there is a wealth of historical literature available which can help us to better understand the German development process, and the responses to the problem of identifying the dead on the battlefield, providing a useful case study to compare with the British development. Additionally, the study of German discs will later allow us to reflect upon how well different nations adapted to the requirement to use their identity discs, through the study of images and artefacts, engaging with methodologies relevant to the field of material culture to consider what these items inform us about how ordinary soldiers engaged with their discs on a daily basis. Before this analysis is possible, it is necessary to reflect upon the fact that France and Germany both entered the First World War with a tried and tested identity disc system, as compared with the British who had introduced their identity disc during a peaceful period, leaving little opportunity for trial, reflection and adaption. Germany had made use of identity discs within more than one significant conflict, gaining the opportunity to improve, and the time for the discs to become a normal part of military culture, with systems of conscription ensuring that many reservists and civilian males in general were also familiar with the wearing, and potentially use of, identity discs. Britain did not have a culture of conscription, retaining a small professional force before the declaration of war in 1914, and it is difficult to find photographs of British soldiers wearing their identity discs, suggesting that they were not as well used as within the German Army. Thus, the study of German identity discs provides a variety of opportunities to reflect upon the differences in the British system used during the same war.

In 1914, the German Army was still using the 1878 pattern *Erkennungsmarke*, which is referred to as the 1914 model by some First World War scholars and collectors.³⁶⁶ By this point, the German Army, including contingent forces, had been using a form of identification disc for over thirty years, with a number of opportunities to use the discs in battle and improve the system based on the experience of war. The introduction of the Imperial Constitution of 16 April 1871 meant that every able-bodied man was liable for compulsory military service, meaning that men from all classes of society, and all forms of employment walked through all ranks of service during their military life.³⁶⁷ This is in contrast to the British Army, whose officer class was dominated by middle- and upper-class men. This polarisation of class within the British forces created a culture where the bodies of officers were prioritised for recovery and burial over lower service ranks. The German Army had a

³⁶⁶ Nash. (2008), p.153

³⁶⁷ Doyle & Schäfer (2015), p.31

more socialistic approach, with a military culture which demanded respect both for one's own dead, and the dead of one's enemy as a moral necessity during war.

As a result, by 1914, identity discs, and processes for identifying and burying the dead were well incorporated into German military culture, and more importantly, well incorporated into the military structure. This is not to say that there were not still errors, and unexpected complications encountered during the First World War, however the German Army entered the First World War with a force built on beliefs that reflected the beliefs of the wider society, with no distinction as to treatment in death based on rank. It was an army that understood what it was to experience mass loss with few identifications possible after battle, that had established a strong administrative culture around the provision of 'loss lists' to record and report all casualties on a regular basis, and a sanitary structure which acknowledged that the biggest vector for disease in the battlefield was the human corpse.

In early 1914, the German Army consisted of 25 Corps with approximately 700,000 men enlisted for service. Service for conscripts was divided up into four phases, passing from the first phase of active service through to the reserves. This meant that a substantial proportion of the adult male population in Germany had some experience of military life even before 1914, but more importantly for the purpose of this chapter, experience of wearing or using *Erkennungsmarke*. Volunteers (*Kriegsfreiwillige*) could partake in a one-year exam in their Gymnasium or Grammar School to shorten their period of active service. They were expected to equip, feed and house themselves for the duration of their volunteer service.³⁶⁸

In August 1914, the Reserves were called up. It took only twelve days for the size of the Army to increase from approximately 840,000 soldiers to 3.5 million.³⁶⁹ The German Army was now not only one of the largest armies in the world, but one of the most efficient. Each of these soldiers was issued with an *Erkennungsmarke* following the 1878 pattern, with both oval and rectangular variants of the 1878 pattern discs still in use. As was the situation before the war, discs were produced by a variety of different private manufacturers, resulting in discs in a variety of sizes and shapes. In addition to the oval and rectangular shapes, the round *ersatz* ('spare') tag sometimes used for reserve units was encountered. Tags from this period can be found in a variety of metals, including zinc alloy, aluminium, tin and cast iron; presumably varying by manufacturer in order to meet the huge demands of the German Army. Occasionally a historical pattern, such as the 1869 *Rekognitionmarke* was issued to a soldier

³⁶⁸ Male, Arthur (1901). *Scenes Through the Battle Smoke*. London: Hayman, Christy & Lilly Ltd.

³⁶⁹ Doyle & Schäfer (2015), p.31

enlisting during or after 1914. An explanation for this could be the use of historical stocks when supplies of the new discs were depleted. The tag was to be hung from cords produced in the national colours, for example black & white for Prussia, blue & white for Bavaria, however there are instances of soldiers attaching their *Erkennungsmarke* to their uniform or wearing it in a bag worn around the neck.³⁷⁰

Each time a soldier transferred regiment or company, they would be issued with a new blank disc, disposing of the old one. This further increased the demands for the rapid production of identity discs. The discs could be confusing, with older discs containing abbreviations of the regional designation of the soldier's unit, which could be complex to decipher as it included a number corresponding with the provincial regimental number, followed by a letter related to the province's initial, two letters which referred to the unit and lastly a number which corresponded to the number of the regiment in the German Army.³⁷¹ An example being 1.SGR 10, which is the abbreviation for the *1st Schesisches Grenadier Regiment Nr 10* (1st Silesian Grenadier Regiment, 10th Prussian Regiment).³⁷² A more complex example would be 4.RJR 30 for the *4. Rheinisches Infantry-Regiment Nr. 30* (4th Rhineland Infantry Regiment, 30th Prussian Infantry Regiment) which could easily be mistaken for the *Reserve-Infantry Regiment Nr. 30.*, especially if encountered by an enemy or allied soldier or volunteer who was unfamiliar with the Prussian numeration system.³⁷³ This was made even more complex in the case of Bavarian discs which did not adopt the Prussian numeration system as previously mentioned. In order to decipher these abbreviations, a handbook or key of abbreviations might be required, if available at all.³⁷⁴

By 1915, as the numbers of unknown dead continued to rise, the issues with the *Erkennungsmarke* were becoming clear. Commander Noel of the Ministry of War wrote a note entitled "Proposal about the name plates" which included the following proposals to improve the disc markings:

The units should be given precise instructions on marking their nameplates. Plaques often allow the identification of the unit.

³⁷⁰ Kraus, Jürgen (1999. 2009 ed.). *The field gray uniform of the German army 1907-1918. Volume 1*. Osnabrück Verlag-Militaria, pp. 271-273

³⁷¹ Vestiges Militaria (2014). Les Plaques d'identité allemandes. Blog. Accessed 20.01.2021 <http://humanbonb.free.fr/indexPlaqueid.html>

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Gassend, Jean-Loup & Alberti, Lionel (2015). Soldiers Mistakenly Reported Killed in Action: Three German World War II Examples Related to Operation Dragoon in August 1944. *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*. 10(2): 96-122

For example, the No. 4 Eisenbahn Regiment (Regiment of the Railroad) had scored “EB 4”, which could be interpreted as “Ersatz-Battalion 4”.

The marking of the Lehr-Infantry-Regiment (LJR) can be confused with “Landwehr-Infantry-Regiment” where the number is missing.

Names (honourary) of regiments, such as “von Stülpnagel”, “Graf Dönhoff”, (etc) should no longer appear on the nameplates, contrary to what has been done. It is the same with provincial abbreviations. Such abbreviations have already led to errors to the detriment of soldiers who died in hostile countries. To avoid any confusion with the Prussian regiments, the Bavarian units should mark for example “Bay, JR1”, etc.³⁷⁵

The proposed tags were rectangular in shape, measuring approximately 7cm by 5.5cm, and featured the same information as the 1878 pattern disc with the inclusion of the soldier’s name.³⁷⁶ It is not clear to whom this letter was addressed, but regardless, it seems to have had an impact on the War Office. On the 28th July 1915, the Ministry of War issued directive number 594 reference 1085/7.15 B3 “Amendment of the provision of identification discs”.

The contents of the order are described in the Army Gazette, published by the Prussian War Office in Berlin on 31st July 1915: in order to establish the identity of the soldiers killed, amendments to the identification tags were required. The new tag must be produced from sheets of zinc, cut in an oval shape measuring approximately 7cm wide and 5cm high. Soldiers would receive an identification tag at their depot of the unit where they signed up and would strike the top half of the tag with the following information: first name, last name, last residence (for larger localities with the house number and street name), date of birth, the depot unit in understandable abbreviations, the number of the company (or battery, or squadron etc) and the soldier’s regimental number (at the depot unit).³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Vestiges Militaria (2014). Les Plaques d'identité allemandes. Blog. Accessed 20.01.2021

<http://humanbonb.free.fr/indexPlaueid.html>

³⁷⁶ O’Mara (2019)

³⁷⁷ Mouchet, Yves (1993) ‘Les Plaques d’identite des troupes Allemandes sur le front français, 1914.18’, *Militaria Magazine* (French Edition), No. 97, p.17



Figure 44 Erkennungsmarke of Georg Redeker on 1915 pattern disc before the introduction of the score line

<https://www.europeana.eu/en/item/2020601/https://1914-1918.europeana.eu/contributions/747>

The lower half of the disc was reserved for information relating to the soldier's transfer in the field. If transferred to another unit, article 3 stipulated that the soldier should cross out the information of his old unit, and replace it with information from his new unit, including the name of the field unit (also in understandable abbreviations), the company number and the soldier's regimental number.³⁷⁸ The filing unit was not to be changed in any case. The directive was signed by Acting Von Wandel.³⁷⁹ The text was accompanied by a drawing of the new tag, which features a small line of separation indented into the middle of the tag to separate the information, though in practice not all discs had this feature and examples can be found with text engraved on the back.³⁸⁰ The annexe of the directive, "The abbreviations of identification discs" ("zu Abkürzungen auf Erkennungsmarken") includes 82 abbreviations which could be used on the tags.³⁸¹ It also specifies that the names of units such as Bremen and Deutschordensregiment, and provincial designations such as the A of Anhalt, or the B or Brandenburg were now forbidden.³⁸² Should the soldier undertake many transfers, using up the space on his tag, a new one would be supplied. Regulation 72822-V-B1 was issued on the 13th August 1915 by the Prussian War Ministry, informing soldiers of the release of the new, larger disc which was used from September 1915, in order to further standardise the *erkennungsmarke* across the German forces. A degree was issued on the 13th September to instruct soldiers holding older versions of identification disc should exchange their discs for

³⁷⁸ Mouchet (1993); "Verfügung des Kriegsministeriums (Nr. 1085/7.15 B 3.) vom 28.07.1915", *Armee-Verordnungsblatt* (1915), Freiburg Militärarchiv, pp.335-337

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Lalisie, Stephen. LES PLAQUES D'IDENTITES ALLEMANDES DE 1869 À 1918: RETROUVEZ CE DOSSIER ET D'AUTRES INFOS SUR LES PLAQUES D'IDENTITES ALLEMANDES SUR, Accessed 16.09.20 : <https://lalisie.pagesperso-orange.fr/militaria/plaquesID.htm>

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Mouchet (1993)

the new version as soon as possible.³⁸³ Both Turkey and Bulgaria would later adopt this design for their own systems of identification.³⁸⁴

As with previous designs, the disc was to be worn around the neck, so that the soldier was identifiable if wounded, unconscious or dead. The tag should be removed from the body along with all identifying papers. Klaus Woche described that a note with the name of the soldier, and the address of his sergeant should be left upon the soldier's body.³⁸⁵ This meant that the enemy had no information on the soldier.³⁸⁶ However these notes were easily detached from the body and quick to decompose, quickly leaving the body without a form of identification.



Figure 45 (above) Illustration of the November 1915 disc showing how updated information should be struck into the disc, Army Ordinance Sheet 594, 1915, p336



Figure 46 (right) Erkennungsmarke of Otto Schoof (1er Garde Regiment zu Fuss) struck according to directive 594 Photo by [Stephan Lalisce](#)

Notes were not always left, as reported in a *Feldpostbrief* to the *Niederrheinische Volksblatt* on 24th October 1914, the captain of the anonymous group was killed by shellfire, and a company officer quickly removed his *Erkennungsmarke*, valuables, letters & etc from his corpse, leaving no form of note behind.³⁸⁷

³⁸³ Kriegsministerium (ed.) (1916). *Königlich Preussisches Armee-Verordnungs-Blatt*. Nov. 18, 1916, Volume 50, Issue No. 52. Berlin: ES Mittler & Sohn, pp. 493-494

³⁸⁴ O'Mara (2009)

³⁸⁵ Woche, Klaus (1988), 'Erkennungsmarken, T.2', in Damerau, Helmut (ed.) (1988). *Deutsches Soldatenjahrbuch 1988*. Munich: Schild, p.406-409

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ 'Eine Woche im Schützengraben' (1914). Bestand Völcker-Janssen, Stadtarchiv Goch. *Niederrheinisches Volksblatt*, 24.10.1914. Accessed 23.09.2020 <https://archivewk1.hypotheses.org/2941>

In order to address the absence of an identifying object on the body of any soldier caused by the removal of an identification disc, a new disc was introduced in Regulation 1727/8 16 B. 'Nr. 792. *Erkennungsmarken*', issued on 16th November 1916.³⁸⁸ The new disc looked similar to the 1915 model disc, but now featured a perforated 'snap line'. The soldier would inscribe his information on both the upper and lower halves of the disc. In the event of his death, the disc would be broken in half, leaving the upper half upon the body for burial. The removal of the lower half of the disc allowed for the confirmation of death, but also ensured that the body could be identified at a later date. The disc was described in regulation 792 reference 678/11 16. KM 2. on 18th November 1916: 'In order to ascertain beyond doubt the identity of a fallen man even after removing the identification tag, and possibly even after the burial', it had been decided to introduce a perforated 'snap line' to the 1915 disc pattern issued on 28th July 1915.³⁸⁹ The snap line should include three perforations, measuring 18mm long and 1mm tall. The perforations should start 4mm from the edge and should have 3mm inbetween each hole. The new discs should be produced with the line included, and soldiers should stamp their duplicate information on both sides of the tag as per pattern ("Mußter").



Figure 47 1916 pattern identity disc of Erwin Hilscher, 7th West Prussian Infantry Regiment (3rd Battalion) No. 155, 10th Company. Copyright Frank Mrugalla, *Europeana 1914-1918*. Available here: http://www.omnia.ie/index.php?navigation_function=2&navigation_item=%2F2020601%2Fh

For soldiers already in possession of the 1915 pattern disc, these perforations should be stamped into their disc 'as soon as possible', with the existing information duplicated on the reverse of the tag in a way that ensured both halves contained the same information as per pattern 2 displayed in *fig. 12*. The regulation reiterated the decree issued on 13th September 1915 that soldiers holding earlier patterns of disc should exchange them as soon as possible.³⁹⁰ The Bavarian Army adopted this model of identification plates, with directives published by the Bavarian Ministry of War on 6th December 1916.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ O'Mara (2009)

³⁸⁹ Kriegsministerium (ed.) (1916). *Königlich Preussisches Armee-Verordnungs-Blatt*. Nov. 18, 1916. Volume 50 (52), Berlin: ES Mittler & Sohn, pp. 493-494

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Vestiges Militaria (2014)

The disc was further improved with the issue of directive 903 ref 2377/ 8.17 B 3 on 16th September 1917.³⁹² Firstly, the measurements for the perforated snap line were slightly adjusted to improve the strength of the tag and prevent accidental breakage. The three perforations should now have a length of 16mm, starting 5mm from the edge of the disc and leaving 5mm between each perforation. The directive also introduced a single cord hole on the lower half of the disc, to be punctured beneath the writing, to allow those tasked with identifying the dead to collect the lower halves on a wire or cord. The tag should be produced from sheets of zinc. Stamping of the identification tag for new recruits should be carried out within their unit by the weapons master or his appointed representative, and letters should be no more than 3mm high (but stamps of other dimensions should be used if that is all that is available). Discs should not be supplied to garrisoned soldiers or those deployed in the homeland. The regulation noted that a uniform price was not available for the production of identification discs, which might be purchased by the weapons master or his representative, noting that the highest price paid had been 20 Pfennings per tag, though higher amounts had been charged and may continue to be charged.³⁹³ This tag was never officially regulated, though some manufacturers did create discs to the 1917 specification and examples can be encountered from the First World War.³⁹⁴

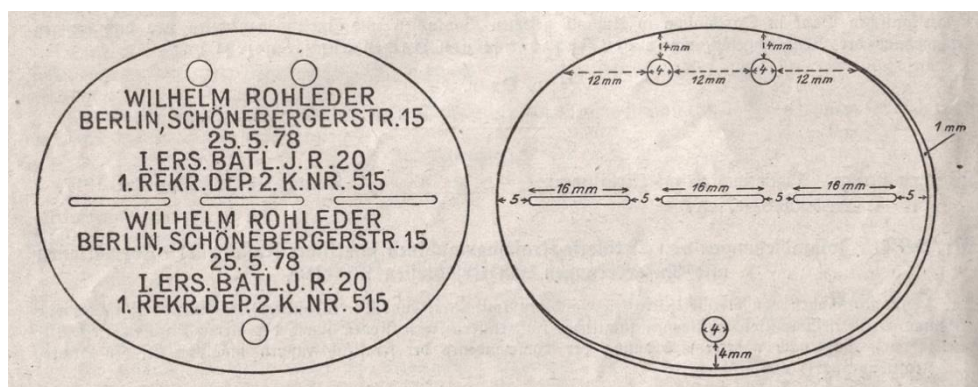


Figure 48 1917 pattern disc featured in a *Kriegsministerium communiqué* dated 16th September 1917 (2377/8.17 B3 Nr 903) (copy provided by David O'Mara)

The introduction of the new identity tags and the regulated list of regimental abbreviations introduced during the First World War were acts designed to increase rates of identification, simplifying the process to confirm identity; However, in practise this could create a number of confusing scenarios resulting in mis-identification or the failure to identify at all. Older corpses found bearing historical tags which could feature unregulated abbreviations or refer to

³⁹² Kriegsministerium (ed.) (1916). *Königlich Preussisches Armee-Verordnungs-Blatt*. Nov. 18, 1916. Volume 50 (52). Berlin: ES Mittler & Sohn, pp. 493-494

³⁹³ A pfennig is a German penny (one hundredth of a mark) under the monetary system used until the adoption of the Euro in 2002. Ibid.

³⁹⁴ O'Mara (2019)

units which had now been renumbered (for example regiments from Baden which adopted the Prussian numeration system), could prove to be difficult to decipher for those working to record the dead. The challenges of deciphering the tags are compounded by issues related to the modern archiving of documents. Modern scholars researching soldiers born in areas which now lie within other countries such as Poland, Romania, Russia and Denmark, face the difficulty that the *Volksbund* archives list the Germanized names of these towns, not their current names.³⁹⁵

Another item that can help us to understand more about how German soldiers used their identity discs is the *Brustbeutel*. The *Brustbeutel* is a small pouch designed to hold the identity disc, which was worn around the neck. These items were privately purchased, and examples can be found in a variety of materials, including leather and canvas. Though these were not officially issued items, there is no evidence that the use of the *Brustbeutel* was discouraged. Unofficial stories even suggest that the *Brustbeutel* prevented the zinc identification tag from irritating the soldier's skin on his chest.³⁹⁶ Whilst this likely refers to common skin irritations caused by skin contact with the zinc, it is also possible that carrying the disc in a bag protected soldiers who were stationed in particularly extreme climates, preventing the hot or cold metal from causing pain or irritation to the wearer. Of the nations described within this thesis, the *Erkennungsmarke* is the identifying item which can be seen most frequently within soldier photos. It is not uncommon to encounter a *Brustbeutel* within such images, as seen in *fig. 49*, however, their use was not exclusive or consistent, indicating that the wearing of a *Brustbeutel* was perhaps an accepted fashionable trend.

Some soldiers were more creative with the use of their *Erkennungsmarke*, preferring to attach the disc to the braces holding up their trousers, as seen in *fig. 50* and *fig. 51*. The disc was large, and therefore easily visible in theory. However, those tasked with identifying the dead might have had very little time to search for the disc, limiting the search to a quick feel around the neck. The searches may have also been undertaken in the dark, limiting visibility. In the event that the search was conducted some months after the death, the body may have been in a state of heavy decomposition, leaving the searcher unwilling to rummage around for a misplaced disc. Further research using German archival sources would be required to verify whether the wearing of identity discs in alternative locations was identified as a factor which hindered identification from a German perspective; However these brief examples provide us with the opportunity to undertake a comparative study into the war cultures the British Army,

³⁹⁵ Gassend & Alberti (2015), p.98

³⁹⁶ Robin Schäfer, Pers. Comms. 29.07.2019

such as identification processes, informal burial processes, and the misuse of identity discs, which shall be described within the following chapter.



Figure 49 A group of soldiers; The two soldiers on the left are wearing their Erkennungsmarke, one also has a Brusttasche, Erkennungsmarke (Identity Disc), IR63, available online [accessed 30.07.2019] <http://www.ir63.org/Erkennungsmarke.html>



Figure 50 German soldiers celebrating Christmas in their shelter in 1916. Note the Erkennungsmarke attached to the braces of the man on the left, Les Plaques d'identité allemandes, available online [accessed 30.07.2019] <http://humanbonb.free.fr/indexPlaquaid.html>



Figure 51 Soldiers posing. Three Erkennungsmarke can be seen attached to the braces of the standing soldiers. Erkennungsmarke (Identity Disc), IR63, available online [accessed 30.07.2019] <http://www.ir63.org/Erkennungsmarke.html>

3.8 Conclusion

The ratification of the 1906 Geneva Convention required all combatant nations to ensure that procedures existing to ensure that the wounded and dead were treated with dignity, identified where possible, and their home army notified of their situation. This created an international precedent in military and humanitarian law, informing the introduction of Field Service Regulations 1909, which would inform the Broader British Expeditionary Force's response to the First World War in 1914. More significantly, the Geneva Convention would act as a catalyst, forcing the British to introduce a formal identity disc system in 1907, rather than relying on Army Form B.2067, as had been the case in South Africa and Sudan.

Though Britain would introduce its second identity disc design in 1914, the British army had possessed little opportunity to test the success of either disc design between 1907 and the declaration of war in 1914. In contrast, France and Germany were using tested and tried systems, which had already been refined over multiple decades, and were continuously developed during the First World War in response to problems identified during reviews of recent wars. As this chapter has identified, the British army of 1914 simply was not prepared to deal with the huge numbers of unidentified dead, or the matter of graves registration, allowing non-military individuals such as Fabian Ware to create their own role of military importance, making a vital contribution to the overall war effort. Fabian Ware's self-positioning was typical for men of his social status at the time, meaning that Crane's assessment of Ware as a visionary should perhaps be reassessed as a representation of Ware as a visionary opportunist.³⁹⁷ This reframing of Ware's achievements alongside his peers does not diminish Ware's achievements, but it does help us to recognise that his shaping of identification practise was not as a result of his expertise in the field, but as a result of his ability to connect his works to public support for the war, to gain support for any desired change. However, the future development of his works was only possible as a result of eliminating his potential rivals, leaving the British Army dependent on his positive, transnational working relationship with the French Army. Therefore, the study of French, German and British identity discs allows for not only reflection on the practical processes of identification, but the military structures which existed to respond to death, and how these structures and items allowed soldiers and

³⁹⁷ Crane (1942), p.228

organisations to pay the remains of soldiers the respect expected by grieving civilians on the various home fronts.

These findings are a result of a cultural approach to the topic of identification, inspired by the use of methodologies from cultural history by Jay Winter. The results also add to his analysis by offering an explanation as to why there were so many Missing soldiers. This has required a novel approach to archival research, re-interpreting key documents used to build the existing narrative of identification within the context of Imperial War Graves Commission practice.³⁹⁸ As a result, it has also been possible to build upon the pivotal works of Crane and Longworth, to further emphasize the work of the Commission and the significance of Ware's contribution to the overall British war effort.

These themes force us to look at domestic histories, but also transnational learning curves, and international agreements in order to truly understand the significance of the British identity disc in not only the war effort, but the shaping of the legacy and modern memory of the First World War.³⁹⁹ The best way to situate the identity disc within the domestic *and* military narratives, whilst also understanding the role of the British identity disc and its designers within the national and international frameworks of the time, is to explore the history of Fabian Ware and the expansion of his mobile unit. Within this chapter the technical, transnational history of identity discs has included a focus on the early days of Ware's work in France, and how his relationship with the French impacted on British identification practices. The transnational learning curves observed following the ratification of the Geneva Convention, and in the development of identification discs used during the First World War, would both shape British practices regarding the identification, burial and commemoration of fallen soldiers. The information presented adds to the existing analysis of international protocols by stressing that we need to understand both international law and the context in which it was situated.

This framework will be applied in the following chapter, situating the development of the 1916 identity disc within the timeline of Ware's developing organisation, seeking to explore how the identity disc was used and developed to aid with practical

³⁹⁸ Crane (1942), Longworth (2003), and Hodgekinson (2007)

³⁹⁹ Jones, Heather (2009). International or Transnational? Humanitarian action during the First World War. *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*. Vol. 16 (5), pp. 697-713; Fox, Aimée (2018). *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

processes of identification. Considering the development of the identity disc and British burial practices within this context allows for reflection upon how Ware's relationship with the French Army would result in the change of military practice, and the implementation of new British laws relating to repatriation, demonstrating that many of the new cultures and traditions which emerged during the First World War were contingent on particular responses to similar factors, and the exchange of knowledge amongst international forces to facilitate the transnational learning curve.

4. ‘Let My Death be Memoried’⁴⁰⁰: the identification of soldiers, the provision of military graves and the shaping of national grief (1915-1921)

During the first months of the war, national armies had been confronted with unanticipated battlefield tactics, field conditions and numbers of war dead. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the British had not been prepared for the number of dead on the battlefield, with Fabian Ware’s expanding unit responding to gaps in information relating to the location of graves. The establishment of the Graves Registration Commission in early 1915, and the continuing expansion of Ware’s work for the duration of the war is significant, not only because it would become an organization that would actively manage the civilian response to nationalized grief, but because it helped to reshape battlefield burial traditions during an ongoing war. Though the Graves Registration Commission was soon revitalized as the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries in 1916, the events of 1915 are politically significant, and primed Ware and his organization for further expansion in 1916.

Ware’s work in the early days of the war had helped him to gain support from influential figures, particularly within the French Army, who were willing to argue the value of his work to the overall war effort, both in the field and on the home front. Ware’s ability to acknowledge, and practically respond to the public response to death on the battlefield would result in further expansion in 1916, to the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries in 1916. The confirmation that the graves of the war dead would be paid for by the National Committee for the Care of Soldier’s Graves would allow Ware to become increasingly ambitious between 1916-17 as his works expanded to new fronts beyond Western Europe – this expansion will be the focus of this chapter.

As the previous chapter suggests, Ware’s relationship with the British and French armies allowed him to gain influence over Army practice, as demonstrated by the letters relating to the design of the 1916 double identity disc, with consultations led by Ware himself. The design process can be considered a case study of transnational learning, as the British reflected upon the experiences of the French identity disc system in order to adapt their own. The double identity disc responded to the absence of an identifying item on a buried body, improving administrative processes and the likelihood of identification. The provision of land

⁴⁰⁰ Owen, Wilfred. (1983). *Complete poems and fragments: edited by Jon Stallworthy. vol I: The poems*, London: Oxford University Press-Chatto & Windus-The Hogarth Press. p241

for military cemeteries by the French, and the promise of funding by the British government meant that it was now more imperative than ever to ensure that soldiers were named before receiving a final burial in said cemeteries. This would require Ware to respond to issues such as the respectful burial of imperial soldiers, how to mark the permanent graves of those who were not identifiable, and how to ensure that soldiers of all ranks and dominions received the same treatment in death.

The 1916 expansion of works can be considered a vital moment in the development of British war grave traditions, as it allowed for a positive expression of imperialism by performing these duties for the soldiers of colonized countries. The experience of working on multiple fronts would allow Ware to argue for another significant development in his organization, the creation of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) in 1917. This chapter will explore these developments, situating them within political movements of the time, and reflecting upon the impact of these developments on identification practice in the field. Specifically, it will argue that Ware's past experience and recent positioning was vital in shaping the operational reaction to death and the national response to grief. Dehne's study of Robert Cecil provides a striking parallel to Ware's own development, allowing for reflection upon the new cultures of government which facilitated the unanticipated careers of wealthy men like Cecil and Ware.⁴⁰¹ Ware had the ability to reshape the wartime response to death by creating a flexible organization that responded to variable burial and identification practices, whilst also creating a knowledge exchange base which allowed civilians to feel like they had a point of contact, and ultimately, after the conclusion of the war, a physical focus for grief in the form of permanent head stones and monuments to the missing. Given the earlier implementation of controversial policies such as a ban on repatriation, it was necessary for Ware to create the principles of equality, to demonstrate a respect for all soldier's, however it is essential that this work is still viewed as an imperial organization, recognizing that 'equality' within the imperial mindset may have a different meaning to our contemporary understanding of the term.

The construction of the IWGC cemeteries and associated monuments to the missing is considered one of the greatest architectural achievements of the modern age, however, this work developed alongside operations to clear bodies from the battlefield. This element of the IWGC's work did not stop with the conclusion of the war in November 1918. For this reason,

⁴⁰¹ Dehne, Phillip (2019). *After the Great War: Economic Warfare and the Promise of Peace in Paris 1919*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 15-30; Dehne, Phillip (2016). The Ministry of Blockade and the fate of Free Trade during the First World War. *Twentieth Century British History*. Vol.27, pp. 333-356

this chapter will also explore the post-war exercise to clear the dead from the battlefields. Minutes of IWGC meetings held during this period allow us to reflect upon the effectivity of British identity discs within the identification process, presenting a hypothesis that fibre identity discs were not successful and actively contributed to the creation of the phenomena of ‘the missing’ which continues to shape the legacy and public memory of the First World War today. Through the review of CWGC archival documents on the post-war clearance of the battlefields, it is possible to reflect upon the political climate of the post-war period, and how a lack of funding and political will resulted in the abandonment of the exercise after 1924. The evidence presented will allow for reflection upon the realities of identification and the burial of soldiers who died on the Western Front, as presented examples present an alternative narrative to the popular idea that many soldiers feared becoming unknown, dispelling lay notions about what the use of additional identifying items tells us about the thoughts and fears of individual soldiers.

To facilitate such reinterpretation, it is helpful to revisit Wilfred Owen’s ‘Sonnet to my Friend (with an identity disc)’, featured in the prologue of this thesis, a poem which forces us to think honestly about the expectations of soldiers who lived in a reality so closely intertwined with death. In the last clause of ‘Sonnet to my Friend’, Owen puts forward an alternative format for grieving, in rejection of the traditional grave, asking his brother to ‘let my death be memoried on this disc’, finishing the poem with the ‘suggestion that grief will fade with the poet’s name’, as the wearing of the disc against the chest of his loved one would wear away the words over time.⁴⁰² As with Owen’s better known poem ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ (written after ‘Sonnet to my Friend’), the poem ‘wonders about the nature of commemoration’, as opposed to being written as an act to commemorate.⁴⁰³ Owen asks ‘What passing bells for these who die as cattle?’, and ‘What candles may be held to speed them all?’.⁴⁰⁴ These questions as to how we commemorate the lives of individual soldiers, and how is it possible to show the appropriate respect to all who were lost, when so many remain missing to this day, provide a starting point for this work to establish how the dead were identified, and how the plans to commemorate their deaths developed as the war progressed, thanks to the efforts of Fabian Ware and his staff.

⁴⁰² Minogue, Sally & Andrew Palmer, Andrew (2018). *The Remembered Dead: Poetry, Memory and the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p196-7

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ in Owen, Wilfred. (1983). *Complete poems and fragments: edited by Jon Stallworthy. vol I: The poems*, London: Oxford University Press-Chatto & Windus-The Hogarth Press. p. 99

This reappraisal of Fabian Ware's work highlights the difficulties in recovering, identifying and burying British soldiers who died on the battlefield, considering the role of identity discs within these structures, and how processes of identification resulted in the rapid transformation of burial traditions to an extent not seen in previous wars that the British had fought. These processes could only function within the appropriate administrative structures, with staff possessing the necessary soft skills required to deal with the grieving British public, particularly where information was distressing and/or inconclusive.

4.1 The Graves Registration Commission and the Development of the National Committee for the Care of Soldier's Graves

The formation of the Graves Registration Commission is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it would allow Ware to assume complete control over the graves work in France, eliminating any competing individuals or units undertaking similar works. Secondly, it would result in the formal incorporation of Ware's team into the British Army, with the works co-funded by the Joint War Committee, formally recognizing the public and military needs for such works during war time. Thirdly, the provision of French land for the establishment of cemeteries would result in the creation of the National Committee for the Care of Soldier's Graves (NCCSG), who would agree that the nation should bear the cost of caring for soldiers' graves. This political development would prime Ware for his pivotal works in 1916, which would result in the permanent transformation of military burial traditions, and the creation of the CWGC cemeteries today. This section will explore each of these developments, considering how the role of the identity disc became increasingly important during the First World War as the structures of the Graves Registration Commission became more formalised under the oversight of Macready.

Lord Robert Cecil of the BRCS had begun discussing the works 'in tracing the graves of those who had fallen in the campaign and identifying the persons buried there' with Macready in November 1914.⁴⁰⁵ Cecil was the son of former prime minister Robert Gascoyne-Cecil; a lawyer and politician who, like Ware, had been too old to enlist for military service upon the outbreak of war, choosing instead to offer his services to the BRCS, helping to organise its department of wounded and missing.⁴⁰⁶ Macready was supportive of the work, saying that the Red Cross might do some very useful work in this regard, prompting Cecil to propose that

⁴⁰⁵ 'Letter Robert Cecil to Fabian Ware, 2nd December 1914' CWGC/1/1/1/3 (MU 3)

⁴⁰⁶ Ceadel, M. (2001). Cecil, (Edgar Algernon) Robert Gascoyne- [known as Lord Robert Cecil], Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (1864-1958), politician and peace campaigner. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Accessed 18.11.2020 : <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32335>

Ware's unit searched the area around Ypres, and the area between Mons and Compiègne to search for the wounded, along with the graves of any buried there. On 1st January 1915, Cazalet provided Ware with a list of graves located, sent urgently as there was reason to believe that amongst the list were the graves of several men who are still reported as missing'.⁴⁰⁷ Additionally, Cazalet called Ware's attention to the fact that he had located a further 29 graves, 'the inscriptions upon which had already become obliterated', urging Ware to press the 'necessity of continuing this work without intermission and with the utmost energy, otherwise a very considerable number of graves will be lost sight of, and many more remain forever unidentified'.⁴⁰⁸ Fortunately, others were already raising the issue of their own accord. On 18th January 1915, Major Hobart (DAAG) wrote to the Officer in Command of the Infantry Section, supplying some of Ware's unit's lists of graves, requesting that he complete the particulars (paperwork) where he had not previously been able to do so, and that he confirm if any of the graves recorded belong to 'men still recorded as "missing"'.⁴⁰⁹ This letter helps us to see how the data collected by Ware's Unit was starting to be used by the Army to assist with their own administrative work flows, and was moving through different organisations and management structures.

Though Ware's work was on Macready's radar, and the value of it well recognised, he was not the only individual who had begun work to respond to the issue of the preservation of records relating to battlefield graves. Ian Malcolm, a politician and public servant, had joined the BRC in October 1914 'on an urgent mission' to locate British casualties and prisoners of war.⁴¹⁰ Like Ware, Malcolm had taken an interest in the marking and recording of graves in the field and sought to take greater control over the matter. It appears that Malcolm had contacted Macready alluding to 'perpetual concessions from the Ministry of the Interior' for the provision of military graves, prompting a rather lengthy and dismissive response on 27th February 1915.⁴¹¹

Macready, rather curtly, informed Stanley that he was 'rather in the dark as to the actual work' being performed by his office, and could not understand these allusions of perpetual concessions, describing that it was usual practice 'either during or at the conclusion of a campaign for the Government to take up the question of concession with the Government of

⁴⁰⁷ 'Letter R Cazalet to Fabian Ware, 1st January 1915' CWGC/1/1/1/3 (MU 3)

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ 'Letter from Major Hobart to Officer i/c Infantry Section, 18th Jan 1915', CWGC/1/1/1/3 (MU 3)

⁴¹⁰ Miller, R. (2014). Malcolm, Sir Ian Zachary (1868-1944), politician and public servant. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Accessed. 18.11. 2020 : <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-75946?rskey=GJySNt&result=3>

⁴¹¹ 'Letter C.F.N. Macready to Mr Ian Malcolm, 27th Feb 1915', CWGC/1/1/1/20 (ADD 4/1/3)

the country in which the graves are'.⁴¹² Such work would usually be done through the Chief Engineer within the British Army, rather than a representative of the British Red Cross, with concessions ultimately transferred to the Government. Macready noted that Stanley might be interested 'to know that an organization has been started and will be in working order during the next few days to take up the question of the locality, marking and registration of all graves belonging to men of the British Army'.⁴¹³ This organization was to work in direct connection with Macready's branch. With this being the case, 'it would seem unnecessary' for Stanley 'to pursue the matter further'.⁴¹⁴ The assertion of power did not end here. Macready continued to describe that it had been brought to his attention that 'certain bodies had been exhumed by, I believe, your instructions', taking the opportunity to remind Stanley that the Commander-in-Chief had issued instructions saying that exhumations for the purpose of identification or removal to England were not to be performed, and were never allowed in the British Area.⁴¹⁵ The letter concluded by thanking Stanley on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief for all that had been done, and reiterating that 'for the future it will be possible to recognise one organization in the mater and that is the one that I have previously informed you is now being set in working order'.⁴¹⁶

The following day, Macready forwarded a copy of this letter to Lord Robert Cecil, describing that for 'some time past' he had been 'considering the advisability of organizing the registration and marking of graves under the direct control of my own office'.⁴¹⁷

Consequently, Mr Fabian Ware had been appointed, along with a section of the Red Cross to work under Macready's direction, reporting back to his office. Macready assured Cecil that this arrangement 'will ensure that all records are passed to the right quarter'.⁴¹⁸

On 2nd March, Ware wrote to the Honourable Arthur Stanley of the BRC to inform him that the Mobile Unit had been 'officially recognised as the only organisation authorised to deal with the question of locality, marking and registration of the graves of British officers and men', and the principal officers of the unit had been given military rank.⁴¹⁹ This elevated Ware to the status of Local Major of what was to be officially known as "the Graves Registration Commission" (GRC). As so many existing graves lay within the French zone, Ware was well placed 'to retain our access, on the best and most friendly terms'. Ware was

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ 'Letter C.F.N. Macready to Lord Robert Cecil, 28th Feb 1915', CWGC/1/1/1/20 (ADD 4/1/3)

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ 'Letter from Fabian Ware to Arthur Stanley, 2nd March 1915', CWGC/1/1/1/20 (ADD 4/1/3)

keen to report that the actual expenses incurred by his unit for the first three months had not reached £1,500, though the Joint War Committee had proposed a budget of £2,000, even with the cost of recording over 1,000 graves, with ‘crosses having been erected in many cases’.⁴²⁰ Ware projected that the sum required for the following three months would rise to £3,000 to allow for four sections, with two based in the British zone, and two in the French zone. This was considered to be an adequate provision, though further resources would be needed should the war increase resulting in a need for a larger effort from the GRC.

Ware suggested that if Stanley felt ‘that the selection of one of your Units (and incidentally the oldest) for this work is in a sense a gratifying recognition of the aid which the B.R.C.S. and St. John Ambulance has given to the Army in the field’, he ‘might wish to make some announcement of a special vote for this purpose’.⁴²¹ Ware went on to ask that it be put to vote to include the work of the Graves Registration Commission with the work of the Unit under the BRCS – a motion with the support of General Macready and Lord Robert Cecil. Ware already had a habit of reporting who had offered support for his work in his correspondence, however here he starts to demonstrate his ability to engage the public with his works, a skill that would prove particularly useful over the following eighteen months. Lastly, Ware requested that the BRCS published the reports of the GRC in their “Summaries” section, forcing his work into the eyes of interested supporters of the BRCS and the wider public. Ware was evidently keen to make certain that there was no doubt over who would be leading future graves work in France, ensuring that the news would be shared in such a way as to alert any current or potential rivals within the Red Cross and the broader sphere of the British Government as to this claimed opportunity.

Ian Malcolm wrote his response to Macready on 2nd March, taking particular care to respond to the allegations of illegal exhumations expressed in Macready’s letter of 17th February. Malcolm protested that the Director of Assistance and Public Hygiene at the Ministry of the Interior had recently told him that plans were being made for the marking of all graves of soldiers who had died in France. The Director had reported to Malcolm that ‘as the French bodies were so very numerous they could not be put into cemeteries, but would be either dug deeper or burned with lime’, as a method of clearing the ground of ‘dangerous substances’.⁴²² Malcolm had told him that if this were done to the bodies of British soldiers, ‘it would give a most painful pression at home’, expressing hope that he would allow one of his team to accompany him in the field with a view ‘to having the British bodies buried in Cemeteries’.

⁴²⁰ ‘Letter from Fabian Ware to Arthur Stanley, 2nd March 1915’, CWGC/1/1/1/20 (ADD 4/1/3)

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² ‘Letter Ian Malcolm to General Macready, 2nd March 1915’, CWGC/1/1/1/20

Malcolm went on to describe that the Director had supported this and had told him to write to all the Mayors in whose Communes he had found scattered graves and to ask for “Perpetual Concessions” in order to ‘avoid our men being buried in pauper’s graves which are dug over every four years’. With regards to the new organization, Malcolm was aware that Ware had been placed in charge of the organization, expressing dissatisfaction that he had been left out of ‘your new organization’ and requesting that Macready entrust him with completing his research that he was already engaged with.⁴²³

Robert Cecil, also writing on 2nd March, would validate Malcolm’s account, confirming he had provided Malcolm with his instructions. Cecil acknowledged that Ware had ‘for some time past been good enough to furnish this office with information on the subject of graves’, claiming to be ‘extremely glad’ that an arrangement for Ware to take control of such works in the field had been made. Potentially acknowledging the severity of the situation, Cecil wrote that he was ‘sorry to learn by the tone of your letters that you appear to disprove of something which my department has done’, professing ‘we merely exist in order to alleviate the anxiety of the relatives, both with respect to the missing and to the dead’.⁴²⁴ If his department were successful in this work, to any degree, then he ventured ‘respectfully to think that we are assisting the success of the British Armies, since ultimately that depends on the energy and spirit of the people at home’.⁴²⁵ Though Macready accepted that Malcolm and Cecil had not acted recklessly, and no wrong had been done, this undoubtedly helped to destabilize Malcolm’s position in relation to graves work at a time when Ware was being elevated.⁴²⁶

Colonel Edward Stuart of the BRC would visit the Unit on behalf of the Red Cross on 3rd March, with an inspection taking place on the 4th. Col. Stuart’s report was positive, praising the unit and describing how the work ensured that if a grave was discovered, the Red Cross would be able to ‘assure the relatives that a Cross will be raised and the exact locality indicated, so that a Memorial can be raised when the war is over’.⁴²⁷ On 4th March, the Joint War Committee confirmed to Ware that they had met with Macready and had sanctioned the undertaking of the graves registration work alongside his continued work to support the French in the field.⁴²⁸

Almost immediately upon becoming the Graves Registration Commission, the scope of Ware’s work began to change again. This period of the Commission’s history often receives

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ ‘Letter Robert Cecil to General Macready, 2nd March 1915’, CWGC/1/1/1/20

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ ‘Letter C.F.N. Macready to Lord Robert Cecil, 5th March 1915’, CWGC/1/1/1/20

⁴²⁷ ‘Letter Col Robert Stuart to Major Fabian Ware’ March 1915, CWGC/1/1/1/20 (ADD 4/1/3)

⁴²⁸ ‘Copy. Unsigned letter to Major Ware, 4th March 1915’, CWGC/1/1/1/20

little attention in comparison to the huge developments which occurred during 1916 and 1917. However, 1915 is the year in which the Commission's work on the Western Front established its structures which would allow for the later expansion into an imperial organisation, responsible for multiple war fronts. This section will consider the foundations of the Commission's imperial mission; the development of Commission structures to accommodate graves photography, the formalisation of grave markers, and a public enquiries branch; and the political positioning of the unit, considering how Ware monopolised the work associated with graves, his negotiations with the French, and the impact of the National Committee for the Care of Soldier's Graves on Ware's evolving mission.

As of March 1915, the GRC was responsible only for the registration of graves, taking no onus for the building of memorials, and the mobilised Army did not have the time nor resources to consider what was a non-essential commemorative operation during the war. Writing in 2016, Phillip Dehne compared the newly founded Ministry of Munitions and the Ministry of Blockade, describing their establishment as 'a true wartime creation never conceived of before the war'.⁴²⁹ The same can be said of the Graves Registration Commission. Though there was a history of governmental intervention with British war graves, as evidenced in Chapter Two, in practice, policy remained that individual military units would be responsible for recovering and burying their own dead. Where this might have been possible in colonial wars, it had been evident from September 1914 that this response was not adequate for the ongoing war. Though the British government recognised the political value of graves, these had traditionally been erected and paid for following the war. By March 1915, the need to alleviate the anxieties of the British public was recognised as a factor which would help to maintain popular support for the war, however, until this point, the required duties for this had been performed by prominent, elite individuals working within the red cross and pursuing their own agendas. Though Fabian Ware's ego could be viewed as individualistic, given his tendency to refer to his network of support in an effort to bolster his position, as seen within much of his correspondence; the GRC would continue to expand far beyond Ware's ego. In fact, Ware's efforts to position himself in a way which eliminated rivals such as Malcolm and Cecil could be viewed as a necessary manoeuvre required because of 'the influx of men with experience in business and commerce' into the British state and influential bodies during the Great War.⁴³⁰ Indeed, the timing of the establishment of the GRC

⁴²⁹ Dehne, Phillip (2016). The Ministry of Blockade and the fate of Free Trade during the First World War. *Twentieth Century British History*. Vol.27, pp. 333-356

⁴³⁰ Dehne, Phillip (2016). The Ministry of Blockade during the First World War and the Demise of Free Trade. *20th Century British History*, vol. 27 (3), p 348

would prove to have an unintended consequence. Unable to further his works relating to graves, it appears that Cecil's attention was diverted towards the functioning's of the Foreign Office's Contraband Department, where he was appointed as the FO's parliamentary secretary towards the end of May 1915. Here, he was a 'rising star' for 'tackling blockade-related duties', resulting in his appointment as Minister of Blockade within the new independent Ministry of Blockade in February 1916 – a significant development which will be revisited in due course.⁴³¹

Before the formal establishment of the GRC, many of the humanitarian elements of the war effort had been performed by volunteers working for non-governmental, non-military organisations, including National Red Cross volunteers such as Ware. The GRC acted as a stabiliser, maintaining the delicate relationship between Britain's armed services who needed to focus on the requirements of the living soldiers, and the British public who needed answers about the dead, or those who were suspected of being so. Though it is important to note that at even at this early stage of the war, many humanitarian organisations and communities were already finding ways to honour and commemorate fallen soldiers. Many organisations encouraged intervention in the form of donations from civilians, as demonstrated by the creation of the Chattri war memorial in Brighton, in a fashion not dissimilar to the intervention by the Guild of Loyal Women in response to the South African War. Consequently, in the British public memory, and in British high school education, the most well-known battles are the battles within which the British faced the most severe losses, such as the Somme, Passchendaele, Gallipoli etc. This means that our understanding of the legacy of the war today is shaped by the British culture of Christian, community-based commemorative practise, which would, in true colonial style, dominate international commemorative practice, particularly following the expansion of Ware's unit in 1917. This theory can help us to understand why the contributions of minority soldiers can feel overlooked, or 'forgotten' (according to the majority of contemporary newspaper headlines reporting on any topic associated with history of minorities of the First World war) today.

The issue of the respectful treatment of the remains of colonial soldiers who had died in the field would lead to a very significant development in the history of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission: The establishment of the Anglo-French agreement whereby land was granted for the creation of cemeteries to house the remain of British and imperial soldiers. Ian Malcolm's letter to General Macready in March 1915 describing the cremation of bodies in pits lined with lime presented a possible public relations issue for the British, at home and

⁴³¹ Ibid. p.340-341

across the empire.⁴³² On the 18th June 1915, the Chamber of Deputies in France passed a Bill providing instructions for the cremation and burial of French and enemy dead. The Bill described that bodies of enemy or French soldiers who were not identifiable were to be ‘burned’, and that the bodies of French and Allied soldiers which had been identified would be buried in the ‘ordinary way’.⁴³³ Ware provided translations for Macready, and highlighted that the Bill made no provision for the cremation of the bodies of British soldiers, whether or not they had been identified – an omission which Ware said ‘may be assumed’ to be intentional. ‘All’ of the Officers and government officials who had engaged with Ware had expressed that they had recognised that the French procedure of introducing and discussing a Bill in parliament as a means of public consultation was a more constructive process, and recommended that such process ‘should also be adopted in England before any measure were adopted as to the cremation of British soldiers’.⁴³⁴ However, the publication of ‘careless statements’ in the British press had ‘caused some anxiety’ at home on the matter of cremations, which encouraged Ware to suggest to Macready that the British Ambassador be required to obtain a definitive statement from the French Government on the issue, through private diplomatic channels, as a matter of urgency before the forthcoming public discussion of a Bill in Senate.⁴³⁵ Ware undoubtedly developed his knack for recognising the public mood in relation to the war during his time as the editor for *The Morning Times*, and from this point Ware increasingly refers to the need to maintain public support for the war, and to prevent any scandal as seen in the aftermath of previous wars, as a means to motivate others into approving his plans with the most urgency, despite not being typical military duties at this time. The Bill to be discussed proposed that the French Minister of War should acquire the necessary lands for ‘the burial of the soldiers of the Allied Armies who have died from wounds or sickness of the fields’, securing the land ‘either by means of expropriation or by mutual agreement’ on behalf of the State.⁴³⁶

In July 1915, Major General Walter Campbell (D.A. & Q.M.G.) of the 3rd Army described that as of 22nd July, new instructions had been made about the provision of land for British and allied cemeteries. The following advice was provided for the selection of burial grounds: to use existing French cemeteries; to use ground adjoining existing French cemeteries if the former cannot be used; to avoid contamination of existing water supplies; (to) choose ground

⁴³² ‘Letter Ian Malcolm to General Macready, 2nd March 1915’, CWGC/1/1/1/20

⁴³³ ‘Letter Fabian Ware to the Adjutant General, 26th June 1915’, CWGC/1/1/1/42 Project De Loi (WG 1076)

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

by the side of existing roads or paths, or in the corners of fields.⁴³⁷ Each Corps should notify the Graves Registration Commission with the location of the cemetery, giving reference to a 1/40000 map, with the location marked on the Cadastre map in the local Mairie when possible.⁴³⁸ The use of isolated graves was to be prevented ‘as far as possible’, with the Graves Registration Commission assisting Corps in any way that they can in ‘procuring the assent of the French Authorities to any of the proposed sites for cemeteries’.⁴³⁹ As the French had shown such an ‘earnest desire’ to ‘provide burial grounds in which our soldiers may be fittingly buried and remain undisturbed’, Ware attempted to convince Macready that these efforts ‘should be met by us with the desire to conform in every respect to it wishes, and to carry out in every particular the procedure which it lays down’.⁴⁴⁰ For this reasons, it was proposed that Macready now approach General Huguet in the French Army ‘as the opportunity of adopting such procedure in connection with the new army at the outset will be lost if action is not taken at once’.⁴⁴¹ The ‘Project De Loi’ file in the CWGC archive includes a newspaper clipping from an unknown paper with a feature titled ‘“ALLIES’ GRAVES IN FRANCE. BILL PASSED BY THE CHAMBER’’, informing the British public about the tribute of land by the French to the British dead, with the Bill provided for both the expropriation and upkeep of Allied soldier’s graves in France’, a motion which was passed unanimously.⁴⁴² A transcript of the speech given by Monsieur Matter, *commissaire du Gouvernement*, is included in the file, and here we see the use of religious language to describe the dead and these works. Matter described the provisions within the Bill rendered ‘these graves perpetually sacred’, acknowledging that ‘there will rise throughout the land of France these shrines of pilgrimage, made holy henceforward by the dust of our immortal dead’.⁴⁴³ He proclaimed ‘there will come their kindred, to weep in sorrow, tempered by a just pride, the children who fell for their country’, continuing ‘one generation after another will carry to the graves of the soldiers who died for justice and liberty the everlasting tribute of their thanks, the witness of their pride in the holiest and noblest alliance of the nations that the world ever knew’.⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁷ ‘Letter Walter Campbell, D.A. & Q.M.G. 3rd Army, to 7th and 10th Corps, 29th July 1915’ in CWGC/1/1/42 Project De Loi (WG 1076)

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ ‘Letter Fabian Ware to the Adjutant General, 3rd August 1915’, in CWGC/1/1/42 Project De Loi (WG 1076)

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² ‘Allies’ Graves in France’ newspaper cutting, Paris, Aug. 13., in CWGC/1/1/42 Project De Loi (WG 1076)

⁴⁴³ ‘From the speech of Monsieur MATTER, commissaire du Gouvernement’ in CWGC/1/1/42 Project De Loi (WG 1076)

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

Though Macready had helped Ware to assert control over graves registration work earlier in the year, Ware now found himself with a new competitor, Sir Alfred Mond, the First Commissioner at the Office of Works (OoW) under the new coalition government of David Lloyd George. The Office of Works had been responsible for the maintenance of war graves in previous wars, notably the Crimean war, meaning that Mond had a natural interest in Ware's work and in the issue of war graves more broadly. Crane describes Mond as 'no more than Ware a man willing to give up power willingly'.⁴⁴⁵ The scale of Ware's works, which had recently expanded to cover both France and the Middle East had resulted in new challenges for the GRC, and Ware recognised the need for change to respond to these challenges, in a way which would keep his rival at bay. The issue was exacerbated by the French insistence on recognising only one body in respect of dealing with land law in relation to the establishment of the new cemeteries.

In September 1915, the military command in France wrote to the War Office in London to recommend that 'the future care of resting places of the country's dead should not be entrusted to any society, however prominent, but should be in the hands of a national committee constituted by, and working directly under Government authority'.⁴⁴⁶ This committee would likely remain inactive during the war, but following the conclusion of the war, it would have the power to plan and erect permanent memorials and provide for the 'continual upkeep of British burial places'.⁴⁴⁷

Ware would later recall that 'the Army towards the end of 1915 proposed to the Government the appointment of a National Committee for the Care of Soldiers' Graves, which would take over the work...after the War' (NCCSG).⁴⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the source for this quote is not provided by Crane so it is unclear whether Ware refers to the French Army proposal, or support for the proposal voiced by the British Army to the government. Regardless, the proposal allowed Ware to invoke a skill which we will see repeatedly as this thesis progresses, the ability to invoke 'the mood of the nation when it happened to coincide with his own'.⁴⁴⁹ The creation of a national committee was intended to discourage the creation or attempted intervention by private war graves groups or societies, who could submit claims to the French. Crane describes that the French proposal included assurances that the creation of the new committee would also demonstrate the British government's determination to 'treat

⁴⁴⁵ Crane (1942), p. 80

⁴⁴⁶ Longworth (2003), p.16

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Crane (1942), p.80

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

the matter as its national importance demands', a statement which demonstrates the stark differences in cultural approaches to fallen soldiers from the French and the British.⁴⁵⁰ Again, Anglo-French communications inform us that the French approach to the dead was driven by a desire to treat soldier's equally in order to signify the equality of their sacrifice, and the desire to maintain the upholding of individual and familial civil rights. In contrast, the British approach to the dead was driven by civilian individuals who had a level of power associated with their position, and their personal vision for the expansion of their own mission.

Ware would also recall that 'it was felt that the nation would expect that the government should undertake the care of the last resting places of those who had fallen, but at the same time that relatives would consider that work of so intimate a nature should be entrusted to a specially appointed body rather than to any existing Government department', holding up the examples of cemeteries maintained by the OoW in Crimea as justification.⁴⁵¹ This is the second example within only one recollection where Ware illustrates his ability to frame the will of the nation in a way which would benefit his own favoured approach – in this case, to maintain distance between his immediate works and the British Government, despite their financial contribution to his planned works, now that a political will had been shown.

4.2 The Directorate of Graves Registration & Enquiries and the 1916 Double Identity Disc

1916 was a significant year in the development of Ware's organisation, and the expansion of graves registration works, which further solidified the practice of using individual marked graves for all ranks who fought on behalf of Britain. The developments of 1916 also allow for reflection upon how Ware's position reflected broader cultural changes within British state during the war. From the outset, Ware utilised the recent establishment of the National Committee for the Care of soldier's Graves (NCCSG) in late 1915 to assist with his plans to build upon the recently established Graves Registration Commission (GRC). In January 1916, the Prime minister appointed a Committee for the NCCSG, with His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales appointed to the position of President. The new Committee included Ware, his second-in-command Arthur Messer, General Macready and military representatives from France.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Longworth P.16

⁴⁵¹ Crane (1942), p.80

⁴⁵² Longworth (2003), p.16

The existence of such an organisation would allow relatives to feel that they had a level of input and control over the graves of their loved ones and would help Ware to minimize government interference in his work in the future, though Ware's relationship with Mond would later prove to be vital in the shaping of the narrative of noble sacrifice, a theme which we will soon revisit. The NCCSG acted as the 'legally recognised association required by the French law of 29th December', with the added merit of royal patronage which would form another link in the evolution of Ware's own Commission.

Ware's intentions to reposition or reframe his Commission had not taken a back seat during this time. Between the appointment of the NCCSG Committee, and the hosting of their first meeting, Ware's own Commission would undergo a number of significant changes which would place Ware in the ideal position to implement change within the British Army itself to facilitate his own works. On 11th February 1916, Ware was promoted to the rank of temporary Lieutenant-Colonel, with officers of the GRC receiving commissions on the General List. That same month, the Graves Registration Commission was rebranded as the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E), with the purpose of acting as the 'sole intermediary authority between the British Army in the Field and the French and Military and Civil Authorities' for all matters relating to French and Belgian law.⁴⁵³ Ware was also given the responsibility of selecting the sites to be used for the final burial grounds where British officers and men would be laid to rest, along with the control and supervision of these cemeteries.⁴⁵⁴ These duties were in addition to the existing works of the GRC, and they continued to grow.

Macready was recalled to the War Office as Adjutant-General to the Forces in February 1916, one of the most senior staff appointments within the Army, a position which required him to relocate to London to take his place in the War Office. Though the specific date of Macready's appointment is unknown, the appointment appears to coincide with Asquith's establishment of the Ministry of Blockade (MoB), to which Robert Cecil had been appointed Minister on 16th February, as new and existing ministries expanded across London.⁴⁵⁵ By this stage, it was now publicly known that the graves enquiry branch had been established, resulting in 'a great rush of enquiries', which 'completely over-taxed the powers of the existing field office at the headquarters of the graves registration units'.⁴⁵⁶ Ware's staff had

⁴⁵³ Ibid., p.17

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Dehne, p. 342

⁴⁵⁶ Anon (1917). *The Registration and Care of Military Graves During the Present War. Royal United Services Institution. Journal*. Vol. 62(446), p. 299

laboured to respond to a never ending number of public enquiries, which Longworth reports placed a heavy burden on the administration in France, whilst also requiring substantial efforts in London to facilitate the developing and printing of photographs of graves requested by families.⁴⁵⁷ By the beginning May 1916, the DGR&E had ‘registered over 50,000 graves, answered 50,000 enquiries, supplied 2,500 photographs, and provisionally selected sites for 200 cemeteries’, yet as Longworth notes, the most costly battles for the British, such as the Somme and Passchendaele had not yet been fought, and there was no work to organise graves registration works in other theatres of war.⁴⁵⁸ Around this time, new units were formed in locations such as Salonika, Egypt and Mesopotamia, broadening the administrative scope of the Commission, and demonstrating further need for increased staff numbers.

Consequently, in May 1916, Ware decided to relocate his main office to London, close to the recently promoted Macready, leaving the executive headquarters in France, along with the Land, Survey, Gardening and Photographic Departments ‘whose work necessitated their remaining in France’.⁴⁵⁹ The move to London would have the added benefit of allowing the DGR&E to employ women clerks, who could ‘ease the burden on the limited establishment of male workers’.⁴⁶⁰ The RUSI journal reported in 1917 that this had been ‘the chief reason for the decision to remove the directorate to London’.⁴⁶¹ We must also consider the possibility that this decision was also influenced by the influx of connected elite men into the British state at this point. Dehne notes that the list of temporaries appointed to the Ministry of Blockade ‘suggest a replication of the existing “Foreign Office mind”, largely recruited from the same social milieu as always – the landed gentry, with public school educations’, following Lloyd George’s famous efforts to draw businessmen into the innovative new Ministry of Munitions.⁴⁶² As a former colonial administrator, Ware fit this profile. He may have seen this move as a potential to gain influence in new spheres, whilst also spotting the opportunity to prevent former rivals such as Cecil from influencing his own position with Macready.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Longworth (2003), p.17

⁴⁵⁹ Anon (1917), p.299

⁴⁶⁰ Longworth (2003), p.17

⁴⁶¹ Anon (1917), p.299

⁴⁶² Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, pp. 7-17. Cited in. Dehne p. 349



Figure 52 'Directorate of Graves Registration & Enquiries office 1922' -With permission from CWGC. Note that there are no known images of the London office or the women who staffed it before 1920.

As Ware relocated to London, he left Messer in charge of graves registration units in France and Belgium. There were now six units in total, each commanded by a captain, and supported by 'two subaltern officers, clerks, orderlies, and the requisite motor transport'.⁴⁶³ Five of the six units were distributed along the front, whilst the sixth unit was responsible for the 'whole of the lines of communication area'.⁴⁶⁴ These units were tasked with the responsibility of controlling graves registration and maintaining the care of cemeteries within their area. The burial of a soldier, the temporary marking of a grave, and the provision of a full report for the authorities remained the responsibility of the chaplains or officers in charge of burial parties. This meant that the graves registration officers were able to follow up on official information 'as early as possible', providing a wooden cross for erection over the grave based on the information provided.⁴⁶⁵

Ware arrived in London on 16th May 1916, one day after his appointment as the Director of the Graves Registration and Enquiries. The DGR&E London office at St James' Square functioned as a department of the Adjutant-General's Branch within the War Office.⁴⁶⁶ He brought with him one officer and three clerks but would soon realise that his office had recruited only one fifth of the requested typists. The lack of typists would prove to have disastrous consequences as the Battle of the Somme began on 11th July, lasting until 18th November. Even before the Somme, Ware's staff were having increasing problems with the identification of soldier's remains. The removal of the single disc from the body left the body

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Anon (1917), p.299

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. p.300

⁴⁶⁶ Anon (1917), p. 299; "No. 29658". *The London Gazette (Supplement)*. 7 July 1916. p. 6823 <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29658/supplement/6823>

unidentifiable, particularly in cases where a temporary burial was not immediately possible. The absence of information on some bodies was starting to severely affect the progress of the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, which now had the task of responding to the same problem on multiple fronts, each with its own military and climate-related challenges.

On the same day as Ware's arrival in London, Messer sent a letter to the Adjutant General Macready on behalf of Ware as the Director of the DGR&E to discuss the 'many instances where it is not possible for bodies to be identified at the point of burial through the absence of identity discs', meaning that there were cases in which identity could only be confirmed or established with the 'greatest difficulty'.⁴⁶⁷ The letter requested consideration of the following points:

- (i) Identity discs are frequently removed at the time of death as evidence of death, and when casualties are heavy, many bodies are not buried for some days; or it may even be weeks as in the case of the Battle of Loos, when burying in some parts of the field of battle was stopped by the Corps General or military reasons.
- (ii) When burying parties are eventually able to carry out their work, it is found that numbers of bodies bear no mark of identification, so that the identity of many is never established. The provision of two discs (a system which has been introduced by the French during the present war), one of which is left on the body until the moment of actual burial, would seem to be the only practical means by which in these cases identity at the time of burial could be ensured and the grave marked in the usual way.⁴⁶⁸

Messer's letter continues, informing us that a scheme including the use of two identity discs as used by the French Army had been discussed before, but the decision had been made not to implement such a system for the British:

I raised this question on a former occasion, when the provision of two identity discs was considered inadvisable, as there were serious reasons for doubting if British soldiers would adapt themselves to the system. As, however, it has now been found to work satisfactorily in the French Army, I would suggest that it might again be considered. Unfortunately the number of graves which are unknown owing to this cause is very considerable.⁴⁶⁹

The idea that British soldiers might not adapt to a new identification system is interesting, given the existence of a broad private purchase market for identifying items, to be explored within this chapter in due course, with a prominent culture of identity bracelets within this trend. This assertion also allows us to reflect upon differences between British and French

⁴⁶⁷ 'Letter from Major A.A. Messer to the Adjutant General, 16 May 1916'. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

⁴⁶⁸ 'Letter from Major A.A. Messer to the Adjutant General, 16 May 1916'. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

military culture. As identified in chapter 2, it is possible to observe a military culture whereby French policy and orders were on occasion shaped by the behaviours of soldiers in the field, adopting examples of good practice into official policy. Information relating to French identity discs can be found published within civilian newspapers in advance of the issuing of military orders. In the British case, we see hesitancy to implement policy based on whether soldiers would adapt, perhaps in acknowledgement of the *ad hoc* nature of learning and knowledge retention within the British Army which had resulted in the variable identification practice in the first instance.

May 1916 was a significant month for another reason, as the month within which the British Treasury would formally recognise the National Committee for the Care of Soldiers' Graves as the 'regularly constituted authority' which the French law had demanded, and agreed that costs associated with the Committee's work, such as the cost of the upkeep of graves in France after the conclusion of the war should be 'accepted as a charge on the Civil Votes', meaning that the nation would pay for the work. Though Crane describes much of the works of the NCCSG as 'dormant', this development alone is significant, as it removed the financial onus of the cost of maintaining graves and the provision of memorials from Ware in his capacity as director of the DGR&E, and member of the NCCSG – a factor which undoubtedly shaped his approach to his work over the years that would follow.⁴⁷⁰ After all, how could any member of the British government reject budget proposals for beautiful monuments and memorials designed by the best architects in the Imperial Empire on behalf of the nation, if the cost was to be shared by the public, rather than assigned to a specific government office as had been the case following the South African War? Now that the cost of caring for war graves would be a public cost, rather than a military expense, Ware had leverage to lobby the Adjutant General for changes which would benefit his staff in their mission to register the names and graves of fallen soldiers – a role which now answered to both public demands, and the public purse strings, rather than responding to military necessity as it had in its earlier variations. Ware would no longer have to convince senior military figures of the benefit of his work to the war effort, and military officials did not need to consider the expense of maintaining burials within their budgets, undoubtedly improving co-operation in an operational capacity.

On the 21st June, Ware wrote to the Adjutant-General to revisit the issue of identity discs, reporting that in a large number of cases it had proven 'impossible at the time of burial to identify men who have been killed owing to the fact that the identity discs have been

⁴⁷⁰ Crane (2003), p.81

removed'.⁴⁷¹ This meant that 'a largely increasing number of graves therefore are, and will remain unidentified'.⁴⁷² Ware referred to the double identity disc scheme introduced by the French Ministry of War in May 1915, which included two separate discs to be worn around the neck and the wrist. Ware reflected that this exact scheme may 'not be suitable' for British soldiers, as it would take a 'very considerable time' to produce and dispatch a sufficient number of discs to the front, compared with the French scheme which had been able to 'rapidly supply the second disc to all men already in the field'.⁴⁷³ The system of two separate discs also raised questions for Ware about how one might be able to confirm whether a British soldier found with an identity disc had been wearing another, which had been previously removed, which could result in confusion and 'make matters worse than present'.⁴⁷⁴

Ware had a remedy to this dilemma and included a sketch of 'two identity discs' which would overcome these difficulties and seemed 'in some ways to offer advantages over the French system'. Ware's design (*fig 53*) included a new octagonal, green disc which would be suspended from the original red disc using a short piece of cord. The new disc would be removed from the body to confirm the death, leaving a disc upon the body which would allow for identification at the point of burial. The design noted that 'in the majority of cases these discs would be removed at night', often under rifle or machine gun fire, and so the new disc was produced from green fibre to make it easily distinguishable from the original disc during daylight, and 'lozenge shape' so that it could be easily felt in the dark.⁴⁷⁵ Ware's letter included a suggestion that once the lower disc had been removed, the severed piece of short cord could remain attached to the upper disc, which could be easily felt by any searcher, allowing them to confirm that this was a more recent death and that one of the discs had been intentionally removed.⁴⁷⁶ The scheme was approved and on the 24th June, instructions were issued to order 4 million discs as per Ware's drawing, with the cords fitted by the contractor. Contractors supplying outstanding orders for the red discs should now stamp an additional

⁴⁷¹ 'Letter from Fabian Ware to the Adjutant General, 21 June 1916'. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Letter from Fabian Ware to the Adjutant General, 21 June 1916'. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18. cited in Ashbridge, S. I. (2020), 'Military Identification: Identity Discs and the Identification of British War Dead, 1914-18', *British Journal for Military History*, 6(1), p.36

⁴⁷⁶ 'Letter from Fabian Ware to the Adjutant General, 21 June 1916'. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18; 'Scheme for the Duplicate Identity Disc'. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

hole at the base of the disc, and red discs stored in R.A.C.D and at Clothing Depots should be perforated in the same way.⁴⁷⁷

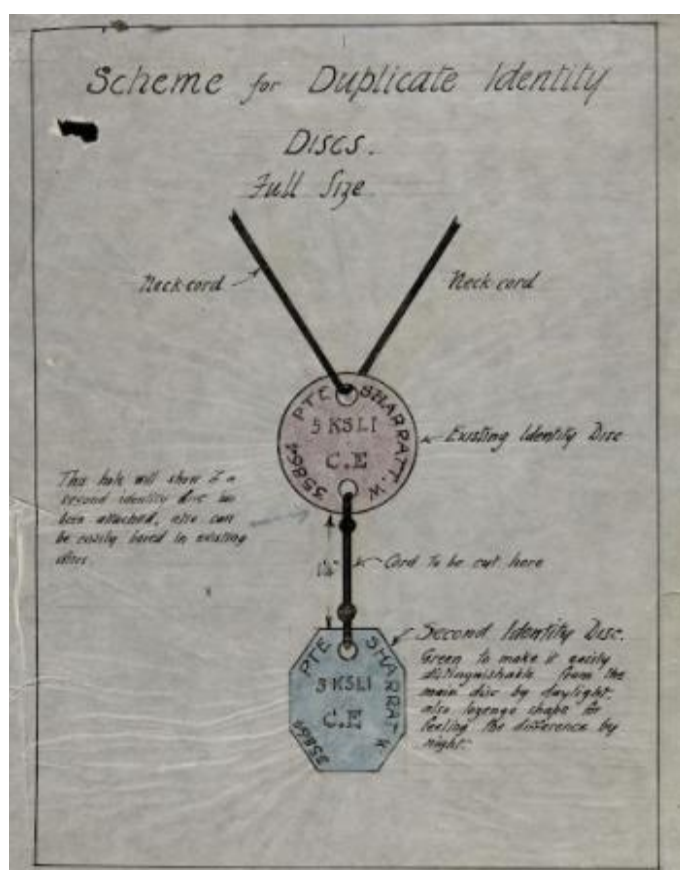


Figure 53 "Scheme for Duplicate Identity Discs" sketch circulated in June 1916. In Directorate Of Graves Registration And Enquiries: File 18 - Scheme for duplicate identity discs, File SDC 4 CWGC/1/1/34/18

On 29 June 1916, B. B. Cubitt sent a letter on behalf of the Army Council to an unknown recipient stating that the Army Council were prepared to accept Ware's suggestion and had 'issued instructions for the provision of a sufficient number of the duplicate identity discs to carry it forward'.⁴⁷⁸ However, it would be some time before a sufficient number of discs would be available for general issue, prompting the Army Council to request that the recipient of the letter provide their 'opinion as to the best and most speedy arrangement for the preparation and supply of the second disc to the troops already in the field'.⁴⁷⁹ It was 'desirable that the issue to draft-producing units at home and to troops in France should as far as possible commence simultaneously'. The letter concluded by advising that it was probable that a supply of stamps and punches would be required for marking and adapting discs would be required, requesting further recommendations on these points.⁴⁸⁰ These were not the only issues with the new discs.

On 10th July, Major A. Courage, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General (DAAG) of the 4th Army, wrote to Ware regarding the design of the two discs, stating that three of the four

⁴⁷⁷ 'Note from D.G.O.S to C.O.O, R.A.C.D., 24 June 1916'. CWGC/1/1/34/18, cited in Ashbridge (2020), p.37

⁴⁷⁸ 'Letter from B.B. Cubitt to Q.M.G.7, 27 June 1916'. CWGC/1/1/34/18

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

Armies consulted had believed that the second disc was to be worn around the wrist, whilst the fourth Army had not stated where they believed the best place for the disc to be worn to be. The handwritten note continues to express concern that the placement of two discs around the neck might 'lead to both discs being cut away', and that the stamping of the discs was a large task. Consequently, the Adjutant General had requested that Ware would re-consider a bracelet design. Major Courage asked for Ware to revisit the design, perhaps considering the use of a chain to be worn around the wrist instead of the string worn around the neck, which could 'wash off' ("especially if it looks nice").

Macready appears to have taken the issue of identity discs seriously, recognising the impact of the misuse or failure to use identity discs on DGR&E staff, and their ability to identify soldiers, as demonstrated by the issue of new instructions to soldiers on the use of their discs. Army Routine Order No. 49 was published on 11th July 1916, reporting that "it has come to notice that sufficient care is not being taken by Officers and Men to wear their identity discs at all times", with "all ranks warned that it is their duty to do so on all occasions".⁴⁸¹ These Routine Orders were intended to complement, rather than overrule existing manuals, acting as an informal opportunity for learning, however they were issued under the assumption that the leaders of each and every unit would have the opportunity to not only read this information, but to share it within their unit, which was not always possible, resulting in further variation across the units.

In the meantime, Ware was quick to respond to Major Courage's requests, sending a telegram to Captain Taylor on 12th July forwarding a request he had wired earlier in the day from the Adjutant General's office which referred Taylor to letter 45/1/7 from Q.M.G.7 on 29th June, instructing 'if not inconvenient delay manufacture duplicate disc further opinions from Armies. Report Progress'.⁴⁸² Ware explained that 'the hitch about the discs' was due to the fact that Q.M.G.7 had written to the Commander-in-Chief 'stating that the Army Council had approved the proposal I had submitted to them and had given the necessary instructions for the discs to be made'.⁴⁸³ Once this letter had been circulated, 'the Ordnance people' had 'remarked that in the original replies from the Armies on the question of the advisability of two discs, three of the Armies had suggested that the additional disc should be worn on the wrist'.⁴⁸⁴ Ware claimed not to have received this information, having only been told by the Adjutant General's office that the idea had been approved. As a result, the Adjutant-General

⁴⁸¹ WO 95/2686, The National Archives

⁴⁸² 'Letter from Lt. Col. Fabian Ware to Captain Taylor, 12 July 1916'. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

had requested that the Armies were consulted again to see if they would consider the new system which they had not yet seen, rather than a bracelet. The sketch of the duplicate scheme was shared that same day, asking the Armies to confirm whether ‘they do not think this system as good as, or better than that of the two separate discs, one of which is worn on the wrist and one round the neck’.⁴⁸⁵ Ware hoped that the Armies would reply within two to three days and did not expect any objections to his proposal.

At the end of July, Major G. H. Stobart (D.A.A.G.2) wrote from the General Headquarters of the 3rd Echelon in France to Ware reporting that there had been ‘several complaints received lately regarding the removal of identity discs from the bodies before being brought in for burial’, requesting for information on whether a decision had been reached regarding the provision of the double disc.⁴⁸⁶ Ware responded on 4th August, confirming that the concerned Department of the War Office was ‘now proceeding with the manufacture of the new discs as speedily as possible’, adding that many similar complaints had also reached him.⁴⁸⁷

The War Office notified Commanding Officers of the pending duplicate scheme on 24 August 1916 with the release of Army Order 287/1916, including new illustrations which depicted the new green disc worn round the neck, with the original red disc suspended from it, as opposed to the original design which featured the new disc suspended from the original disc (*figure 54*). There are no surviving documents which confirm the reason for this change, but from the information given in Major Courage’s letter to Ware on 10th July, we can presume that this switch removed the requirement to punch an additional hole in the existing red disc which would save time and therefore money, allowing the discs to reach soldiers in a timelier manner. The discs were to be renamed “Disc, identity, No.1, green” and “Disc, identity, No.2, red”.⁴⁸⁸ Disc No.1 would replace disc No. 2 on the 42-inch length of cord worn around the neck. Disc No.2 was to be fastened to Disc No.1 with the new, shorter length of cord. Crucially, these orders gave no information about which disc to remove from the body of a fallen soldier, or why the double disc was being implemented. This information was circulated on the home front by newspapers such as the Daily Mail, who interestingly gave clear instructions for their use in a feature entitled ‘Tommy’s Necklet’ published on 25 August 1916.⁴⁸⁹ A special Army order published on 24th September 1916 provided further guidance on how to use the disc:

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ ‘Letter from G.H. Stobart, D.A.A.G.2 to Director of DGR&E, 30 July 1916’. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

⁴⁸⁷ ‘Letter from G.O.C. for Director of DGR&E to D.A.A.G.2., G.H.Q, 3rd Echelon, France, 4th August’. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

⁴⁸⁸ ‘Army Orders, War Office, 24 August 1916’. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

⁴⁸⁹ ‘Tommy’s Necklet’. *The Daily Mail*. August 25 1916. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

In case of the death of an officer or soldier in the field, the lower disc, known as “Disc, identity, No.2, red,” will be removed and disposed of in the same manner as heretofore.

The upper disc, known as “Disc, identity, No. 1, green,” will not be removed but will be buried with the body.⁴⁹⁰

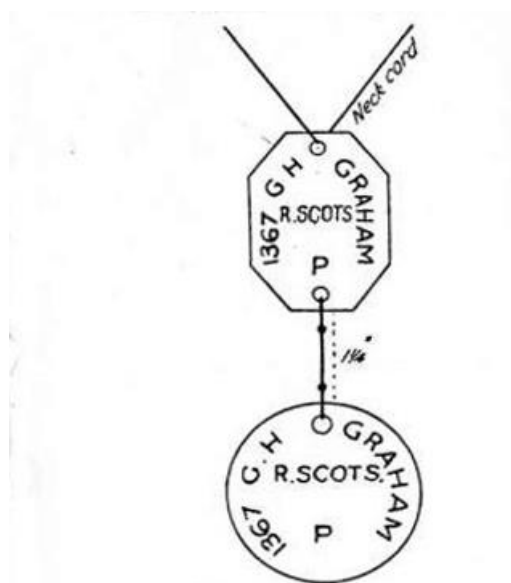


Figure 54 The 1916 identity discs introduced to soldiers. In Army Orders, War Office, 24 August 1916'. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

Soldiers were instructed that in the case of the death of a soldier or an officer, the lower red disc should be removed, though the upper green disc was *not* to be removed and should be buried with the body, ‘as a safeguard against loss of identity’ in the future when burial might be possible.⁴⁹¹ Where a body could be reached and identified, but not buried at the time, the lower red disc was still to be removed ‘to ensure proper notification of death’. The discs should be worn by all officers and soldiers on active service, and neglect to do so would be regarded as a breach of discipline as per Army Order 287/1916.

Despite this warning, it would be months before the new discs were ready for dispatch. On 6th November, Ware petitioned the office of the Adjutant General to confirm whether they would be taking steps to hasten the dispatch of discs, bluntly stating ‘the point is: we are receiving many inquiries as to why identification of bodies is in so many cases impossible: if we are able to reply that this new scheme of double identity disc has been completely carried out we can at least say that every possible precaution against loss of identity has been taken’.⁴⁹²

Again, Ware utilises his tried and tested approach to military diplomacy, reminding those who might limit or restrict his activities of the need to answer to the nation at the end of the war, particularly now that they would be paying for the care of the graves. Ware wrote again to Macready again on 12th November 1916 asking if there was anything that could be done to

⁴⁹⁰ ‘Army Orders, War Office, 24 August 1916’. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² ‘Copy A.G. telegraphs 06.11.16-26.11.16’. CWGC/1/1/1/34/18

‘expedite the issue of the new double identity discs to troops in the fighting line’, reiterating the large numbers of unidentifiable dead found in recent months due to ‘the want of the second disc’.⁴⁹³

Ware received a reply from the Adjutant General’s office on 15th November, stating that 200,000 new discs had arrived in France and were being distributed at a rate of 50,000 a week.⁴⁹⁴ France was to receive the whole supply of discs. By 1st December, 1067,000 new discs had been issued to France to date, with a further 690,000 owed. It was expected that the order would be fulfilled within 4 weeks based on this pattern of distribution.⁴⁹⁵ Despite this, it is not uncommon to encounter a combination of the green octagonal disc introduced in 1916 paired with the 1907 aluminium disc, rather than the 1914 red fibre disc. It is possible that on occasion new red fibre discs were not distributed to those still in possession of the aluminium discs, resulting in unauthorised pairings of discs, but we must also consider the absence of information on the distribution of the new discs beyond the Western Front, meaning that these pairings may have been as a result of insufficient supplies in specific regions.

The identity disc couldn’t have come at a better time, as G.R.O. 1083 1915 had reported a number of cases where there had been a failure to report deaths occurring at aid-posts or during transit to Field Ambulances, reminding the reader that the *F.S. Regulations*, Part II, paragraph 133 (3 and 4) must be adhered to ‘where individuals are brought in dead, and the identity can be established, commanders of medical units will report such deaths to the D.A.G., Base, and in case of officers, to the Headquarters of the Army Concerned’.⁴⁹⁶ The location of hospitals had an impact on both the death rate, and the organization of burials following death. Field hospitals could be a distance from the Front Line, and the long journey to treatment could prevent soldiers from receiving treatment before death. Methods for the transportation of injured soldiers to the field hospitals varied and could even increase the suffering of the transportee. The impact of this was recognized and in 1916, the field hospitals were restructured, bringing them closer to the Front Line.⁴⁹⁷ This meant that soldiers could receive treatment more quickly, resulting in a decreased rate of death as a result of injury. Military cemeteries could be formed behind the field hospitals allowing some form of structure to the processing of the War Dead which kept death away from the Front Line. The huge losses incurred during the Battle of the Somme offensive (1st July-18th November 1916)

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ ‘Extracts from General Routine Orders Issued to the British Army in the Field Part I., 1st December 1915’. Extracts from General Routine Orders 01.03.1915-01.06.1916, CWGC/1/1/1/32 CWGC

⁴⁹⁷ Mayhew, Emily (2013). *Wounded: From battlefield to blighty 1914-18*. London: The Bodley Head

revealed that a number of organisational deficiencies still remained, resulting in significant numbers of unburied dead. Ware would recall:

At the beginning of the Somme offensive last year I called at the Fourth Army HQ and saw Gen Hutton with regard to this question of burials. There was no organisation for the purpose of the time and I was satisfied after having discussed the matter with them that it was impossible to establish any proper organisation at that time in the middle of severe fighting. Subsequently the organisation of Corps Burial Officers was established.⁴⁹⁸

The identification and burial of the dead was not only required for the administration of the army, the respectful treatment of the dead was also necessary for the maintenance of morale in the field and support for the war at home. The concept of mental health and knowledge of conditions that would later be known as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was still developing during the period of study, but it was recognized that the constant views of death had an impact on the wellbeing of soldiers. Reverend E.C. Crosse described that:

burials on active service had a very great practical importance. In the first place if one had buried a man's body one knew for certain that he was dead. Secondly, nothing is more depressing to the living to see unburied dead about them. In some areas e.g. at Beaumont Hamel in the winter of 1916 the ground was covered with unburied dead and it became a matter of real military importance that the work of burial should be conducted.⁴⁹⁹

This shows us that clearing the dead helped soldiers to cope with their environment. The rising number of unburied, unrecorded soldiers caused a multitude of administrative and organisational problems for the Graves Registration Commission, The War Office and Government. The inability to confirm the location of a soldier, or any ambiguity in details relating to a soldier with a 'missing' status, or a soldier believed to have died, could cause significant anguish for their loved ones on the Home Front. The only option for these families was to write letters, if they were able to read and write, a privilege still largely attributed to the wealthier proportions of society at the time. A good example of this is Michael Durey's case study of the Williamson family's 'search for answers' following the notification of the death of their son Lt High Henshall Clifford Williamson, who was reported as killed during

⁴⁹⁸ 'F. Ware to DGR&E', in CWGC/1/2/I/12 A Manual Of Instructions For Officers Employed In A Graves Registration Unit. Cited in Hogkinson, P. (2007), Clearing the Dead, *Journal of First World War Studies* (online), Vol.3, No.1, accessed 26.02.2018, available from:

<http://www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/clearingthedead.html> accessed 16.02.2018

⁴⁹⁹ IWM 80/22/1 E.C. Crosse, cited in Hogkinson, P. (2007), Clearing the Dead, *Journal of First World War Studies* (online), Vol.3, No.1, accessed 26.02.2018, available from:

<http://www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/clearingthedead.html> accessed 16.02.2018

the Battle of the Somme.⁵⁰⁰ Hugh was reported as killed in the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards War Diary, however there were also multiple eyewitness accounts which provided varying accounts of his death, and administrative errors contributed to the distress experienced by the family. Consequently, the exact circumstances of his death, and the location of his body were never definitively confirmed, leaving his parents unable to accept the news of his death.

In October 1916, the DGRE was formally incorporated into the British Army (in spite of his previous protests against his unit becoming part of the Army), and Ware was promoted to the rank of Director-General, with duties extending across all theatres of war; answering directly to the Adjutant-General to the Forces at the War Office (a post which General Macready had been promoted to). Ware's duties, as outlined in his own accounts of the Commission published in 1937, can help us to understand the motives of the Commission and their work before the construction of their final iconic cemeteries began. The first duty of the Director was to 'meet the demands of relatives', by ensuring provision was made for the care and maintenance of military graves after the war, a requirement which was given increasing consideration as the 'numbers of non-professional soldiers forming the New Armies increased'.⁵⁰¹ The work was to 'reflect the spirit of the free co-operation of the Dominions with the United Kingdom during the War', and thus all partner Governments of the Empire should share the responsibility and cost of the works, which should be administered by civilians following the War.⁵⁰²

4.3 Equality of Treatment: The Establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission

In order to reflect such duties across the imperial empire, Ware needed to adapt his organisation again and, as usual, would rely on powerful acquaintances to help him to position his arguments in front of the most effective audience to implement his desired changes. With the 'great expansion and development of the works of the Directorate', Ware knew that further expansion was needed to facilitate the needs of the NCCSG, allowing the DGRE to function as the sole organisation representing the NCCSG in the field, as per the French Law of 1915. Crane describes that it was the Prince of Wales who was behind the initiative for such an organisation, in his capacity as president for the NCCSG, prompting him

⁵⁰⁰ Durey, Michael (2015). The Search for Answers on the Missing in the Great War: Lt High Henshall Williamson and His Parent's Struggle with officialdom, 1916-2001. *British Journal for Military History*. 2(1), pp. 86-104

⁵⁰¹ Ware (1937), p.24

⁵⁰² Ibid.

to submit a 'memorandum to the Prime Minister' requesting that the issue of British and empire graves should be raised at the forthcoming Imperial War Conference.⁵⁰³ Gibson and Ward describe that the Price 'felt strongly that Lieutenant Colonel Ware's work was essential as a tangible tribute to the Empire's fallen.'⁵⁰⁴

The Permanent Secretary of the Office of Works, Sir Lionel Earle claimed that his department should have the responsibility for the maintenance of graves after the war, given its experience with building, parks and public space, along with its responsibility for some of the graves from the Crimean war and 'certain other graves as distant as east Asia'.⁵⁰⁵ By 1917, Ware was able to argue that the required works were far too great for a department which Longworth describes as having 'dealt with so few graves by comparison', a notion supported by Macready who described that 'it was felt by the Army, when preparing the creation of this [National] Committee that the intimate nature of the works to be undertaken made it desirable to appoint an organisation *ad hoc* rather than to entrust the work to one of the existing Government offices'.⁵⁰⁶ The arrangement proposed by Earle could have been perceived as a government attempt to assert control over Army affairs, though it also interrupted Ware's ambitious plans which had developed with the support of Macready over the years. Macready would argue a second point, that the new body must be imperial, not national, to reflect the co-operative spirit of the Empire, with the contribution of Imperial soldiers 'powerfully symbolised by the battlefield cemeteries', which therefore must be preserved by a body which was also Imperial.⁵⁰⁷ The NCCSG had invited representatives from the Dominions as a result of these feelings.

The issue needed to be decided upon swiftly, as a number of private bodies had launched appeals relating to the graves of the dead, and undoubtedly, more would follow both within England and across the Dominions if clear, decisive action were not taken to decide on a scheme of permanent memorials, along with a system of funding to support these works. As usual, Ware had begun to promote his own works to mediate the situation, circulating a memorandum which proposed an 'Imperial Commission for the Care of Soldiers' Graves', supported by a draft Charter for his proposed commission.⁵⁰⁸ The memorandum suggested that an international, specifically imperial, organisation should be constituted following the war, as opposed to a number of national committees, such as the NCCSG, which was to take

⁵⁰³ Crane (1942), p.96

⁵⁰⁴ Gibson and Ward (1989), p.47

⁵⁰⁵ Longworth (2003), p.24

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

over the work of the DGR&E following the conclusion of war as a specially appointed body, as opposed to a governmental department.⁵⁰⁹ This proposal would transform the DGR&E into a body with international powers, but would also provide it with the task for caring for the dead of all Imperial soldiers, making it essential that Ware's staff was able to respond to the cultural needs of every soldier fighting on behalf of the British Empire. Ware anticipated that 'the only possible opposition' might be that of the Office of Works'.⁵¹⁰

Though the Prime Minister, Lloyd George was supportive of the proposals, the First Commissioner of Works, Sir Alfred Mond objected on the basis that in 1889 a committee on British Cemeteries had given the Office of Works the full responsibility over the care of soldier's graves in Crimea, deferring to the qualifications of his department and acknowledging the usual presence of a clerk of works in Constantinople.⁵¹¹ Mond put forward that he should be appointed chairman of this new body, as the War Office was too busy to respond to the demands of the works. His body would continue to reflect the feelings of the empire. Ware was quick to highlight that Mond's proposal would leave the representatives of the Dominions able to act only in an advisory capacity, lacking any power or authority to implement the wishes of their own nation. Ware's organisation already had operations across multiple war fronts, with good relationships with thousands of relations, having successfully negotiated the French Law of 1915, meaning that his organisation was better placed to immediately respond than the Office of Works. Additionally, Ware reiterated that it was felt that decisions relating to memorials 'should be decided on a broad public basis and not by any Governmental department'.⁵¹²

By April 1917, the (then) Directorate had registered 150,000 graves in France and Belgium, 2,500 in Salonika, and over 4,000 in Egypt, with over 12,000 grave photographs sent to relatives.⁵¹³ Yet there were thousands of graves remaining to be registered. Though the French Law of 1915 had provided land for the cemeteries, the land was not enough to hold the number of soldiers killed and buried on the battlefields. The responsibility for the cemeteries again became an issue of positioning in May 1917 when the Adjutant-General in the field, General Fowke sanctioned a restructure of the Graves Registration Units which would facilitate their work, whilst ensuring that there was a timely hand over of the cemetery duties upon the conclusion of the war. As a result of this re-organisation, mobile and stationary units

⁵⁰⁹ Julie Summers (2007). *Remembered: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*. London: Merrell, p. 16

⁵¹⁰ Longworth (2003), p.25

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⁵¹² Longworth (2003), p.25

⁵¹³ Ibid., p.23

were established responding to the Army and Lines of Communication Areas. Longworth describes that the mobile units would prepare the cemeteries, whilst the stationary units would take over the cemeteries once they had been filled.⁵¹⁴ The responsibility of maintaining the cemeteries remained with the Army, though the works were to be supervised by the DGRE's horticultural workers.

Though some amendments were required to Ware's proposal for the Commission, it was passed unanimously, with the draft Charter approved by the Kin in Council on 10th May 1917, and executed under the Sign Manual on the 21st May, bringing the Imperial War Graves Commission into being.⁵¹⁵ The Sixth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission published in 1926 described that 'the Imperial War Conference of 1917 had decided that the permanence of the War Graves should be secured', reflecting that 'perpetuity in sepulture has in the past been a very rare thing, much rarer than is generally realised' - a public misconception which remains today.⁵¹⁶ And so the idea of a permanent, individually marked war grave for those who died in service became the policy of the empire, catalysing the transition in British military traditions from mass to individual graves, with appropriate recognition for all ranks, as per the National cemeteries of the American Civil War. This transition and the development of administrative processes to respond to these issues in the field, was first facilitated by the work of the Guild of Loyal Women in South Africa, during the South African War, with the formalisation of these traditions implemented as a result of Fabian Ware's work between 1914-1917.

Under the Royal Charter, HRH the Prince of Wales was appointed as the first President of the Commission, with the now Brigadier General Fabian Ware appointed to the position of vice-chairman.⁵¹⁷ The IWGC helped to strengthen the bonds of empire which had been weakened during the 1916 Imperial Crisis, a fact which the Prince described in a letter to Lloyd George:

The thoughts of all turn instinctively to the honoured dead who rest in many lands across the seas and to whose memory the Empire owes a duty which must never be forgotten. Future generations will judge us by the effort we made to fulfil that duty, and I hope that in undertaking it will be possible to enlist the representatives of all those who came forward to help the Empire in the hour of need.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Gibson and Ward (1989), p.47; Crane (1942), pp.96-97; Longworth (2003), p.25

⁵¹⁶ 'Sixth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission (1926) London: HMSO', CWGC/2/1 Annual Reports

⁵¹⁷ Gibson and Ward (1989), p.47

⁵¹⁸ Crane (1942), p.98

The first tasks of the IWCG were to concentrate an estimated 160,000 isolated graves, to concentrate small cemeteries into larger ones, and to locate and identify the missing, estimated at over half a million.⁵¹⁹ Another task was the programme of horticultural works, after the Commission had benefitted from the assistance of Assistant Director at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Arthur Hill, who had visited thirty seven cemeteries during 1916, provided a report on which plants were suitable to be planted at each site, according to the soil and climate.⁵²⁰ In the spring of 1917, works began to plant trees and shrubs in cemeteries.⁵²¹ Special attention was given to the cemeteries which lay closest to the front lines, as Hill recognised that the garden like cemeteries ‘help to brighten places often very barren and desolate; they cheer our men who are constant visitors to our cemeteries and who frequently pass these cemeteries when on the march’.⁵²² More gardeners arrived throughout 1917, and by the autumn, four nurseries had been established, storing plants from Orleans, Versailles and England.⁵²³ Some horticultural staff had or received military rank, with two sergeants and twenty corporal gardeners engaged, though Longworth reports that there were a number of men who were unfit to report for active service, along with ‘some thirty’ women from Queen Mary’s Auxiliary Army Corps.⁵²⁴ The work of the Commission was not only important because it responded to the public and military need to process the dead, as a means of maintaining morale in relation to the ongoing war, but because it provided an opportunity for many who could not participate in military service, as a result of their gender, health or disability amongst other factors, to contribute to the war effort. It provided a means for the public to engage with the war before its conclusion, whether through employment or through correspondence, something which had not been possible for British families during the South African War, fought much farther away from home. Though the Army recognised the value of the horticultural works of the Commission, they would not supply the necessary tools or funds for plants and seeds, leaving the Commission dependent on the Red Cross.

Despite the huge expansion of works, the focus of the Commission remained the same: the locating and recording of graves. Though, as Ware’s work had expanded to multiple fronts in 1916, the Commission now had the responsibility of locating, concentrating, and maintaining burials and memorials for all Imperial Forces. The Commission was given some powers to give power to their works, permitting them to obtain land in Britain for the erection of

⁵¹⁹ Hogkinson, P. (2007)

⁵²⁰ Longworth (2003), p.21

⁵²¹ Ibid., p.21

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

permanent memorials or cemeteries, and giving them the right to prohibit anyone other than the Commission from erecting private memorials in these cemeteries.⁵²⁵ The Commission could administer funding from the Dominions to support their works and could delegate powers to constituted agencies.⁵²⁶ The Charter characterised the very spirit of the organisation, describing that the works of the Commission would honour and perpetuate the memory of the sacrifice made by all soldiers, ‘to keep alive the ideals for the maintenance and defence of which they have laid down their lives, to strengthen the bonds of union between all classes and races in Our Dominions and to promote a feeling of common citizenship and of loyalty and devotion to Us and to the Empire of which they are subjects’.⁵²⁷

The IWGC hosted their first meeting on 20th November 1917, with representatives from each Dominion in attendance. During this meeting, the IWGC recognised the need to begin the process of designing the cemeteries within which British and Imperial soldiers would be buried, particularly as work to concentrate burials into Commission cemeteries had already begun. During the meeting, the group discusses the fact that the dead included men of all social classes, of many religions, races and occupations, yet a consistent design was required for the graves and the cemeteries. Ware described that the Commission recognised that there would ‘inevitably be considerable difference of opinion on the question how the Cemeteries abroad should be laid out, and what form of memorial should be erected in them’ and acknowledged the need to avoid controversy.⁵²⁸

Ware had already consulted with external contacts in advance of the meeting - in this case, the Curator of the Wallace Collection, the Director of the National Gallery, Aitken of the National Gallery of British Art at Millbank, and two distinguished British architects, Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker - to gain their opinions on the matter of the cemeteries.⁵²⁹ Ware’s consultants could not agree on a design, and so he had been advised to approach Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederick Kenyon, the Director of the British Museum. During the first Commission meeting, a resolve was passed to appoint Kenyon as an advisor. Kenyon was appointed ‘with a view to focussing, and if possible, reconciling, the various opinions on this

⁵²⁵ Ibid., p.28

⁵²⁶ Longworth (2003), p.28

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Kenyon, Lieut. Col. Sir Frederick (1918). *War Graves; How the Cemeteries Abroad Will Be Designed. Report to the Imperial War Graves Commission by Lieut.-Colonel Sir Frederic Kenyon, K.C.B., Director of the British Museum* (online), p3 accessed 08/02/2019. Available from: <https://www.cwgc.org/about-us/history-of-the-cwgc>

⁵²⁹ Longworth (2003), p.28

subject that had found expression among the Armies at the front and the general public at home, and particularly in artistic circles.⁵³⁰

Kenyon was the son of a Professor of English Law at the University of Oxford, and was the great-grandson of Lord Kenyon, 1st Baron Keyon. After completing his own studies at Oxford, Kenyon began working at the British museum as an assistant in the department of manuscripts, to examine and translate a number of Greek papyri. His published works resulted in a number of academic honours, including the award of honorary doctorates from Durham University, and Halle University in Germany.⁵³¹ He was involved in the creation of the British Academy, before later becoming a member of its council. In addition to his academic studies, Frederick also wrote for the general public, with many titles focusing on the Bible, ancient manuscripts or archaeology. Twenty years later, in 1909, Frederic Kenyon was appointed as Director of the British Museum, an unusual appointment given that he had not served as a First Class Assistant or a Head of Department, rising from the position of Assistant Keeper.⁵³² In 1912, he was knighted for his services, reportedly at the insistence of King George himself. His reputation as a man dedicated to the education of the public, with a temperament ‘suited to administration’, made him the perfect appointment for the Commission to help them negotiate the needs of the soldiers and the public, presenting in the information in a way which was palatable to those with influence, and those capable of sharing the aims of the Commission – a strong public relations strategy, given the infancy of public relations as a practise or discipline at this time.⁵³³ Given this purpose, the Commission decided that Kenyon’s terms of reference were to be as follows:

to decide between the various proposals submitted to him as to the architectural treatment and laying out of the cemeteries, and to report his recommendations to the Commission at the earliest possible date-

1. He will consult the representatives of the various churches and religious bodies on any religious questions involved.
2. He will report as to the desirability of forming an advisory Committee from among those who have been consulted, for the purpose of carrying out the proposals agreed upon.”⁵³⁴

Two days after the IWGC meeting, Ware announced that there was to be ‘no distinction...between officers and men lying in the same cemeteries in the form or nature of the

⁵³⁰ Kenyon (1918)

⁵³¹ Miriam, C. Davies (2016), *Dame Kathleen Kenyon: Digging Up the Holy Land*, Oxon & New York: Routledge (First published in 2009 by Left Coast Press, Inc.)

⁵³² Davies, Miriam, C. (2016). *Dame Kathleen Kenyon: Digging Up the Holy Land*. Oxon & New York: Routledge (First published in 2009 by Left Coast Press, Inc.)

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Kenyon (1918)

memorials'.⁵³⁵ Keenly aware of the importance of maintaining good relations with the public, Ware began works for a public statement, released in January 1918 to share these principles:

The Commission feels that it would be inadvisable to leave the provision of memorials to private initiative. If memorials were allowed to be erected in the War Cemeteries according to the preference, taste and means of relatives and friends, the result would be costly monuments put up by the well-to-do over their dead would contrast unkindly with those humbler ones which would be all that poorer folk could afford. Thus, the inspiring memory of the common sacrifice made by all ranks would lose the regularity and orderliness most becoming to the resting places of soldiers, who fought and fell side by side, and would, in the end, grow to be ill-assorted collections of individual monuments. Thus the governing consideration which has influenced the Commission's decision is that those who have given their lives are members of one family, and children of one mother who owes to all an equal tribute of gratitude and affection, and that, in death, all, from General to Private, of whatever race or creed, should receive equal honour under a memorial which should be the common symbol of their comradeship and the cause for which they died.⁵³⁶

These principles would inspire the work of the Commission's architectural works, though, in practise, the various iterations of the Commission had been putting these values in to practise to the best of their ability for the duration of the war, recording the graves of all soldiers. In order to respond to his terms of appointment, and Ware's new principles, Kenyon visited France on two occasions, viewing 'a considerable number of cemeteries of various types' including large base cemeteries (such as Boulogne, Wimereux, Etaples, and Abbeville), large independent cemeteries adjoining towns (Armentieres) or in open country (Lijssenthoek), cemeteries forming adjuncts to French communal cemeteries (Merville, Bailleul, Abbeville and Boulogne), cemeteries adjoining or amalgamated with French military cemeteries (Villers-au-Bois), small isolated cemeteries (Mendinghem, Brandhoek and Warloy-Baillon), small groups of graves (as seen near the mud of Ploegsteert), and finally, single, scattered burials (as witnessed over the whole area of the Somme).⁵³⁷ In fact, the only 'important category of cemeteries' not visited during these two trips was the burials from the days of the Marne and the Aisne in 1916, which by then, were cared for by Allies within the French zone.⁵³⁸ Kenyon 'was able to visit the cemeteries along all parts of the front...and thereby was able to form an idea of the variety of problems arising in connection with their arrangement, decoration and upkeep.'⁵³⁹ These experiences would help Kenyon to write a report entitled 'War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad will be Designed', submitted on 24th January 1918,

⁵³⁵ Longworth (2003), p.33

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid p.5

⁵³⁸ Ibid. p.5

⁵³⁹ Ibid p.5

often referred to today as ‘the Kenyon Report’.⁵⁴⁰ It reflected on themes such as equality of treatment, headstone design, central monuments within IWGC cemeteries, ‘other’ buildings to hold a register of graves, horticultural design, boundaries, cemetery registers, isolated burials and battle memorials, providing recommendations for the execution of the described plans. This report was later published by HMSO in November 1918.

In the final paragraph of the conclusion, Kenyon wrote that ‘it is in the hope that the scheme here put forward will secure for all time the permanence of this tribute and its embodiment in a memorial worthy of the Empire and of the sons (and daughters also) who have given their lives for it, that I have the honour to present this report to the Commission’. Here, the language used to describe the work speaks of a sense of duty and honour to the war dead, both personally for Kenyon, but also for all those involved, though we are not yet starting to witness a religious use of language towards the dead which would develop in the years after the war (to be explored further in the subsequent section). The report speaks about the equality of treatment of those who fell, yet the proposal of a tribute in the form of a memorial ‘worthy of the Empire’ is a reminder that whilst the work of the IWGC was advanced, and would be considered liberal today, it was still a product of Imperialism and therefore colonialism, so ‘the Empire’ was still viewed within the lens of British culture, faith and tradition, meaning that equality could never truly be applied, despite the best of intentions from Ware and his colleagues, despite their advances in policy related to the treatment of the war dead during the First World War. The Commission accepted his recommendations on 18th February 1918.

A very important question is that of the single scattered burials. Over all the battlefields bodies have been buried where they fell and have not been moved since. This is particularly noticeable in the Somme area, where thousands of burials have been found and a large proportion identified by the conscientious labour of the Directorate's burial parties. All these, whether identified or not, and of whatever nationality have been made up into mounds and marked with a wooden cross; and wherever the fighting was severe, the crosses cluster thickly, but in no arrangement. At present, removal is impossible for military reasons, but these reasons are purely temporary. Exhumation is in any case only possible with French assent; but the time will come when this area will be given back to cultivation, and then every argument will be in favour of the removal of the bodies. The land is now a wilderness of shell holes, overgrown with rank vegetation, cumbered with barbed wire, with bombs and shells and fragments of shells half buried all over it, and sown thickly with burials. As it is now, the plough cannot touch it, and to plough over these thousands of bodies would be an unspeakably revolting task.

⁵⁴⁰ Kenyon (1918)

This passage describes some of the variations in battlefield burials, with different patterns of distribution in former areas of intense fighting, but it also identifies difficulties in gaining consent to exhume located soldiers. The report goes on to make suggestions on a new operational approach to begin during the demobilization period:

But if the clearance of the land be undertaken, the bodies would be removed to selected cemeteries, the shells and the wire would be cleared away, the holes would be partially filled up in the process, and the farmer would have some chance of reclaiming the land for cultivation. This work can only be done during the period of demobilization; then labour will be plentiful and the clearance can be carried through rapidly and effectually. But it is important that the principle should be settled in consultation with the French authorities in advance, so that the sites of the future cemeteries may be chosen and planned beforehand, and that all may be ready for the commencement of the work as soon as the moment arrives.⁵⁴¹

There would also be a need to concentrate smaller ‘cemeteries’, typically containing 10-40 bodies, into larger cemeteries which could be maintained with greater ease. Though this meant the disturbance of soldier graves, it would ensure that the bodies were placed in cemeteries with better access by roads, and ultimately reducing the cost of both visiting and maintaining the cemeteries, which were designed to last for all of perpetuity, a new precedent in British burial traditions where grave licenses were typically only granted for exclusive use of a grave plot for a specified amount of time.⁵⁴² Planning for these permanent graves and cemeteries, complete with their central memorials meant that the IWGC had to work hard to ensure that the final graves chosen were able to represent the regiment, nationality, and religion of each and every individual buried, whilst providing a respectful burial in keeping with their cultural or religious requirements.

In the third meeting of the IWGC, held on 24th July 1918, the Committee members heard the recommendations made by ‘the Committee appointed at the last meeting to consider the special questions arising with regard to the graves of Indian soldiers’.⁵⁴³ This statement implies that the previous meeting of the IWGC was used to draft the recommendations submitted to the second meeting of the Imperial War Conference in 1918. These recommendations were:

1. That, except in cases where there was the slightest apprehension of the grave being moved, Mohammedan graves should be left undisturbed.
2. That any bodies of Hindus which had received burial should, where possible, be exhumed and cremated in some central place where it was possible to assign the ashes to the elements. If exhumation were not

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ ‘Commission meeting No. 03 – Jul 1918’, CWGC/2/2/1/3

possible bodies should be allowed to remain in their present position and marked with headstones bearing the device "Here fell etc."

3. That in cases where exhumation was necessary, the bodies of Mohammedans should be concentrated in the central reserved cemetery. If exhumation were not possible the graves should be marked by a headstone.
4. That instructions be given to Sir E. Lutyens and Mr. Baker to draw up a design for both a Mosque and Temple, with due regard to the requirements of the respective faiths, the situation to be decided hereafter but to be in some accessible part of France, and that these building should serve as central memorials to all Indians who had fallen in France and Belgium during the present war.⁵⁴⁴

Ware reported that this matter had been discussed at the Imperial War Conference in 1917 and that the 'Indian representatives drew special attention to these recommendations and laid great stress on the desirability of their being carried out', demonstrating a long term commitment to the issue of respectful burial for dominion soldiers.⁵⁴⁵ Though considerations were shown for other ethnic groups, such as the 'Egyptian Mohammedans', 'Copts', Indians and Jews, acts which may have been considered socially progressive in Britain at the time, there principle of equality was still limited by restrictions that an Imperial outlook facilitated.⁵⁴⁶

Another task for the Commission, as the number of dead continued to rise with significant Battles such as the Third Battle of Ypres in November 1917 contributing huge numbers of casualties to the overall total of losses, was the planning for the post-war task of clearing the dead. Later Ware would reflect that over 150,000 scattered graves are known in France and Belgium... Either they must be removed to cemeteries where they can be reverently cared for, or they must be ploughed up with the soil'.⁵⁴⁷ Of course the latter option would be most distressing to both the relatives of the deceased, and the individuals tasked with the ploughing of corpses, and so it was necessary that plans were made to concentrate these graves into the cemeteries already established, or still to be established by the Commission on behalf of the Empire. Following the Armistice, on 11th November 1918, the Commission found that their list of missing soldiers still contained around 500,000 names, and so a new stage of works was entered, the post-war clearance of the battlefields to concentrate burials into imperial cemeteries.⁵⁴⁸

4.4 The Post-war Clearance of the Battlefields: The Efficacy of British Identity Discs

In the post-war period, it was essential to clear the battlefields, not only to ensure that civilians could return to their land, but to attempt to consolidate the large number of missing

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Crane (2003), p.86

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 105

⁵⁴⁸ Gibson and Ward (1989), p.47

and deceased soldiers. As France had provided the permanent provision of land, along with the necessary powers to establish military cemeteries, it was necessary that Britain was seen to make some effort to concentrate the dead into these cemeteries, particularly as the public continued to press the Imperial War Graves Commission's administrative workers in London for information about soldier's whose fate had not yet been confirmed. Rumours were rife in Britain that Germany was still holding Prisoners of War in secret camps, leaving many families holding onto the faint hope that their loved one was still living in one of these camps, rather than lying, unknown on the battlefields.⁵⁴⁹ Any public perception of inaction could generate a negative public reaction, and risked undermining the huge efforts and expenses that had been contributed in efforts to establish the IWGC cemeteries. The removal of the dead from the battlefield should be seen as a necessary part of the process of withdrawing a military presence from an occupied area, however, the post-war exercise to clear the battlefields following the conclusion of the First World War is worthy of particularly focus for three reasons. Firstly, studying this period allows us to consider how the political positioning of the IWGC as its duties became increasingly different from military objectives, allowing us to further interrogate operational practice and international collaboration along with British political attitudes to the management of the war dead following the conclusion of the war. Secondly, despite being an understudied period (a fact identified by Hodgkinson in 2007, which still remains true), the post-war exercise to clear the battlefields can be understood as an act to mitigate the emotional needs of the home front, or as we may now call it, an exercise in public relations – an area which Fabian Ware was particularly skilled in assessing.⁵⁵⁰ Lastly, data produced during the First World War period allows us to interrogate the effectivity of the identity discs during the First World War, reflecting upon its success in identifying soldiers who died during the war.

By exploring this period of military burial practice as separate from the war time military burial practice we can seek to understand the specific difficulties faced after the cessation of war within their own specific context, whilst also considering the ever-shifting position of Ware's organization, and the political response to his works.

Following the Armistice, the battlefields were left strewn with the remnants of war, including explosives, fired ammunition, litter associated with food or storage, and more gruesomely, a

⁵⁴⁹ Durey, Michael (2015). The Search for Answers on the Missing in the Great War: Lt High Henshall Williamson and His Parent's Struggle with officialdom, 1916-2001. *British Journal for Military History*. 2(1), pp. 86-104

⁵⁵⁰ Hogkinson (2007)

myriad of isolated graves, accidental inhumations and the uncleared war dead.⁵⁵¹ The Imperial War Graves Commission could now take a more organised operational approach to search and recovery in relation to the location of war graves, which was necessary in order to concentrate an estimated 160,000 isolated graves into established cemeteries, whilst also relocating bodies buried within small cemeteries into larger cemeteries.⁵⁵² Additionally, the IWGC had to consider the presence of unrecorded bodies and/or burials in each area in an attempt to reconcile the overwhelming numbers of soldiers still reported as missing. On 18th November 1918, Macready hosted a conference on the issue of the war dead at General Headquarters, and only three days later exhumation work began in the 5th Army Area, with works soon extending to the 3rd and 1st Army Areas.⁵⁵³ Volunteers were recruited amongst the ranks, rewarded for their duties with extra pay of 2/6d. per day, with work offered to the Canadians in the Albert/Courcelette area and Vimy Ridge, and to the Australians at Poizieres and Villers Bretonneux.⁵⁵⁴

This was important for a variety of reasons. Firstly, there was the need to answer to the nation, providing closure for the families of the missing and those whose grave could not be located. Secondly, particularly on the Western Front, there was the need to return the land to the owners for the rebuilding of decimated homes and to restore agricultural land to farmers. With the Armistice came demobilisation which meant that the British Army had to develop new units to undertake this work and recruit accordingly.

The devastated landscape, which had made it so difficult to attend to the dead during the war, was still littered with active explosives (making any search operation dangerous work), with craters of varying sizes left by former explosions. These new features made it difficult to access all areas of the battlefield, with many bodies deposited within shell holes or similar features of war. Trenches, along with natural features could also reveal the remains of dead soldiers, in varying stages of decomposition depending upon the interval of time between the occurrence death and interaction with the corpse. The war time images shown (*figs. 55-62*) do not represent the decomposed remains located during the post-war period but do allow us to visualise how bodies could be found. Works would almost immediately be stalled by the

⁵⁵¹ Hodgkinson 2007

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ CWGC/1/1/7/B/42, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 1294/3 Pt. 1

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

difficulties in getting supplies into the necessary areas, along with problems in finding areas suitable for erecting a camp to provide accommodation for the volunteer workers.



Figure 55 American signallers (telephone and carrier pigeon) in a shell hole near Larné, 15 April 1918. Telephone lines are broken so messages are being sent by pigeons. Note two dead soldiers in the shell hole. IWM Q 58208



Figure 56 Soldier of the Royal Engineers collecting the identity disc from the wrist of a Highlander killed by a shell on the edge of a water filled crater IWM Q 3963



Figure 57 British trenches with unburied dead soldiers, April 1918. IWM Q 23880



Figure 58 British crew of a Lewis machine gun post lying dead in a trench, April 1918. IWM Q 23682



Figure 59 Battle of Pilckem Ridge. Half a dozen dead German soldiers strewn about the wreckage of a shell hole, 31 July 1917. IWM Q 4218



Figure 60 Dead British soldier in a trench near Guillemont. IWM Q 3964



Figure 61 Dead British soldier in a trench near Guillemont. IWM Q 3964



Figure 62 Battle of Amiens. Stretcher-bearers passing British dead while taking back wounded alongside a communication trench. Behind the northern flank of the advance, near Albert. 9 August 1918. IWM Q 10378

Hogkinson reports that in January 1919, works had to be stopped as a result of the poor weather, with work resuming on 17th Sept 1919 with an increased number of staff. The number men required to exhume, transport and re-inter each body expanded from five or six to nine, with many teams required to ensure that multiple bodies could be moved each day.⁵⁵⁵ As a result of the huge amount of labour required to move each individual corpse, by 14th March 1919, only 1750 exhumations had been reported, excluding the Canadian efforts.⁵⁵⁶ The inability to confirm the fate of missing soldiers exacerbated public anxieties, which were 'fuelled by the fact that the deaths of so many missing soldiers could not be confirmed.'⁵⁵⁷ In February 1919, Sir William Joynson-Hicks had raised a query in the House of Commons about the inability to confirm the location of so many missing soldiers. Winston Churchill admitted that 'about 64,800' servicemen were missing without a trace, though Durey notes that this figure did not include 97,000 soldiers who were missing, but officially presumed to be dead.⁵⁵⁸

The sheer volume of dead soldiers on the battlefields, buried and unburied, meant that the exhumation work required a huge workforce for a sustained period of time, if there was any hope of completing the task. Despite the need for labour, as demobilisation continued, the volunteer work force began to dwindle as men returned home, prompting Churchill and Field-Marshal Haig to pursue further volunteers.⁵⁵⁹ In April 1919 it was estimated that 15,000

⁵⁵⁵ Hogkinson 2007

⁵⁵⁶ CWGC/1/1/7/B/42 Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, File WG 1294/3 Pt.1. Cited in Hodgkinson (2007)

⁵⁵⁷ e.g., *The Times*, 26 November 1918, cited in Durey (2015), p.95

⁵⁵⁸ Durey (2015), p.96

⁵⁵⁹ CWGC/1/1/7/B/42, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 1294/3 Pt. 1

Labour Company personnel, 1,500 Cemetery Party personnel and 1,787 IWGC staff would be required to continue the required works.⁵⁶⁰

War Zones were divided into areas, with further subdivisions within each area. Each exhumation company featured 32 men, who were provided with "two pairs of rubber gloves, two shovels, stakes to mark the location of graves found, canvas and rope to tie up remains, stretchers, cresol (a poisonous colourless isomeric phenol) and wire cutters."⁵⁶¹ A Survey Officer would designate an area to be search, usually based on DGR&E records, which were not always accurate, and his team would search each area.⁵⁶² As was the case in 1914, men learned through experience, with the IWGC claiming that up to 80% of bodies would not be found without the employment of experienced men, further compounding the ability of the Commission to respond to the task at hand given the limited proportion of men with these specific skills who were able and willing to continue with such macabre duties.⁵⁶³ Christie describes four main methods of identifying graves in the field during this period:

- i. Rifles or stakes protruding from the ground, bearing helmets or equipment;
- ii. Partial remains or equipment on the surface or protruding from the ground;
- iii. Rat holes - often small bones or pieces of equipment would be brought to the surface by the rats;
- iv. Discolouration of grass, earth or water - grass was often a vivid bluish-green with broader blades where bodies were buried, while earth and water turned a greenish black or grey colour⁵⁶⁴

The remains would be placed upon a canvas, as seen in *fig 65*, with any identifying items wrapped separately and recorded to confirm the identity where possible. These canvas bundles would be transported to cemeteries for burial. As can be seen in the figures below, the often skeletonised remains recovered would result in a far less substantial 'body bag' than one might expect, particularly where only partial remains were recovered. *Figures 63-66* from the Bawtree Collection depict full and partial skeletonised remains, though it is not clear if these images were taken during the war or during the post-war clearance of the battlefields.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ N Christie, N. (1999). *Canadians on the Somme*. Ottawa: CEF Books, p.59 cited in Hogkinson 2007

⁵⁶² Christie (1999), 57-61. Cited in Hogkinson 2007

⁵⁶³ CWGC/1/1/7/B/42, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 1294/3 Pt. 1

⁵⁶⁴ Christie (1999), p. 53 cited in Hodgkinson



Figure 63 Bawtree Collection, IWM Q 100914



Figure 64 Bawtree Collection, IWM Q 100630



Figure 65 Bawtree Collection, IWM Q 100916



Figure 66 Bawtree Collection, IWM Q 100915

One major problem which hindered the recovery of the War Dead during the post-war clearing process was the lack of tools and materials for the job. Captain W.E. Southgate, wrote of the problems experienced by the No. 83 Labour Company working at Cambrai in September 1919:

This unit joined this group on 18/9/1919 and has only been able to exhume 190 bodies. This is due to a lack of canvas... There is no Motor Ambulance doing duty with this unit, although one was detailed to report over two months

ago... We have only 30 picks and there is a shortage of shovels (we have about 200 for nearly 500 men).⁵⁶⁵

This could, at least in part, explain some of the reported issues relating to a lack of productivity. Private W.F. Macbeth wrote on 23rd April 1919 that:

Although we have only been going a few weeks we have had two strikes, we refused to work until we had better means for handling the bodies, had better food and cut out all ceremonial parades.⁵⁶⁶

However, the lack of suitable working materials, and suitability of volunteer staff was not the only problem encountered during the post-war clearance. Exhumation companies focused their efforts on the concentration of the largest number of bodies possible, in the shortest time possible, paying little attention to the process of identification.⁵⁶⁷ These issues of staffing, equipment, poor working conditions and low morale, resulted in slow progress in the clearance of bodies, a fact which would not go unobserved by France and Belgium. In April 1920, during a meeting of the IWGC, Ware reported that the French felt that the IWGC “had not kept their agreement with them” with regards to the clearance of the War Dead.⁵⁶⁸ The French had ‘made very strong representation’ to the Commission ‘that the Army in France had undertaken that it would clear the British zone of all French and German isolated graves’, and whilst it had done so ‘to a certain extent’, but only ‘so long as it had German prisoners at its disposal for the work’.⁵⁶⁹ As soon as the German POWs had been sent back to Germany, ‘the Army had no longer any labour available for the purpose and had ceased to do the work’, which had prompted the French had described ‘quite tactfully, but...firmly’ that the British Army in the Field ‘had not kept their agreement with them’. Ware had pointed out that this was ‘purely a War Office matter’, and ‘not a matter which concerned the Commission at all’, though upon reflection of the documents, Ware had recognised that the agreement with the French ‘was more definite than we had been aware at the time and we have not carried out the agreement’.⁵⁷⁰ As a result of the need to consult with the Adjutant-General on the issue, Ware requested time for these discussions with the promise of reporting back to the Commission in due course.

⁵⁶⁵ W.E. Southgate, IWM Docs Misc 136(2118) cited in Hogkinson (2007)

⁵⁶⁶ Hogkinson (2007)

⁵⁶⁷ CWGC/1/1/7/B/42, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 1294/3 Pt. 1

⁵⁶⁸ CWGC/2/2/1/22, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission held at The Office of Works, St. James's Park on Tuesday, 20 April 1920

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

The minutes of this meeting are of particular significance, as the contents allow us to re-assess the effectivity of the identity discs reflecting upon contemporary data. Towards the end of the meeting, Ware referred to a 'statement as to exhumations' given to attendees which presented the following figures for works in France and Belgium: There had been 128,577 re-internments in total, with 55,508 of these already known, 6,273 identified for the first time, and 66,796 remaining unknown.⁵⁷¹ This meant that around 50% of graves could not be identified. Ware described that in 1914, he had quoted the expected number of identifications to be 50%, with the actual statistic in 1920 coming out 'a little above that'.⁵⁷² Ware was keen to point out that some of the 66,796 unknown men may still receive their names, referring to a scenario where bodies were discovered in a dug-out – if it was possible to identify one or two men, it would be possible to know the names of the others collectively, by referring the Battalion records even if it was not possible to correctly identify them individually.⁵⁷³

Ware concluded the conversation by returning to a query raised by Mr Blankenburg at the previous monthly meeting of the Commission, when he had asked for information on the role of identity discs in the identification process.⁵⁷⁴ Though Mr Blankenberg was absent at the April meeting, Ware reported that "identity discs have not proved satisfactory, owing to the way that these identity discs have gone to pulp".⁵⁷⁵ Though the fibre had been introduced to prevent the 1907 discs produced from thin aluminium from affecting injuries, the fibre disc 'proved most unsatisfactory'.⁵⁷⁶ The double disc had been introduced 'so that a man found dead always had a disc on him', but the poor material had in fact been 'the chief reason of there being such a large number of unidentified, is owing to the unsatisfactory material out of which the discs were made'.⁵⁷⁷ The fibre discs were vulnerable to damp, making them unsuitable for purpose within a typical burial context. The cord or string from which the discs were suspended was also subject to rapid decomposition which could lead to snapping, and the subsequent loss of the identity disc.⁵⁷⁸ Though the Commission Committee quickly moved on in that meeting, there are other CWGC documents which provide more detailed

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ See CWGC/2/2/1/21, COMMISSION MEETING NO.21 - Mar 1920 for the original enquiry

⁵⁷⁵ CWGC/2/2/1/22, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission held at The Office of Works, St. James's Park on Tuesday, 20 April 1920

⁵⁷⁶ CWGC/2/2/1/22, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission held at The Office of Works, St. James's Park on Tuesday, 20 April 1920

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Edwards, Nina (2015). *Dressed for War: Uniform, Civilian Clothing and Trappings 1914-18*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris

information on the reliability of the identity disc. The D.A.A.G. in charge of Effects had provided the following statistics which were reviewed during the April meeting:

20% cases are identified by discs.

25% are confirmed by discs.

30% are identified by other methods.

25% cases are not identified.⁵⁷⁹

This means that only 45% of soldiers were being identified by their identity discs as early as 1920, though the author of the report was keen to acknowledge that the figures were misleading ‘unless it is borne in mind that they refer only to effects received’, with many bodies recovered with ‘no effects whatever’, or ‘where the articles found are in such a condition as to provide no clue as to the identity of the body, and are therefore not sent to the effects branch’.⁵⁸⁰ The report provides further insight into the broader effectivity of the discs:

On the general question of the relative value for identification purposes of the various types of disc, this Branch, whose experience on this particular subject is very large, reports that the ordinary red and green discs were most unsatisfactory, as exposure to the elements and burial even for comparatively short periods rendered them more or less unreadable.⁵⁸¹

The ‘thin metal disc used by the original Expeditionary Force’ had been ‘more satisfactory’, with the Australian Forces reporting a similar experience. The ‘thick deeply impressed metal disc’ used by the Canadian Forces was ‘particularly satisfactory’. The French and Portuguese designs were ‘equally effective’, but the ‘German flat metal disc was the most satisfactory of all’.⁵⁸² Essentially, all reported models were superior to the British fibre pattern. The report concludes with a warning that it ‘must, of course, be remembered that there are serious objections to the use of metal discs from other points of view besides identification’.⁵⁸³ The reasons for these objections are not provided.

The fibre discs had been introduced to prevent the worsening of injuries, which was acknowledged in both the report and the minutes of the Commission’s April 1920 meeting, but the durability of the discs did not appear to have been considered with serious attention at the point of development. Given this information, archaeologists working on the recovery of

⁵⁷⁹ ‘Unsigned letter dated 1st April 1920 (29/C/7/S)’ in CWGC/1/1/7/B/43, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 1294/3 Pt. 2

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

British soldiers should not expect to find British fibre identity discs, except perhaps in the most extreme conditions (such as a desert environment) and should focus on the recording of effects located on or around the body using adapted skeleton sheets and/or 3D visualisation methods (e.g., photogrammetry) to order to assist with post-excavation processes to attempt to establish the identity of the recovered individual.

Despite the best efforts of the Commission to avoid scandal, there was significant backlash from the general public who objected to the ban on the repatriation of the bodies of the fallen. The scandal was such that a debate was led by Sir James Remnant in Parliament on the 4th May 1920, demanding that ‘relations of the dead’ should have the right to erect the type of headstone or tribute that they wished, and that ‘where it is possible the body itself might be brought home to rest in England’.⁵⁸⁴ The debate was passed to William Burdett-Coutts who spoke in favour of the principles created by the Commission, and Robert Cecil who spoke on behalf of those who opposed the ban on repatriation, and pressured the house to ensure that uniform graves were not provided against the wishes of the families of the deceased. The debate was closed by Churchill who did not support the motion:

I must, however, for a moment dwell upon the practical aspect of the case. This is a unique undertaking from the point of view of its size and scale and the conditions under which the work is to be carried out. In France and Flanders alone there are 500,000 graves to be dealt with. The means for making tombstones in this or any other country are limited—local and limited—and they are more or less proportioned to the ordinary rate of mortality. This task which is now entrusted to the Imperial War Graves Commission can only be achieved within a reasonable period of time if standardisation plays a large part in the production of the tombstones. It is not merely a question of standardisation, but of these memorials arriving at the graveyards at the same time so that the work can be immediately undertaken and the graveyard brought into complete existence. Many of these places...are situated in the desolate war-shattered wildernesses of the Western Front, 10 or 20 miles from the present habitations of men. It is necessary that the working parties engaged on this work shall be fed, housed and maintained in these districts by an elaborate organisation, and it is absolutely necessary that as each cemetery is taken in hand the memorial shall arrive at the right time, and shall not be broken or shattered in transit, so that the work can be completed as speedily as possible.⁵⁸⁵

Churchill went on to discuss the proposed works by the Commission and the symbolism of monuments such as the Stone of Remembrance or the Cross of Sacrifice. This was enough to satiate Remnant who proposed to accept Churchill’s suggestions and so the amendment was

⁵⁸⁴ Parliament, House of Commons (1920), *Imperial War Graves Commission*, HC Deb 04 May 1920, vol. 128 cc.1929-72. Available at <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1920/may/04/imperial-war-graves-commission> [accessed 08.02.2019]

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

thus withdrawn, and the Commission began to plan how they would move forward with the works.⁵⁸⁶

On 18th May the Commission hosted their 23rd meeting during which they discussed the design of the Cross of Sacrifice, before revisiting the ‘question of the Missing’.⁵⁸⁷ Initially, the position of the Commission had been that the Missing ‘should be commemorated by name in the cemetery nearest to where they fell’, but to do this, it had been necessary to initiate ‘a very big enquiry’, with the assistance of the Director of Military Operations.⁵⁸⁸ The whole front had been mapped out, ‘showing where casualties had been the heaviest, and where the Missing where likely the be the most numerous’, with approximately 300 cemeteries selected for the commemoration of these Missing soldiers.⁵⁸⁹ There were still an estimated 200,000 Missing in France, which the Commission assuming that ‘many of these...would be “Unknown” graves and would be commemorated in graves marked “Unknown British Soldier”’.⁵⁹⁰ The burials exhumed would need to be cross referenced with Battalion Records, and until this work was completed, ‘it would not be possible to get the names of those who fell near each of the selected cemeteries’.⁵⁹¹

It was estimated that it would take two years to obtain all of the required information, noting that it could ‘of course’ be done quicker if a large staff of clerks could be put to the task, ‘but it must be remembered that skilled labour would be necessary’, with such skilled clerks being ‘very scarce’, and little accommodation available even if they could be recruited.⁵⁹² The Director of Works had put forward a suggestion ‘that the Missing should be commemorated by regiments’, with ‘certain front cemeteries’ allocated to specific regiments, with ‘chapels or other memorials in these cemeteries’ added to ‘commemorate the Missing of the regiments to which they were allocated’.⁵⁹³ Though this work could be carried out quite quickly, the Director had reason to think that this approach might ‘not meet the wishes of all the relatives’, with a ‘strong minority’ expected to want more. He referred to Mr Thorne’s speech in the House of Common’s where he had expressed a wish to ‘go to the place where his boy fell and fine something there marking the spot’, or at least to see him commemorated in the nearest cemetery. However, he had specifically expressed that ‘if his boy had fallen on the Somme and was to be commemorated elsewhere, that would not be the same thing’. Above all, his

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ CWGC/2/2/1/23, COMMISSION MEETING NO.22 - Apr 1920, WG 1039

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

speech expressed that the relatives should be consulted, even though it was difficult to know how to go about such a survey.⁵⁹⁴

Sir Frederic Kenyon had made an alternative suggestion, recommending that there 'should be some small monument designed...which could contain about 100 names', with these monuments placed in cemeteries at different points. The architects of the Commission had rejected this proposal as for cemeteries set to commemorate large numbers of Missing would require multiple obelisks, interfering with the designs of their cemeteries. They had preferred the idea of 'the names being carved on the wall of the cemetery', but it was impossible to know how many names would need to be inscribed until the search for the Missing had been completed, with Lieut-General Sir George MacDonogh (appointed Adjutant-General to the Forces on 11th Jan 1918) indicating that the work of exhumation and searching the battlefields for graves would 'not be finished before the end of September' 1920.⁵⁹⁵

Indeed, that September, it was reported to the Committee that there was still 'a large number of bodies' being found in the Passchendaele district, which 'certainly warranted the maintenance of the exhumation staff', a position strongly endorsed by the Australian Government.⁵⁹⁶ Adjutant General Macdonogh confirmed that he had no plans to close down the work 'until they were certain that there were only a few scattered bodies here and there'.⁵⁹⁷ The Directorate was soon due to be closed down, leaving the IWGC responsible for the concentration of graves, despite not being a part of the British Army, but Macdonogh was clear that he would 'not recommend the closing down so long as there were large numbers found as at present'.⁵⁹⁸ Ware stated that he had 'thought that the Adjutant General would admit that the War Graves Commission were not competent to take on work of the kind on a large scale', having only the ability to contemplate such a small number of exhumations that the work could be undertaken by the French or Belgian Authorities.⁵⁹⁹ Under these circumstances, the discussions had to be postponed to discuss the arrangements for future exhumations, and who would fund these works if they were to be undertaken by the Commission. In the October meeting of the Commission, the Committee discussed public tenders 'for the construction of forty-five more cemeteries in France and Belgium',

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ CWGC/2/2/1/26, Commission Meeting No.26 – Sept 1920, WG 1265

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

demonstrating that the work was still not slowing down for the Commission as the exhumation teams continued to locate bodies across the former battlefields.⁶⁰⁰

The exhumation works would continue for another year until the War Office announced on 8th October 1921 that all military staff working on the exhumation efforts were to return to England. That month, the Secretary of State for War, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans attended the 37th meeting of the IWGC, to discuss the closing down of the exhumation works being performed by the Army, given that there was ‘still a certain amount of pressure from the public, both in the press and in private correspondence, protesting against the closing down of the work of search and exhumation.’⁶⁰¹ Worthington-Evans said that as he was ‘satisfied that the work had been carried out so thoroughly in the past...the Government would not be justified in continuing longer this very expensive military organisation in France and Belgium’.⁶⁰² Though he recognised that there might be public complaints at this, he also recognised that notifications of bodies found were likely to continue for some years, and in these instances an officer ‘could be deputed to go out and make the necessary arrangements for internment’.⁶⁰³ He also proposed that where parents of next-of-kin had reason to believe that they knew the location of a body, they could put forward their case to the Commission, who could investigate, and make the necessary arrangements for exhumation and reburial where possible. This would prevent giving rise ‘to a feeling among the public that no steps were being taken to collect and rebury the bodies which might be found’.⁶⁰⁴

The Commission did not consider that this response would adequately respond to the public mood, with Kipling requesting that it be ‘made quite clear’ that it was the War Office who had stopped the search and exhumation works. Sir Robert Hudson was quick to point out that if it was known to the public that bodies were being found at the rate of 200 a week at the time the military search parties were disbanded, the public would want an explanation.⁶⁰⁵ There had been considerable difficulties recovering the bodies of Australians in France, with visitors complaining ‘that there were remains lying about in many places and that no effort was being made to recover them’.⁶⁰⁶ Worthington-Evans accepted that he would need to explain the closure of works to the public, recommending that the Commission may need to increase their staff, to allow for the public to submit their cases and receive an appropriate

⁶⁰⁰ CWGC/2/2/1/27, Commission Meeting No.27 – Oct 1920, WG 1306

⁶⁰¹ CWGC/2/2/1/37, Commission Meeting No.37 – Oct 1921, WG 1681

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

response, asking for the Commission to agree with an announcement that he could present in the House of Commons.

This prompted the final shift in works, and the complete separation of the IWGC from the Army now that the Directorate was closed and the active searches for burials were concluding, but it marked a new direction in the works of the Commission. Several cemeteries were still undergoing construction and works were ongoing to compile lists of the Missing in order to create registers for the cemeteries. Works to move final Commission gravestones into the cemeteries, replacing temporary wooden markers would need to continue for a number of years, with a backlog of grave photographs still due to be posted to relatives (owing to a lack of funds for this particular job), and the Commission was now entirely responsible for responding to public cases relating to Missing soldiers.⁶⁰⁷

As the Commission had expected, the cessation of the exhumation works by the War Office did not result in the cessation of alerts to the discover of human remains, even years later. On 24th February 1927, the registrar of the Commission wrote to the Director of Records of his attempts to obtain information about the number of bodies which were recovered in ‘the French and Belgian areas’ from their original place of burials, compared with the number of bodies discovered during general concentration. The results gave the author ‘a certain amount of surprise’, given his suggestions ‘about a year ago’ that approximately 5,000 bodies could be expected to be recovered in the next few years. This letter reported that 318,681 “missing” soldiers had been recovered, with an additional 144,202 recovered from unmarked graves.⁶⁰⁸ This report brought into question the Commission’s accepted idea of the number of missing dead into, acknowledging that the figures show ‘something like 100,000 remains unaccounted for’; which would affect the Commission’s future work considerably. Over eight years after the end of the War, the Commission and the government had still failed to truly comprehend the number of missing and unidentifiable War Dead, or offer any viable, affordable solution to the problem.

On 24th October 1931, Sgd. BSCG reported that up to October 1921, the Commission had exhumed and reburied 204,000 bodies.⁶⁰⁹ Despite the abandonment of the recovery exercises around this time, large numbers of British soldiers were still recovered on battlefields and reported in international media. In 1932, French newspapers reported the recovery of 2,785 French bodies. An Englishman wrote to the *Etat Civil Militaire* to enquire whether any of

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ CWGC/1/1/7/B/45, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 12943 pt.4

⁶⁰⁹ CWGC/1/1/7/B/44, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 12943 pt.3

these ‘were the bodies of Englishmen’.⁶¹⁰ The *Etat Civil Militaire* reported that the French Authorities ‘never proceed with the exhumation of English soldiers in the course of such searches’, but that the War Graves Commission were immediately informed.⁶¹¹

The IWGC acknowledged the need to return land to its pre-war owners across the landscape of war. This may not be as honourable an intention as it first appears, as the IWGC acknowledged in 1927 that ‘three years’ ploughing would clear agricultural land as a general rule’.⁶¹² Archival evidence indicates that French farmers were cooperative with the Commission and reported the discovery of bodies on a regular basis, particularly during the ploughing season.⁶¹³ On the 6th April 1927, the Director of Records described to the Vice-Chairman ‘a farmer near Neuve-Chapelle who is closely in touch with the office at Arras and who has reported bodies every year since 1921’.⁶¹⁴

4.5 Conclusion

Though Fabian Ware is best known for his establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission, and the role of his organisation in shaping the memory of the First World War, his role in shaping and developing military identification practice has been overlooked. Though the idea for Ware’s organisation likely took influence from the work of organisations such as the Guild of Loyal Women, who had first developed graves registration practice in response to the South African War, Ware’s team built upon this and developed strategies of search & recovery, reporting and knowledge exchange, ultimately removing a significant proportion of public pressure from military leaders. Ware reshaped the response to fallen soldiers into a duty which was both a military and a civilian duty, in keeping with the military burial traditions of France and Germany described within Chapter Two. This shifting of responsibility continues to shape our expectations with regards to the treatment of fallen soldiers today, with the expectation that families will receive prompt, factual information in the event of a military death, and support with the burial process, along with assistance for the repatriation process if required. With Fabian Ware, positioning was everything, with a significant example being the consultation for the 1916 identity disc, which demonstrated Ware’s ability to utilise positive relationships to his advantage. Ware’s close relationship with

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ CWGC/1/1/7/B/44, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 12943 pt.3; CWGC/1/1/7/B/45, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 12943 pt.4

⁶¹⁴ CWGC/1/1/7/B/44, Exhumation - France And Belgium - General File, WG 12943 pt.3

the French Army developed in 1914-15 had allowed him to access information about the French identification system which he used to demonstrate a military need for the changes he required in order to meet civilian expectations. In this instance, the change was the 1916 double identity, which remains an iconic piece of military ephemera to this day, allowing families to hold a physical connection to their family's military past. Researchers can also use the information stamped onto identity discs to gain information about the stories of individual soldiers, making use of online archive services such as Ancestry and Fold-3 to access historical records to learn about the wearer of the disc.

Ware had a unique ability to situate his work within the broader context of military operations, and civilian needs during and after the war, reflecting upon how his work would help to maintain public support for the war. Though the Red Cross, and other humanitarian NGOs such as the Guild of Loyal Women had assisted the British Army in responding to wounded and dead soldiers killed in battle, no other organisation had become incorporated into the military machine to such a great extent, nor had such an influence over military and national policy. However, tempting it might be to hail Ware as an exceptional example of an external individual driving national and military change, his achievements must be viewed within both national and international context. Ware's repositioning in 1916 was part of a broader pattern of elite individuals gaining influence within government ministries, with a number of these ministries, including the Ministry of Blockade and the Ministry of Munitions providing a stabilizing bridge between civilian authorities and the armed services, as the GRC and DGR&E had done.⁶¹⁵ Ware's ability to expand into an Imperial organisation in 1917 came as a result of international anti-imperialist movements, which presented the opportunity for creative innovators to find new ways to reassert an imperial presence, and ideas of imperial power in former colonies in various ways, with the Imperial War Graves Commission forming just one of these outputs. Ware's ability to build relationships, use his position as leverage to solicit change, and to read the national mood allowed him to promote his works during broader opportunities for rapid change, situating his desired changes as developments which would contribute to both national and international goals.

The most striking result of Ware's work, was the creation of an organisation which could create a uniform response to non-uniform practice on the battlefield with regards to burial and identification, mitigating for a lack of consistency in military learning and the impact of this on identification practice, personal misuse of identifying items, and variable battlefield traditions. Through this uniformity, Ware was able to nationalise individual grief, elevating

⁶¹⁵ Dehne (2016), p. 342

the 'Missing' to a quasi-religious status to mitigate the absence of an individual grave, and thus creating a built legacy which continues to shape our understanding of the First World War and our commemorative practice today.

5. A Known Grave: Cultures of Battlefield Burial, Grave Marking and Private Purchase Identification

Memorials to the Missing, such as the Menin Gate or the Thiepval memorial, list the names of 103,000 Commonwealth soldiers who were never identified.⁶¹⁶ 45,500 of these men have been buried in CWGC cemeteries as unknown soldiers, meaning that 55,000 Commonwealth dead have not yet been found.⁶¹⁷ In many cases, the skeletal remains of those who lay in temporary graves which were never recovered, who were buried by shell blasts, or were never formally buried still lay in their final resting place. This chapter will explore cultures of battlefield burials, grave marking and private purchase identification to reflect upon how death and identifying objects might assist with processes of archaeological investigation or investigations to establish identity today.

Between 1914-1918, the systems devised by Ware's teams to search for, identify and record graves provided a pioneering response to the Empire's first experience of mass loss at distance. This shift in political attitude towards the war dead facilitated by Ware needs to be understood alongside the development of battlefield grave marking as its own war culture, building upon Wilson's examination of battlefield burials as a specific *culture de Guerre*.⁶¹⁸ As evidenced in the introductory chapter, there is a wealth of literature which explores loss, grief, commemoration and memorialisation during and following the FWW, though the focus on burial has been most thoroughly explored in relation to the permanent, post-war cemeteries, without engaging deeply with cultures of battlefield burial. This lack of literature appears to have shaped public understanding about war time burials to an extent. In addition, during the course of this doctoral project, the author received many questions and comments which suggest a skewed public understanding of battlefield identification and burial, expressing ideas such as that mass graves were used by Germans to pile the British into in a disrespectful way, or that the British always buried their dead exclusively within individual graves. Though battlefield graves, or the presence of dead are common features in battlefield narratives and accounts of trench life, there remains a lack of scholarly focus on battlefield burials and the way that these were marked.

Whilst the organisation that became the IWGC was responsible for the recording of graves, they were not responsible for burial. This was the responsibility of the Army, an Army guided

⁶¹⁶ Verdegem, S., Dewilde, M., Bracke, M., Wyffels, F., Decort, J. and Stichelbault, B. (2018). 'Missing in Action', in Stichelbault, Birger (ed.). *Traces of War*. Brugge: Hannibal, p65

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Wilson, Ross (2012). The Burial of the Dead: The British Army on the Western Front, 1914-18. *War & Society*, 31(1), pp.22-41

by an ethos of informal learning and adaptability as prescribed in Field Service Regulations 1909 (with 1913 amendments), described in Chapter Three. The largely professional Army of August 1914 was socially and culturally very different from the largely conscript or volunteer led Armies of the years that followed, with entry to the lower ranks no longer defined by low social status, as had been the historical culture in the British Army (see Ch. Two). This civilianisation of the Army in the Field as the war progressed resulted in a variety of field burial types, as soldiers continued, built upon, and departed from nineteenth century battlefield burial traditions. As with the use of identity discs, individual soldiers would approach the act of burial and grave marking according to their military experience, cultural or religious traditions from home, access to resources to perform a burial and provide a marker, provision of time to perform these acts and the conditions of the field which dictated where burial was safe at the time. This chapter will describe some of the burial types and the ways in which graves were marked, along with a discussion on how graves could be 'lost', to demonstrate the complexities faced by Ware's staff when seeking to locate graves, or to return to known graves. These issues also impacted works during the post-war clearance of the battlefield, an operation further compounded by issues with the fibre identity discs now used across the empire (excl. Canada), contributing to the huge numbers of reported unknown or missing soldiers who have yet to be united with their names to this day.

5.1 Battlefield Burials

It is difficult to undertake any form of quantitative assessment on the types of battlefield burial, given that not all were recorded, the fact that all located graves were concentrated into Commission cemeteries, and because of the fact that many records pertaining to the First World War were destroyed during the Second World War. However, by examining photographs, postcards and written personal accounts, it is possible to demonstrate some of the types of burials that were performed by British soldiers on the Western Front. Though recent publications such as Jeremy Gordon-Smith's *Photographing the Fallen* have explored the development and practice of war graves photography, and scholars such as Ross Wilson have explored the experience of battlefield burials on the Western Front, there are no existing studies which specifically explore cultures of grave marking in detail as a defined culture.⁶¹⁹ The Bawtree Collection, a collection of images taken by an IWGC Photographer, Ivan Bawtree, held in the IWM is a particularly valuable resource which will be utilised in the absence of literature on this topic. Understanding the myriad of burials which were performed on the

⁶¹⁹ Gordon-Smith, Jeremy (2017). *Photographing the Fallen: A War Graves Photographer on the Western Front 1915-1919*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military; Wilson, Ross (2012). *The Burial of the Dead: The British Army on the Western Front, 1914-18*. *War & Society*, 31(1), pp.22-41

Western Front can help us to consider the complexity of the work of Ware's Commission, and to reflect upon the experience of living amongst death for British soldiers. The exploration of battlefield ritual allows for the identification of visible 'war cultures' within these processes, as soldiers altered or adapted pre-war forms of expression and interaction with death to create rituals which carried a new meaning to help them navigate through their wartime experience.

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New methods of warfare, and lengthy periods of stagnant trench fighting interrupted traditional methods of recovery and burial historically employed by the British Army, with recovery taking place at the end of a short battle or during an arranged ceasefire. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the battlefields of France were filled with the remains of thousands of allied soldiers from a very early stage into the war, with the issue of the dead on the battlefields becoming almost immediately problematic from the start of the war. This created new problems for the army, in terms of both soldier morale and disease control. The provisional design for the double identity disc included a note which informed us that searches to locate the dead were taking place at night, at least some of the time, meaning staff were often faced with the task of finding and removing identity disks in the dark, often in risky conditions.⁶²¹ However, the prospect of enemy fire was not the only challenge that hindered those charged with these unpleasant duties. Though it was intended that units would bury their own dead whenever possible when the war had begun, there simply was not the time, nor the resources, to attempt to recover the dead before rotating out of the trenches or moving to the next destination. Operationally, it was not worth risking the life of a living



*Figure 67 A destroyed British tank with
dead British soldiers in the foreground.
IWM Q 23685*

⁶²⁰ Becker, Annette and Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane (2002), *14–18: Understanding the Great War*. trans. by Catherine Temerson. New York: Hill and Wang;

Becker, Annette and Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane (2002), *14–18: Understanding the Great War*. trans. by Catherine Temerson. New York: Hill and Wang cited in Wilson, R. (2012). *The Burial of the Dead: the British Army on the Western Front, 1914–18*. *War & Society*. 31(1), pp.22–41

⁶²⁰ Longworth, P. (2003). p.7

⁶²¹ CWGC/1/1/34/18, Directorate Of Graves Registration And Enquiries: File 18 - Scheme for duplicate identity discs, File SDC 4

soldier in order to pay respects to the dead, though of course, stories can be found which demonstrate intense bravery in order to recover a fellow soldier.



Figure 68 Infantry of the 1st Australian Division moving up in the advance near Harbonnieres, France, on 9 August 1918 just after a tank had finally disposed of a line of machine gun emplacements which had momentarily held up our troops. (Dead bodies in the foreground). IWM E (AUS) 2878



Figure 69 A dead British soldier on the battlefield on the Marne, June 1918. He probably was searched by the Germans as he doesn't have shoes on, his bayonet is stuck in the ground and his playing cards are scattered around. IWM Q 23690



Figure 70 British soldiers searching dead for identification. Near Chipilly, 10 August 1918. IWM Q 23562



Figure 71 Dead German soldiers on the battlefield, October 1916. IWM CO 940



Figure 72 Battle of Amiens. Stretcher bearers passing British dead while taking back wounded alongside a communication trench. Behind the northern flank of the advance, near Albert. 9 August 1918. IWM Q 10378

The conditions of the field, and the dangers associated with the recovery of the dead meant that it was not always possible for a unit to recover their own dead. Some fallen soldiers may have been confirmed as dead following the removal of their identity discs, but not buried at the time, and others were not responded to at all, waiting months or years for a burial. The interval of time between the occurrence of death and the recovery of the corpse could significantly affect the likelihood of identification, not only because of natural processes such as decomposition, but more anomalous factors such as looting, or destruction caused by shell fire. The crater filled landscape of the Western Front caused soldiers to adapt burial traditions as appropriate for the terrain, whether by utilising existing trenches or shell craters for graves, or by creating an improvised grave marker using available materials.

When a burial was possible, bodies were typically placed in a mass or individual grave depending on the individual circumstances of the burial. Where possible, a simple wooden cross would be used to mark each grave, with the soldier's details inscribed directly onto the cross, or pressed into thin strips of metal which were fixed to the cross. In the absence of a wooden cross, anything recognizable would be used including upturned rifles screw pickets, barked wire stakes, notes in sealed glass bottles, aeroplane propellers and even wooden ration boxes.⁶²²

This section has attempted to demonstrate loose categories of battlefield burial types performed on the Western Front. The featured images provide us with a glimpse of the creativity employed by soldiers to ensure that their comrades were given a proper burial wherever they were able to. The categories provided also allow us to consider how the conditions of the battlefield facilitated the

⁶²² Fraser, Alastair H. and Brown, Martin (2007). Mud, blood and missing men: excavations at Serre, Somme, France. *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*. Vol. 3(1), p.158; Ganschow, J.P.P. (2009). Identification of the fallen: The supply of "dog tags" to soldiers as a commandment of the laws of war. *New Zealand Armed Forces Law Review*, Vol. 9, pp. 22-544; Kenyon, Lieut. Col. Sir Frederick (1918). *War Graves; How the Cemeteries Abroad Will Be Designed. Report to the Imperial War Graves Commission by Lieut.-Colonel Sir Frederic Kenyon, K.C.B., Director of the British Museum*. London:HMSO); Robertshaw, Andrew and Kenyon, David (2008). *Digging the Trenches: The Archaeology of the Western Front*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military; Michael Sledge, Michael (2007). *Soldier Dead: How we Recover, Identify, Bury and Honour Our Military Fallen*. New York: Columbia University Press; Wilson, Ross (2012). The Burial of the Dead: The British Army on the Western Front, 1914-18. *War & Society*, 31(1), pp.22-41

cultural shift within an Army, which was experiencing cultural change at almost every level of the organisation as the war progressed, hastening the transition from the use of mass graves for ordinary ranks to the use of individual, marked graves for all – a transition which would become solidified in both military tradition and public expectations by the conclusion of the post-war clearance of the battlefields, as shall be examined in the proceeding section.

‘Mass’ Graves

During fieldwork undertaken within the course of this doctoral project, the author regularly received comments from volunteers, visitors or enquirers which expressed a belief that British soldiers were only found in mass graves when they had been disrespectfully piled into one by the Germans. Though this opinion was not universally expressed, it was encountered with such frequency that it became apparent that not all understood pre-FWW military burial traditions nor pre-FWW civilian burial traditions. Though today, British society tends to refer to a grave containing multiple individuals a mass grave, with our contemporary understanding or memory of mass graves implying a war crime owing to more recent cases of genocide as a wider society (e.g., WW2, the Bosnian Genocide, the Armenian Genocide), in fact, a shared grave was a common phenomenon for the poorest members of society.

In late Victorian England, the cheapest graves available were shared graves were referred to by names such as a ‘common’, ‘pauper’s’ or ‘public’ grave. A private grave was something of a luxury and was only possible following the purchase of a private grave plot, which was typically only licensed for a specific amount of time, despite the purchase of a grave plot being referred to as a ‘perpetuity’. Once the lease had expired, it could be issued again for a new burial deposit. Please refer to *Appendix 1* for a summary of British civilian burial types for further information on types of shared graves. The Army which mobilized in 1914 was a professional army, with ranks which typically reflected the social structure of British society. This meant that many soldiers of the ordinary ranks would have had little expectation of anything beyond a shared grave, whether they died in war and were placed in a shared grave as in previous wars (as discussed within Chapter Two), or whether they were deposited within a common grave in England. It is

important to recognize that a marked mass grave would have been considered significant to many ordinary ranked or working-class soldiers. British society as a whole did not yet have a shared expectation of an individually marked grave, and thus the concept of knowing the location of an individual within a mass grave may not have been considered significant to those performing burials. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the provision of a permanent grave marker had historically been considered a private family matter and therefore a private expense. Consequently, pre-1914 traditions of using shared graves continued for the duration of the war, with descriptions and photos of mass graves existing as late as 1918.

Mass graves ensured that more than one body could be buried quickly and in accordance with sanitary regulations, reducing the burden of labour on soldiers who were not attached to burial units. Some images feature religious figures such as priests or padres, with *fig 74*, showing three padres representing three different churches of Christianity overseeing a group burial. The images shown in both *figures 73* and *74* show that the burial of these soldiers were well attended, with the bodies prepared for burial, having been wrapped in shrouds, with religious rites respected. It is possible that a mass grave could be selected when the terrain did not allow for the individual burial of large numbers of soldiers, such as wooded areas with deep roots hindering the ability to dig a deep cut, or areas close to the front line, where a sustained presence above the tops was not advisable.



Figure 73 Chaplain reading the service at a burial of soldiers killed in the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge, Q3871 IWM



Figure 74 Three British Army chaplains of the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church, and Presbyterian Church holding a burial



Figure 75 'Englisches Massengrab vom 26. August 1914' postcard by Druck von Fritz Elsner, Köln. Provided by Andrew Thornton

A mass grave could be marked in different ways, with the detail of the final marker dependent on the resources available to soldiers at the time. A burial containing more than one body could be provided with a marker for each individual, though there are photographs which also show plaques provided in addition to crosses to contain the detail of those who had died or been buried in that area, as seen in *figures 76-78*. British mass graves can be encountered on the battlefield but may also be encountered in the vicinity of field hospitals or casualty clearing stations which encountered large numbers of casualties during significant battles or experienced outbreaks of illnesses such as typhoid.



Figure 76 Photograph by Ivan Bawtree depicting a cross mounted with a plaque featuring multiple names. Photograph from the Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100735



Figure 77 Grave of Serg R H Henrie MM and Bar. Made by pioneers, 33rd Battalion MGC in French Church cemetery. Henrie was accidentally drowned. Buried in village churchyard at Hellebrouck, in the Sombrin billeting area. IWM Q 56273



Figure 78 Photograph by Ivan Bawtree featuring a cross which includes multiple names. Photo from the Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100723



Figure 79 (right) Grave of 24 men of the 2nd East Lancs Regiment who were killed by one shell on 14 March 1915 during a rifle inspection at the Rouge Croix Cross Roads on the La Bassee Road. IWM Q 56181

However, practices such as moving corpses into trenches which would be backfilled forming a functional grave, utilized during the South African War may have also been used where it was the only practical option for burial, and would also be considered a mass grave, however this would still be in keeping with British military burial traditions. British soldiers can also be encountered in mass burials performed by German soldiers in photos, recollections and within the archaeological record. In accordance with the requirements of the 1906 Geneva Convention, many German soldiers made efforts to bury the British dead left on the battlefield, providing burials that were in keeping with their own traditions which also featured communal burials. Archaeological excavations in Fromelles in 2009, led by Oxford Archaeology, led to the recovery of eight mass graves containing the remains of British and Australian soldiers who had died behind German lines during the Battle of Fromelles. German soldiers had buried these soldiers, with identity discs and personal papers removed at the point of internment, in accordance with the requirements of the 1906 GC.⁶²³ In some of the graves, there were more than one layer of corpses (see *fig 80*), with the large pits allowing for the rapid sanitary disposal of corpses to maintain the hygienic standards of the living.

⁶²³ Loe, L., Barker, C., Brady, K., Cox, M. and Webb, H. (2014). 'Remember me to all': the archaeological recovery and identification of soldiers who fought and died in the Battle of Fromelles, 1916. Oxford: Oxford Archaeology.

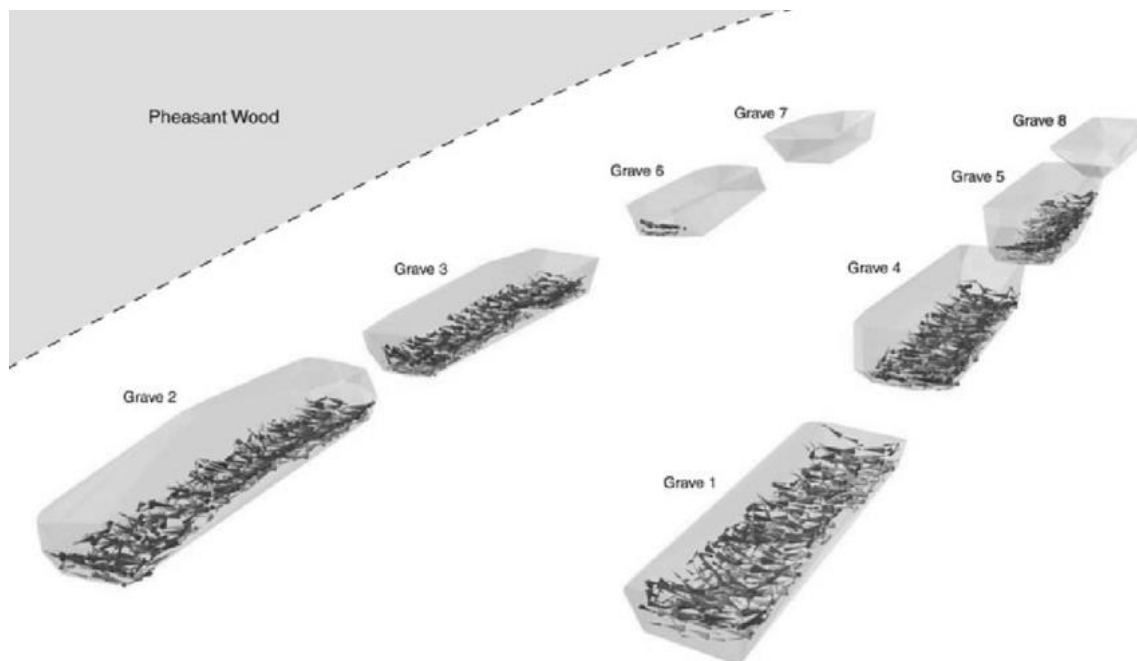


Figure 80 3d representation of fully excavated graves at Pheasant Wood, Fromelles in Loe, L., Barker, C., & Wright, R. V. (2014), An Osteological Profile of Trench Warfare: Peri-mortem Trauma Sustained by Soldiers who fought and died in the Battle of Fromelles, 1916. In Knüsel, C. and Smith, M. J. (eds.). The Routledge handbook of the bioarchaeology of human conflict. London: Routledge, pp.575-601

Scattered Graves

Studying scattered graves can allow us to examine the variation of grave markers more thoroughly, owing to the large volume of photographic material held within archives such as the Imperial War Museum, for example the Bawtree Collection, and the availability of postcards featuring graves through militaria fairs and on auction sites such as eBay. As can be inferred from the name ‘scattered grave’, this type of grave typically involves a single, or a small cluster of single graves isolated from main burial grounds, most typically located close to areas of intensive fighting, though not exclusively. As described within previous chapters, soldiers would mark graves with whatever they had, though as the war progressed, many units would procure or create more formal grave markers. So as the war progressed, and Ware’s organisation expanded, it appears that there became more formalisation in the type of marker used, though as always in war, soldiers would improvise with whatever materials were available if the correct equipment were not available.



Figure 81 (left) Soldiers washing themselves on the edge of a water-filled shell crater at St. Julien, IWM Q 11562

Figure 82 (bottom left) Scattered graves marked by simple white crosses on the old Somme battlefields, AWM PO 3631.216

Figure 83 (bottom right) German trench burial, personal collection



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

PO 3631.216



This burial type, which may also be referred to as an isolated grave, would be performed wherever possible, so whilst some photographs display graves in peaceful settings, surrounded by nature, examples also exist of photographs showing markers on the edge of shell craters, or dug into the sides of trenches, amongst other unusual locations – with German images such as *fig 83* demonstrating that this culture of ad hoc burials was not exclusive to the British or allied soldiers, despite current differences in the layout of some German war cemeteries which feature shared gravestones to demonstrate the use of shared graves or an ossuary, such as Langemark cemetery, Belgium.

Military Burials Performed by Civilians

War graves were not only performed on battlefields, with many instances of fighting occurring within typically civilian landscapes, such as towns and villages, with every day buildings being reutilised as watch posts, stores, or hiding places as per operational need. This meant that on occasion, soldiers were killed within civilian spaces. On occasion, French and Belgian civilians are reported to have buried soldiers within their gardens, or even within their civilian cemeteries. Though the majority of graves were concentrated into CWGC cemeteries, photos such as *fig. 84* show us that some graves were performed in close proximity to civilian houses. Such burials are acknowledged in IWGC documents, however, following the concentration of burials into IWGC cemeteries, these war graves in civilian spaces no longer contribute to our contemporary landscape, and so photos such as this act as a medium which allows us to reflect upon ways in which French and Belgian civilians engaged with British war dead who died upon their land, and also to reflect upon what a task it must have been for IWGC staff to obtain information about such graves in order to concentrate them into official cemeteries.



Figure 84 IWM Q 100716



Figure 85 Nuns with a group of children tending to an unknown grave in a garden of the Hospice in Locre. The grave might be of a British soldier, 11 June 1917. IWM Q5475

5.2 Cultures of Grave Marking

Though *figures 75-85* all feature wooden crosses, there are also many examples of more creative grave markers, provided in place of, or in addition to the wooden cross. *Fig. 87*,

shows a very traditional individual grave, featuring a tumuli and stones marking ‘RIP’, headed with a rectangular plaque rather than cross. *Fig. 88* shows an upturned rifle and a tiny cross used to mark a grave from the Battle of Morval. It appears that efforts have been made to create a small, raised tumulus, though it is possible that this was not completed due to a lack of time, or even because of the terrain, with the background appearing to resemble the thick clay typical of the Flanders region in particular, which was encountered during the Somme. *Fig. 86*, a postcard marked ‘the grave of one of our airmen’ shows a grave featuring a cross marker and a raised tumulus. The tumulus is mounted with what appears to be the axel of an airplane. It is possible that this was an official IWGC photograph, because of the etched number in the bottom left of the photo, which is typical of IWGC photos, as depicted in *fig. 89*, however there is no reference to the initials of the photographer as is typical in IWGC images.⁶²⁴



Figure 86 ‘The graves of one of our airmen’ postcard, personal collection, no publisher’s information. First published in Ashbridge, S. I. (2020), p.25



Figure 87 King George V visiting a soldier’s grave on Vimy Ridge, 11 July 1917, Q5680 IWM Note the decoration of the tumulus representing pre-WW1 traditions described within Chapter Two



Figure 88 Battle of Morval. A makeshift grave in a shell-hole, marked by an inverted rifle driven into the ground near Combles, Q 4316 IWM

⁶²⁴ Gordon-Smith, Jeremy (2017). *Photographing the Fallen: A War Graves Photographer on the Western Front 1915-1919*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military



Figure 89 IWGC Grave Photo from an established cemetery, personal collection



Figure 90 A propellor repurposed in a grave marker within what appears to be an established cemetery. Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100592



Figure 91 Grave of Lieut. Asholms, 177th Company, marked with a beautifully carved cross. Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100698

Though we see examples of makeshift and official crosses, along with ad hoc markers for the duration of the war, it is possible to observe developments within official grave markers through the war as Ware's organisation expanded and individual units learned to better respond to death in the field as their experience increased. The first pattern observed is hand painted markers. As the documents featured in Chapters Three and Four Describe, Ware's team would locate graves painted with the details of the buried individual, which Ware's team would on occasion need to repaint to ensure the details were clear. Units who prepared their own burials would also typically paint their own grave markers. *Fig 92*, shows a particularly detailed grave marker. The shape of the grave marker implies that this was pre-prepared, or at the very least, was not a marker which was hurriedly prepared, as it required some carpentry skills to attempt this shape. The marker, dedicated to Sergeant H. R. Daniels of the 30th Field Company of the Royal Engineers, describes that Sergeant Daniels was killed in action at St Yves Avenue (possibly the name of a Trench passage) on 15th January 1916, aged 27 years old, and includes his service number. Another pre-prepared marker can be seen in *fig 94*, showing the grave of Lieutenant Corporal P. Barden of the 6th Connaught Rangers, featuring the message 'in loving memory', better reflecting the format of British Christian graves on the home front, particularly with the addition of the painted cross at the foot of the marker. *Fig 93*

shows another variation of the structure of these crosses, a topic which will be further addressed in the following section.

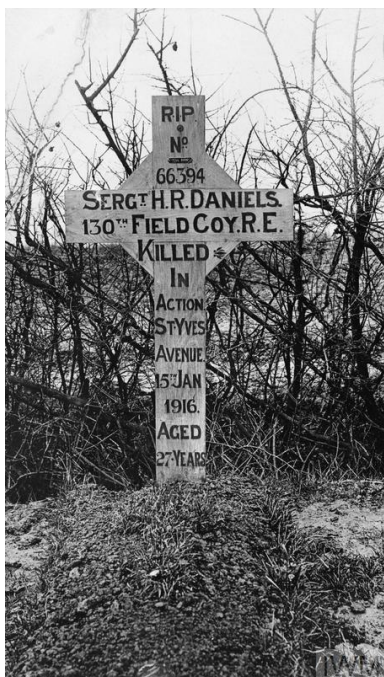


Figure 92 Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100743



Figure 93 unreferenced photograph of a grave, personal collection



Figure 94 Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100504



Figure 95 Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100711



Figure 96 Two comrades of the late L/Sergeant E.W Sifton, V.C., 18th Battalion, visit his grave. IWM Q 2464 Again we see pre-war traditions of decorating the grave tumulus.

From 1915, we can also observe the use of stamped metal plates which were affixed to wooden crosses, containing essential information about the individual buried, such as the name and date of death. This type of marker was predominantly used by the IWGC, however, as many military practices were not recorded, we cannot say it was a practice that was exclusively used by the IWGC. Multiple metal strips could be stamped to add additional information, if it was available, such as regiment, date of death, age etc. *Fig 97* shows a row of wooden crosses, each marked with rows of stamped metal to identify the inhabitant of the grave. We can see that these graves lie just next to the boundary wall of what appears to be a civilian graveyard because of the presence of permanent, Christian grave markers. Images such as *fig 98* show us that a single marker could be used to record the presence of more than one individual, in circumstances which would not be considered a mass grave. The grave could have been combined for many reasons, such as a lack of materials to mark two graves, the presence of partial or co-mingled remains only, or the commemorative use of a cross in the total absence of human remains, and as such, no presumptions should be considered to be absolute fact unless a document is recovered to provide further details which confirms any such theory.



Figure 97 Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100732



Figure 98 IWM Q 100695



Figure 99 Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100734

Privately Erected Grave Markers

In keeping with historical military burial traditions described in Chapter Two, at the start of the First World War, the provision of a grave marker had been considered a private matter for the family, community or unit of the individual to respond to, with the unequal opportunity to expatriate or commemorate a soldier who had died acting as a significant motivator for Ware's developing works, particularly between 1915-17, with the Principles of Equality acting as one particular outcome in response to this issue, as evidenced within this chapter, and the previous (Chapter Three). However, neither the development of these principles, nor the presence of the NCCSG would deter individuals and communities from attempting to provide a private burial marker, as evidenced in *fig 100* which shows a small stone grave marker placed on top of a wooden temporary grave marker, dedicated to Major Hugh Forster of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, who died of wounds on 26th September 1915. *Fig 101* provides a particularly extreme example of a private grave marker. This image, featuring the grave of Ko Ho, Sema Naga Chief, who had fought with the 35th Naga Indian Labour Corps and was killed on Christmas Day 1917 features the inscription 'he took 24 heads and was present at the death of 130 enemies in battle'. Though it should be noted that this grave is not located upon the Western Front and better reflects non-Western forms of commemoration, so whilst it is beyond the geographical scope of this study, the image could act as the starting point for future works to investigate non-western cultures of grave marking during the war, before the exercise to concentrate graves into IWGC cemeteries began.



Figure 100 Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100733



Figure 101 “‘Grave of a famous warrior Mazargues C.C.E.’ – Close-up view of original private memorial headstone to a Naga chieftain, Ko Ho Senuna Nagi, who died on 25 December 1917, and who was recorded as having taken 24 heads and was present at the death of 130 enemies in battle” in Photograph Album Vol.7 CWGC/1/1/5/42.7

The Bawtree Collection includes many photos featuring established cemeteries, awaiting their permanent headstones. Within these images, we can see a variety of the cross style grave markers described within this section, but also private markers, as seen in the following images. This could reflect a practice of moving the temporary markers which were not damaged along with the exhumed corpses. Such a practice would allow teams tasked with re-concentration to save money, as they would require the production of fewer new wooden crosses and would consequently save the staff time required to paint the new markers. No archival documents have been located thus far to support such this theory of reuse, meaning that this theory should be interrogated further within future works. Though images such as *fig 103*, featuring the grave marked by a black cross dedicated to Private R. Robertson of the 1st Cameronians dating 31.08.15 also features a wooden border surrounding the tumulus, which means that we could be looking at either a small 1915 cemetery (having examined the dates of the other featured graves) established during the war, or a later cemetery, where members of the regiment or the family have already visited to care for the grave. Without further evidence to confirm such details, it would be impossible to confirm the scenario without doubt as a result of the lack of consistency which characterises the response to the dead during the First World War before 1917.



Figure 102 Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100698



Figure 103 Bawtree Collection IWM Q 100715



Figure 104 Bawtree
Collection IWM Q
100821



Figure 105 Bawtree
Collection IWM Q
100712



Figure 106 Bawtree
Collection IWM Q
100778

Temporary Field Memorials

In addition to the use of wooden crosses to mark individual graves, there are also examples of temporary battlefield memorials in the form of giant, marked wooden crosses, some of which have made their way into our built landscape within Britain today. A fantastic example is the Somme Cross, a Grade II listed memorial which can be viewed in the south porch of the Royal Garrison Church of All Saints in Aldershot (*fig. 107*). The large cross is engraved with the words ‘In memory of the Officers, SNCO’s and Men of 1st Division killed in action near High Wood during September 1916 – RIP’. Today the cross is displayed opposite a plaque which reads:

IN JANUARY 1817 THIS CROSS WAS CONSTRUCTED AND ERECTED IN HIGH WOOD BY THE 23RD FIELD COMPANY. R.E. TO THE MEMORY OF THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE 1ST DIVISION WHO FELL ON THE SOMME. THE TIMBER WAS OBTAINED FROM RUINS IN THE BAZENTIN. IN THE SUMMER OF 1927 THE CROSS WAS BROUGHT TO ENGLAND AND SET UP IN FRONT OF THE HEADQUARTERS 1ST DIVISION ALDERSHOT. IN JANUARY 1939 THE 23RD FIELD COMPANY R.E. RECONSTRUCTED THIS PORCHWAY AND MOVED THE CROSS INTO THESE PRECINCTS.



Figure 107 (L) Battlefield memorial cross dedicated to the men of the 1st Division who died at High Wood on the Somme in 1916. Personal photograph

Figure 108 Photograph of a man at a memorial cross to the 151st Brigade on the Butte de Warlencourt, France, 1922, Copyright of Durham Record Office, D/DLI 2/6/10(423)



The memorial is further accompanied by a historical sketch of the cross on the battlefield, depicted alongside a fallen tank. The memorial is listed for two principal reasons, firstly, the design interest, described by Historic England as a ‘simple yet elegant memorial, by a named designer, of good quality workmanship and materials’.⁶²⁵ Historic England also describe the Somme Cross as being of historical interest as a ‘national record commemorating the fallen of the 2nd Division of the British Army in the First World War and as a visually distinctive reference for those who serve or have service in the British Army, embracing the tradition of service and the regimental bond’.⁶²⁶ These items displayed together help us to understand how military communities have engaged with the memorial over the years since its creation, and further explore how battlefield cultures relating to death have shaped our contemporary understanding of the war in Britain today.

This information has been presented to demonstrate the huge variety in burial practice and cultures of grave marking within and beyond Ware’s organisation. However, a grave marker could only be marked properly when the body was identifiable. This chapter has already identified some of the issues in accessing bodies, and the conditions in which identifying marks were removed from the deceased, but it has not yet described the most informal cultures of identification, the private purchase identity disc market and the adaption or misuse of identifying object.

5.3 Privately Purchased Identification

Though personalised forms of identification can be found in many online archive collections, there is no scholarly information available which fully interrogates the different cultures of private identification. Private discs and bracelets are non-standardised items, which could be purchased through jewellers or sutlers, or made by soldiers themselves, providing an additional form of identification to carry upon the body, though as this chapter will demonstrate, concerns relating to identification were not the only reasons that a soldier might want what is informally referred to today as ‘private purchase identification’. Perhaps it is the lack of standardisation of design, or the difficulties in attempting to categorise the various styles of private purchase I.D. which have survived to this day which has resulted in the lack of scholarly focus on these fascinating objects, however, it is essential that this unofficial war culture is explored in further detail, given that these items can be found in the archaeological record today, and because they

⁶²⁵ Historic England (2010). British Army 2nd Division World War I Memorial, accessed 18.11.2020 <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1393803>

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

can be useful in the post-excavation processes associated with attempting to establish the identity of the individual recovered.

During the First World War, markets for private forms of identification appear to have proliferated in a way that has not been observed in previous wars that the British have engaged with. Saunders describes that the nineteenth century was a 'crucial period' in the evolution of trench art, with increasingly large and professionalised armies.⁶²⁷ Examples of objects which would now be defined as trench art can be found from the Napoleonic period (1796-1815), with known examples of items produced during the Crimean War, the American Civil War, the Franco-Prussian War, the Spanish-American War (1898), and the South African War.⁶²⁸ The definition of trench art is broad, and not rigidly defined, but generally items described as trench art tend to feature war '*matériel*' which was been repurposed, personalised or adapted to produce something new, though the crucial difference between these items and any mass produced item marketed at soldiers is the personal process of creating the item, embedding experiences or associations during this creative process - 'a fundamental point which differentiates personalized and meaningful creation from anonymous industrial production'.⁶²⁹

This emphasis on the personal investment in the production of items defined as trench art makes this a useful methodology to investigate cultures of privately purchased identification. Though typically referred to as 'private purchase' identification or discs, this term does include privately made discs as well as privately purchased discs, with the term being an all-encompassing descriptor for unofficial identifying items (i.e., not an identity disc, *Erkennungsmarke* or *plaque d'identité*). It would be easy to assume that these items were all procured because soldiers had worries about being identifiable in death, however, as this chapter will show, there are multiple subcultures of private identification, and archival data can help us to better consider the plethora of reasons why a soldier might carry an identifying item.

In this war, we also start to see cases of soldiers who have specifically purchased personalised items designed to identify them, or in some cases to act as a souvenir with the added bonus of acting as an additional form of identification. Soldiers of all nationalities purchased these non-regulation items, indicating a universal fear of burial in an unmarked grave, if a body survived at all, but the focus of this chapter will be limited to British forms of private identification.⁶³⁰ For the British, the First World War was a conflict which interrupted the rigid class structure

⁶²⁷ Saunders, Nicholas J. (2003), *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War*, (Oxford and New York: Berg), p.10

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., pp.11-12

⁶³⁰ Robertshaw, Andrew and Kenyon, David (2008). *Digging the Trenches: The Archaeology of the Western Front*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, p. 155

within the ranks as conscription resulted in the mass influx of civilians into the previously small, professional Army, allowing for 'the erosion of distinctions between soldier and civilian', creating new markets for artefacts of war.⁶³¹ Historically, the main motivation for joining the British Army was the opportunity to receive regular food and pay. The negative public image of the ordinary ranked soldier as a drunken lout, incapable of good work without direction from a supposedly 'superior' leader in the field helped to maintain the polarised class structure within the Army in the years before the FWW. Following the introduction of conscription during the FWW, soldiers from all levels of society would begin to pass through all ranks, bringing new skills and cultures with them, along with varying levels of disposable income.

This allowed for the proliferation of informal markets of trade and sale, as military cultures were commercialised in response to the new presence of soldiers in previously civilianised zones. Consequently, some private identifying items can be categorised as souvenirs or war memorabilia, with the personalization performed by the merchant rather than the soldier, though as this chapter shall demonstrate, it is not always easy to make a clear distinction, given the interesting relationships and cultures which can be observed through the study of private purchase identification.

To make sense of this diversity of design and use, it is necessary to begin to categorise the patterns which are immediately observable. Initially, three categories have been identified:

- Identity bracelets
- Trench art
- Souvenirs and memorabilia

There is no universally, nor nationally agreed definition of what trench art is, resulting in a variety of labels used by various organisations, for example the National Army Museum refers to these objects as 'Decorative Arts', and the Royal Air Force Museum describe it as 'Commemorative Art'.⁶³² Saunders, Mass and Dietrich described Trench Art in 1994 as 'objectifications of the self, symbolising grief, loss and mourning', a statement which particularly speaks true to identity discs.⁶³³ Reflecting upon private cultures of identification, and how these items were used by soldiers, allows us to also consider how items which became ordinary to many soldiers could evoke an emotional reaction from family members asked to

⁶³¹ Saunders (2003), p.10

⁶³² Saunders, Nicholas J. (2000), Bodies of Metal, Shells of Memory: 'Trench Art' and the Great War Re-cycled, *Journal of Material Culture*, vol.5 (1), pp.44

⁶³³ Maas, B. and Dietrich, G. (1994), *Lebenszeichen: Schmuck aus Notzeiten*. ('Life-tokens: Jewellery for Distressing Times'), Köln: Museum für Angewandte Kunst. Cited in Saunders, Nicholas J. (2000), Bodies of Metal, Shells of Memory: 'Trench Art' and the Great War Re-cycled, *Journal of Material Culture*, vol.5 (1), pp.45

engage with them. Photographs of objects will be examined in conjunction with archival and archaeological evidence to provide further insights into the purchase and use of these items during the First World War, allowing us to reflect upon informal military cultures of production and consumerism during the First World War.

Identity Bracelets

As described, the most common form of unofficial identifying item which can be found today is the identity bracelet, or inscribed plaques designed to be mounted to a bracelet. In Britain, some jewellers advertised personalised soldier bracelets.⁶³⁴ It is not clear if these items were available for sale before the war, but two archival case studies show that these items were definitely being used by 1915. Poet Roland Leighton wrote to his mother to ask her to send a silver identification bracelet to him in France before he was killed on 23rd December 1915. His mother would later recall her reaction to this request:

I knew what it stood for as I looked at it. It stood first and foremost for the fact that the boy who in himself was all earth and all heaven to me was in the army only one among many thousands- perhaps among many hundreds of thousands. It stood for a fearful confusion in which masses of men might get inextricably mixed up so that none could know who this fellow was; and it stood for a field on which there were many dead lying, and for grim figures walking about among those dead and depending for their identifications on some token worn by the still shapes whose lips would speak no more. All this passed through my mind while I packed up the little disc and chain.⁶³⁵

Another well-known figure to request an identifying item from a British shop was John ‘Jack’ Kipling in one of his last letters home, written on 19th Sept 1915:

By the way next time you are in town would you get me an Identification Disc as I have gone and lost mine. I think you could get me one at the stores...It is quite impossible to get one out here or I would not trouble you about it, and it is a routine order that we have to have them.⁶³⁶

As described in the letter, Army and Routine Orders dictated that every mobilised soldier had to wear an identity disc around his neck whilst on active service. John had entered as a second lieutenant, generally the entry-level rank for a non-commissioned officer, and as an officer, he was responsible for replacing his own identity disc if he lost his issued disc, making his letter a practical request to replace a lost item in keeping with orders, rather than a request driven by

⁶³⁴ Fiennes, P. (2012), *To War with God: The Army Chaplain who Lost his Faith*, Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing

⁶³⁵ Van Emden, Richard (2012). *The Quick and the Dead*. New York: New York University Press

⁶³⁶ The Kipling Papers, Wimpole Archive, University of Sussex Special Collections ref GM 181 SXMS 38

a fear of being unidentified amongst the thousands of dead soldiers on the battlefield, as Leighton's mother had imagined.



Figure 109 Illustration of the identification disc requested by John Kipling, dated 19th Sept 1915. In the Kipling Papers - Wimpole Archive, University of Sussex Special Collections ref GM 181 SXMS 38



Figure 110 identity disc of Lieutenant-Colonel R. B. Worgan, with permission of the owner, Worgan's family. Image by Dan Hill (cropped)

John included a drawing to show the information required, including his rank, name, religious denomination, and regiment, with a note to say the disc should be 'about' the size of his drawing (*fig 109*). The design is in keeping with the discs issued by the British Army, with the request for an aluminium disc which could mean that John was issued with an aluminium disc himself, or that he had seen others with an aluminium disc and considered them to be superior to the fibre discs. Alternatively, he may have seen flashier designed which appear to have been engraved by jewellers such as the disc of Lt. Col. R. B Worgan (*fig. 110*), which was later re-engraved with Worgan's updated regiment and rank, around the edges.

Private discs of this design have not been encountered during the course of this research project, however, many examples of bracelets can be found in spite of Capdevila & Voldmans proposal that bracelets were mostly disregarded due to 'the frequency of wounds to the upper limbs, "hands cut off", and the fear of the evil eye' speculating that 'the reluctance of soldiers to wear something considered feminine restricted its general use',⁶³⁷ and despite the British Army's concern that British soldiers would not adapt to a system of wearing a disc on the wrist along with around the neck, as expressed during the period of consultation to design the 1916 double disc. Identity bracelets can occasionally be seen in photographs, such as the soldier portrait photo featured in *fig. 111*.⁶³⁸ The variety of design, quality of engraving and

⁶³⁷ Capdevila, Luc and Voldman, Danièle (2006). *War Dead: Western Societies and Casualties of War*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (original work published in French 2002).

⁶³⁸ Soldier of the Royal Engineers collecting the identity disc from the wrist of a Highlander killed by a shell on the edge of a water filled crater IWM Q3963

material used indicate that there were a number of sellers of vendors, potentially in a number of countries, with *figures 111-104* showing but a few examples of bracelet from this period.



Figure 111 Soldier portrait postcard featuring identity bracelet, photographer unknown, personal collection



Figure 112 Private purchase identification belonging to 2nd Lt. C. Carpenter, killed on 17th February 1917. Private collection of Christine Considine, descendent of C. Carpenter



Figure 113 identity bracelet - the reverse of the disc is inscribed with 'REMEMBRANCE 28.8.17', IWM EPH6358



Figure 114 Identity tag belonging to Captain Alan Bowles, 2nd Battalion. The Princess Charlotte of Wales's (Royal Berkshire Regiment), 1915 (c), NAM.1994-541-1 (cropped image)



Figure 115 Small silver oval-shaped identity disc (H 2.5cm x W 2cm) and chain (L 14cm) with clasp. The disc is engraved as follows: (obverse) 'H. Irwin CNRE 73 1'; (reverse) 'Sister H. Mackay Q.A.T.M.H.J.R. Pres'. Note that item is engraved 'roughly' on the obverse and 'professionally' on the reverse', IWM EPH 4728 (note Q.A.T.M.H.J.R. = Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service)



Figure 116 Metal bracelet with inscription on the disc: 'V H C Carter/ 81698/ 137TH LAB. COY / CE', IWM EPH 9422– in the style of the French Mle 1881 disc

Not all bracelet designed were purchased from jewellers, or formal vendors, with some soldiers purchasing from sutlers or merchants through informal channels, as had been the tradition during the American Civil War, though the rudimentary nature of many of the designs indicates that these may have been produced by soldiers themselves, perhaps as a result of boredom, to emulate an ID design worn by someone else, or even in response to insecurities about being identified in death, or the inefficiency of the official fibre discs. Each identifying item will have been bought or made for reasons specific to the owner's thoughts, feelings and experiences, meaning that where additional contextual evidence is available to us, these discs, like trench art, can be seen to represent 'the intense relationships between human beings and artefacts during and after the war'.⁶³⁹

Some identifying items owned by British soldiers can inform us about the location of the soldier, with some examples appearing more like a souvenir item than an additional form of identification in case of one's death. Interestingly, one of the most commonly encountered styles of private identification held by British soldiers is the French 1881 design aluminium identity disc. Quantities of this tag were produced in England to supply French soldiers, however it is not clear if British soldiers purchased these tags from home, or whilst abroad on service. Some of the discs appear to be too thick or too thin to be official 1881 discs, which indicates that the design had been copied by private merchants, or by British soldiers themselves.

⁶³⁹ Saunders (2003), p.10

Handmade Identification or Trench Art

Handmade or self-customised items can be encountered in many wars, as evidenced by Saunders, though before the First World War, it appears that these items were more commonly produced by soldiers, rather than purchased. This tradition of making or re-purposing items through personalisation did continue during the FWW, with these examples sitting more firmly within the ever-broadening definition of trench art. In 2011, Saunders described trench art as 'the evocative but misleading name applied to the dazzling array of objects made by soldiers, prisoners of war and civilians from the waste of industrialised war, and a host of miscellaneous materials', though acknowledging the convenience of the term due to its widespread and non-specific use.⁶⁴⁰ Personal items such as match box holders, inkwells, and snuff holders can all be encountered with soldier inscriptions, with this practise also extending to the carving of information into possessions associated with their role as soldier. Knives, toothbrushes, and leather pouches branded with the owner's information have occasionally been recovered during archaeological excavations, sometimes leading to the identification of a soldier in the absence of an official identity disc. These items, which intersect the categories of Trench Art and identifying objects, embody the confusions of war 'as ambiguous weapons transformed into ambiguous art, each object retaining visual cues to the former lives of its constituent parts'.⁶⁴¹ Items of both civilian and military origin were transformed to embody a new meaning to the owner, with bullets, shell cases and the remnants of weapons transformed into new items which could identify them in death, though these very items could be the cause of their demise. In many cases, these items could be considered a physical manifestation of individual anxieties about one's fate in death.



Figure 117 Match box cover engraved with the information of F. Mickle of the Machine Gun Corps and the date 1915. Photograph by Judy Waugh, trench-art.net

Figure 118 (right) "Pearson's banjo", comprised from a snuff compartment, five pennies and chain, belonging to Kenneth Herbert Pearson of the London Regiment (Artist's Rifles), photograph by Judy Waugh, trench-art.net



⁶⁴⁰ Saunders, Nicholas J. (2011). *Trench Art: A Brief History & Guide*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, p.19

⁶⁴¹ Saunders, Nicholas J. (2000). Bodies of Metal, Shells of Memory: 'Trench Art' and the Great War Recycled. *Journal of Material Culture*. Vol. 5 (1), pp.43-67

It is also possible to encounter handmade items which are designed to be worn as identifying items in a style which replicated the official identity disc or the private purchase bracelets available from jewellers. Some bracelet designs are less typical of traditional jewellery, which indicates that soldiers were obtaining identity bracelets from less formal vendors than jewellers, perhaps such as local merchants or sutlers, as had been seen during the American Civil War, though soldiers would also create their own bracelets by repurposing pieces of metal, such as shell brass, or coins which could be mounted to a strap or chain, as can be seen in *figures 119 and 120* on the following page. *Fig. 119* is marked with stamps which appear to bear a striking resemblance to the Army regulation stamped used to mark official discs, and *fig 120* shows an identity bracelet plaque made from polished shell brass, which could just as easily be a purchased military ‘souvenir’ of sorts as a handmade item.

Fig 121 shows a disc which appears to be inspired by the French Mle 1881 design, though is likely to be a handmade example as the edges are rough, along with the non-regulation cord holes. The disc includes the soldier’s name, religion, number, and regiment, with different swirls surrounding the text. Though it isn’t possible to confirm if this was made by Frank Nuttall himself, the style of the engraving is indicative that text was inscribed by hand rather than machine, especially if compared with the neat text displayed on the previous bracelet images already shown. On the reverse of the disc, someone has scratched ‘GREECE 1916’, allowing us to imagine Frank scratching his disc to remind him of his time in Greece, and perhaps his first time abroad? Though in the majority of cases, we are unlikely to ever possess access to the documents or recollections required to allow us to embellish stories like this, these reflections allow us to accept that identifying items were not exclusively sought or carried exclusively in response to fears about misidentification in death. The disc of G.H. Smyth (*fig. 122*), crafted from an Imperial Russian 50 kopek coin, includes his regiment, and also the location ‘Vladikavkaz 1916’, perhaps indicating his base to aid with identification, or perhaps simply as a reminder of a favoured location. As Wildred Owen’s poem ‘A Sonnet to a Friend (with an Identity Disc)’, featured in the prologue of this thesis describes, has demonstrated that some soldiers were not concerned with what happened to them after death, with that being a matter for the living. This leads us to the third and final category of private identification, souvenirs and memorabilia.



Figure 119 Private Purchase Identification belonging to a machine gunner in the 2nd Garrison Battalion, King's Liverpools. Personal collection of Stephen Chambers



Figure 120 Identity disc made from shell brass, Collection of Professor Peter Doyle



Figure 121 private identity disc of Frank Nuttall (Royal Field Artillery), personal collection (front and reverse)



Figure 122 Handmade identity bracelet associated with the First World War service of G H Smyth in 1 Squadron, Royal Navy Armoured Car Division on the Russian front in 1916. IWM EPH 14

Souvenirs and Memorabilia

The last category of private identifying items is personalised souvenirs or memorabilia. These are items purchased or made featuring a design typically relating to a place or dedicated to a regiment which also feature identifying information. *Figure 123* shows a tag purchased by or for J.E. Beckett from the 14th Light Armoured Motor Battery which includes identifying information, but also a carved illustration with the slogan 'Baghdad 1917-18'. The disc has been made from a coin, as can be seen on the reverse, with the front side smoothed ready for inscription, and the coin attached to two fittings on either side. This type of tag could be fitted with a strap and worn as a bracelet (see *fig. 125*) or attached to a soldier's uniform. The reverse of the tag shows that this item was produced from a coin – a technique commonly employed by the sutlers who offered their wares to the soldiers of the American Civil War. Tourist identity tags from Baghdad are not uncommon finds at militia fairs, indicating that a significant number of British soldiers bought these items, bringing them home, or with them being sent home as personal effects.

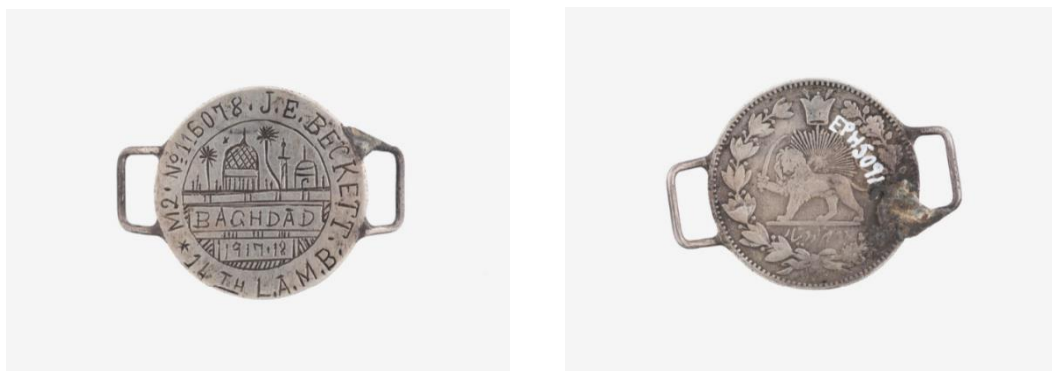


Figure 123 identity disc (front and back) IWM EPH 5091



Figure 124 A similar tag depicting Kazemian (or Kasmein) in Baghdad created from an Iranian 5000 dinar coin. This disc is interesting as it features Arabic text but features the crescent and star of the Turkish flag. Photograph provided by Judy Waught of trench-art.net



Figure 125 private identity disc from Baghdad belonging to Pte. A. Johnson which has been mounted to a leather strap to wear as a bracelet. Photograph provided by Judy Waught of trench-art.net



Figure 126 A tag with an illustration and the inscription 'France 1914-15, Mesopotamia 1916-', this tag does not feature the soldiers name or information, however it tells us about where the owner was stationed. Photograph provided by Judy Waught of trench-art.net

The latter item shows a disc which is not personalised with identifying information but does feature personalised dates of service in France and Mesopotamia. This item is indicative of a product market in Mesopotamia, responding to the new presence of British soldiers who had been moved over from France. We can learn about how sutlers and merchants responded to the wants and needs of the British soldiers who by looking at a case study from Baghdad. Within the Ministry of Information's First World War collection, housed in the Imperial War Museum, London, lies an image of a 'famous silversmith' named Zahroom who was known to those stationed in Mesopotamia as the "silver identity disc man" (*fig. 127*).⁶⁴² The Ministry of information captured Zahroom, spelled as Zahroam in the video description, at work in the market place at Baghdad in 1918 as part of a film about the inhabitants of the River Tigris shoreline from Basra to Kut al Amara.⁶⁴³ Soldiers might buy private forms of identification from a man such as Zahroom for a number of reasons, including the desire to ensure identity survives in death, the desire to buy a nice item to send home from a land far from home, or even for more frivolous reasons such as the desire to shop out of boredom or copying a nice find purchased by a friend. The film allows us to think about how individuals and businesses responded to the presence of British soldiers, adapting their trade to meet a new target economic audience.

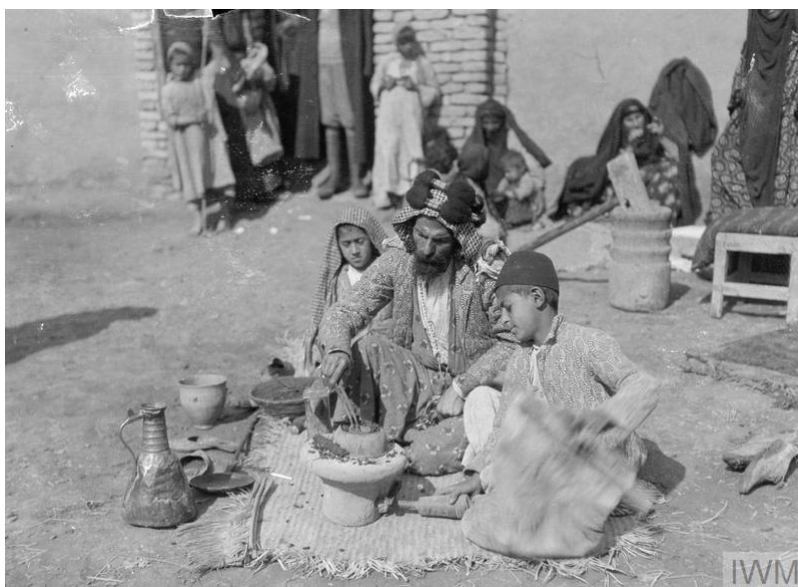


Figure 127 Zahroom, the famous silversmith known to all troops of Mesopotamia forces as the "Silver Identity Disc Man". ' IWM (Q 24600)

⁶⁴² Zahroom, the famous silversmith known to all troops of Mesopotamia forces as the "Silver Identity Disc Man". ' IWM (Q 24600)

⁶⁴³ 'With the Forces in Mesopotamia – Series 6', IWM (IWM 65)

Private forms of identification could be worn as bracelets, as necklaces, in the pockets, attached to the belt etc, limited only by the creativity of the wearer. They could also be worn with official forms of identification, being mounted to the same cord as official identity discs. Though these informal items can be difficult to categorize with certainty as a result of their informality, the study of private purchase ID markets can provide new insights into informal military cultures, whilst also dispelling contemporary ideas that the purchase of such an item is evidence of a fear of becoming unknown, with the reasons for use being far more nuanced than this. The examples shown have all been produced from a variety of metal, a substance with far greater durability than the fibre used for the official British identification disc. This forces us to consider the efficiency of the fibre disc system, given the popularity of the private purchase market, and the rare recovery of British fibre identity discs during archaeological works today.

Between 2000-2018, the full or partial remains of 819 Commonwealth soldiers were located and reported to the CWGC (excluding cases where investigations have not yet concluded).⁶⁴⁴ During this period, references to identity discs, tags and bracelets were reported in relation to only 10 cases, meaning identifying objects were only recovered in 1.22% of cases. Five of the ten identifying objects were British, including three identity discs and two bracelets.⁶⁴⁵ This thesis has evidenced that British soldiers were not officially issued with identity bracelets, meaning that we can assume these items to be private purchase items and remove them from the statistics, meaning that British identity discs featured within 3 of 819 recoveries, representing only 0.37% of total recoveries. COVID workplace restrictions meant that it was not possible for the CWGC to access the required records to confirm if the three identity discs were all official identity discs or private purchase discs, meaning that this statistic may reduce further if limited to official discs only, representing the possibility that only aluminium British identity discs have the potential to survive to this day (except in the most extreme environments. Thus, it is possible for both archaeologists and historians to conclude with certainty that British fibre identity discs used during the FWW were known at the time to decompose, and consequently play a minimal role within identification procedures today, with private purchase items presenting the most significant chance of identification for British and Commonwealth soldiers using fibre discs.

⁶⁴⁴ Mel Donnelly, Pers. Comms 23.12.2020

⁶⁴⁵ The remaining items were 3 Canadian discs (Canadian discs were produced from metal) and 2 German discs (both illegible) – Mell Donnelly, Pers. Comms. 23.12.2020

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the military traditions of battlefield burials and grave marking, war cultures which allow us to reflect upon processes of identification and the ways in which the graves of soldiers might represent within the archaeological record today. Military burial traditions can be considered an extension of British civilian burial traditions, however, a cultural and structural shift towards the use of individual graves for all ranks can be observed during the war. Following the war, all burials were concentrated into IWGC cemeteries, creating a permanent burial culture which continues to shape our military burial traditions today.

In order to create a known grave, the identity of the soldier was required. As demonstrated within Chapter Four, the fibre identity disc was proven unsatisfactory by 1920, a fact which was perhaps already known to the soldiers in the trenches during the war. This chapter has provided a system of categorisation for privately purchased (or private purchase) identifying objects, providing much needed context to this fascinating phenomenon within military material culture. Here it has been possible to reflect upon the individual uses for identity discs and their relationship to individual fears over the retention of identity after death, whilst also demonstrating their value within contemporary archaeology as a method for the identification of soldiers recovered during archaeological works.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

The British identity disc was formally introduced to allow for the confirmation of military deaths, but the mass losses of the First World War incurred by every section of society meant that the disc took on a new value. The disc played an essential role in the developing practice of graves registration and facilitated the transformation of military burial traditions for ordinary ranked soldiers from a culture of shared (or mass) graves into an expectation of an individual, known grave. The discs were a physical object which transcended the military need for the recording of death to interact with and influence Governmental policy with regards to identification and graves registration practice. The identity disc allowed Fabian Ware to argue that it was essential to be seen to be making every possible effort to confirm the fate of soldiers if the Government hoped to maintain public support for the ongoing war, repositioning political attitudes to the issue of dead soldiers. For the public, the discs took on further meaning, as an item which delivered the message of the death of a loved one, or a reminder of participating in the war if the wearer survived. To large swathes of the general and military populations, the discs came to represent the permanence of memory, particularly after the completion of the spectacular IWGC cemeteries which paid unprecedented respect to soldiers of all ranks and dominions. However, each soldier had an individual engagement with their disc framed by informal training, personal ideas about memorial after death, and as a result not all identifying objects, private or official, can be considered to represent a desire to secure a burial to be commemorated for all of perpetuity.

This thesis has examined the development, implementation and use of British identity discs used during the First World War, adopting an interdisciplinary methodology to explore the discs as a national, transnational, and international response to the issue of fallen soldiers on the battlefield. The results address multiple audiences through this interdisciplinary investigation, offering an original contribution to a range of historiographies, and confirming unproven theories for practicing archaeologists. The historical findings of this thesis confirm the informal reflections of First World War archaeologists that British identity discs are rarely, if ever recovered. Ironically, it appears that amongst British and Australian soldiers, the most encountered identifying objects are privately purchased identity discs, personalised items and registered equipment. Officially issued identity discs appear to support less than 1% of investigations to establish identity today. Thus, it has been possible to evidence a continued need to remedy the expectations of the public in relation to the potential for identification, even one hundred years after the war, being sensitive to the intensive, international media

response which has appeared in response to some better-known excavations during recent years.

In the archaeological sector, media coverage can occasionally result in the attraction of visitors or crowds to excavation sites, putting pressure on archaeologists who are already working on emotive and complex sites with a far greater presence of archaeological deposits than can be encountered on sites relating to earlier archaeological periods. This pressure also extends to the CWGC today, as they continue to care for the graves of those who died during the two world wars and attempt to establish the identity of British and (when agreed with the relevant nation) Commonwealth soldiers who are recovered today.

British identity discs are not well represented within scholarly or popular literature from the fields of archaeology or history. Through situating the British response to identification within the international narrative, it has been possible to demonstrate the issues that the British were responding to by showing how continental armies responded to similar issues e.g., public expectation, sanitation etc. The development of identity discs and identification practice is not only an international story, but also a transnational story and a transnational learning curve, where knowledge was shared as a means to improve collaborative practice. The findings of Chapters Two and Three present an understanding of how German and French practices informed how British war dead were treated by these armies, when they were not identified by their own. By exploring the British developments alongside the French and German developments, it has been possible to present a continental narrative, in which the British disc is a late arrival. As a result of this late development, the British learning curve with regards to identification practice only began during periods of colonial warfare, representing a different experience from the inter-continental conflicts which had previously defined nineteenth century warfare. Additionally, presenting the British developments within the international narrative has allowed for reflection upon the ad hoc nature of British developments, and the political will which would frame the operational response to fallen soldiers on the battlefield.

The findings of this thesis were presented to interrogate our understanding of how identity discs moved through operational and administrative structures of the British Army and Fabian Ware's organisation, considering how official policy differed from practice in the field and why. Ware's unique positioning and experience helped him to expand from a mobile unit of the red cross into a colonial body designed to respond to both civilian and military need. Through the study of Ware's work and his organisation, it has been possible to reflect upon the flexible, adaptive nature of the Army which was able to incorporate his services, and what such a partnership tells us about the humanitarian response to war.

Additionally, archival documents describing the development of the 1916 double identity disc inform us about military processes of consultation and development during a war. The documents and illustrations provided reasons as to why so many could not be identified, even with the provision of a single identity disc, and provided new insights into identification practice. Though Hodgkinson first presented the archival evidence from 1920 which describes the unsatisfactory nature of fibre identity discs, and their low rate of success for identifications during the post-war clearance of the battlefields in 2007; this thesis has been able to insert these findings into a broader narrative of international identification practice, findings which are also significant for, and directly applicable to the field of archaeology. Additionally, the reported findings about the failures or misuses of British identity discs provide context for informal cultures of identification which are more prominent within the archaeological record today – privately purchased ID, most commonly found in the form of a bracelet or disc, as evidenced in Chapter Five.

This thesis bridges disciplines and responds to the gaps in knowledge to make a contribution to a range of popular scholarly themes including histories of mourning, commemoration, memorialisation, and the scientific identification of human remains within the disciplines of archaeology and forensic sciences. Thus, the archival data collected was used to evidence the development and use of identity discs, and more critically, to examine how the failures of identity discs which allowed for the creation of so many Missing and unknown soldiers before they were commemorated as such. This phenomenon caused a fundamental shift in the commemoration of British and Commonwealth soldiers, an area which has received significant scholarly attention from eminent scholars such as Jay Winter.

By situating the history of the British identity disc within the broader, international narrative of identification systems, it has been possible to reflect upon transnational cultures of observation and intelligence sharing, which began long before the First World War. Chapter Two demonstrated that Germany's identity disc system was developed to respond to the experience of mass loss during the Austro-Prussian and Franco-German Wars of the nineteenth century, and the inability to confirm the identities of large numbers of soldiers. In this case, the respectful treatment of the fallen soldier was considered a moral duty of war, but also a civic duty to the family who had a right to grieve for a loved one who had died in service. The French system was developed following conflict with Prussia. Though the implementation was not immediate, once introduced, the French system was well publicised, and many developments appear to have been influenced by the military cultures of deployed soldiers, incorporating best or routine practice into official policy. In contrast, the British

would not begin to develop an official identification system until the end of the nineteenth century, when engaging in colonial war efforts, rather than intra-continental wars where there remained a possibility of repatriation or family visits to the war grave.

The British system was introduced following the ratification of the 1906 Geneva Convention, which required that the captor of the field check all corpses for identifying objects before burial – though a motion to make it compulsory to provide mobilised soldiers with identifying objects was rejected. The thesis' consideration of the place of the dead in international humanitarian law offers a significant contribution to the historiography of humanitarianism and international law. The introduction of the British identity disc in 1907 meant that Britain would enter the First World War with an identity disc, like the French and the Germans. Unlike the French developments, improvements to the British designs were not well published, meaning there is little evidence to explain why the 1907 aluminium disc was replaced with a compressed fibre material in 1914. Fortunately, the archives of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission contain a wealth of information that allowed for reflections upon the use and efficiency of identity discs by situating them within the narrative of the identification processes used by Fabian Ware's mobile unit of the Red Cross, which would take multiple forms, before assuming its final format as the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1914.

Through archival documents, the study of identity discs has provided new insights into the flexible, adaptive nature of the British Army and the way that it engaged with humanitarian services during war following the 1906 Geneva Convention. By reflecting upon the politics of military humanitarianism, it has been possible to deconstruct the ideologies which framed the operational response to death during the First World War. Ware's letters, held within the Commission archive, demonstrate the importance of his Anglo-French allegiance in the development of identity discs and IWGC architecture. In fact, Ware would liaise with the French during the consultation for the 1916 double identity disc, a development led by Ware himself. The letters also provide evidence of a complex political relationship between the Armed Forces and the British Government, which Ware was able to navigate by presenting his work to identify soldiers and record their graves as an action which would respond to public anxieties and maintain long term support for the war. This mediation of military and public concerns should be considered Ware's greatest achievement, as it was this which facilitated Ware's incorporation into the Army before expanding into an international, imperial organisation. Through studying this expansion, it has been possible to reflect upon the learning curve of Ware's staff, how battlefield conditions influenced burial practise and

thus registration practice, and how variable cultures of wearing identity discs mobilised soldiers affected identification practice. Thus, these findings make a significant contribution to the historiography of learning, or learning curves within British military cultures, building upon the works of prominent scholars such as Aimeé Fox.

Most importantly, the collection held documents referring to the post-war exercise to clear the battlefield which demonstrated that Ware had reported in 1920 that the fibre identity discs had not proven satisfactory because of their rapid decomposition, which had been a major reason for the creation of so many unknown soldiers. Despite this revelation, the British Army continued use of fibre identity discs until around 1960 when they were phased out, with some RAF and Navy units issuing fibre discs as late as 1980. As a result of the phased abandonment of the discs, the year in which they were finally replaced with a more durable design varies across regiment and service, as was the case with the prolonged issue of the aluminium identity disc during the First World War. Consequently, these findings are not only significant for anyone concerned with the identification of British soldiers from the First World War, but for anyone concerned with the identification of British soldiers from more recent conflicts including the Second World War. Metal discs were used in hot climates from the Second World War, and so this should also be considered by scholars of a later period.

The documents held within the CWGC archive also allowed for reflection upon the way in which Ware's contribution has been accounted for within histories of the Commission. Though Ware's achievements were extraordinary, his introduction into the British Red Cross was remarkably typical for a man of his social status and represented a flurry of wealthy men into civic and humanitarian offices at the start of the war. Historians such as Philip Dehne have explored some of these key figures e.g., Cecil, who existed whose contribution has been overshadowed by the usual prominent political statemen who have been studied such as Lloyd George, investigating a new style of government which allowed innovators like Ware and Cecil to undertake new bureaucratic learning curves as influential men working across governmental departments. Like Cecil, Ware 'took advantage of the nebulousness of the organizational situation' and created a unique role for himself.⁶⁴⁶ Ware's actions during the First World War build upon these historiographies of government and bureaucratic learning; whilst simultaneously continuing to provide new information about how military learning curves and operational responses in the field could be reshaped by political will - highlighting the importance of this second tier of governmental workers during the war. As such, Ware's

⁶⁴⁶ Dehne, Phillip A. (2019). *After the Great War: Economic Warfare and the Promise of Peace in Paris 1919*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, p.17

ability to position his works as a mediation between the Armed Forces operational needs and publics' emotional needs helped him to eliminate potential rivals, which would ultimately create the space for expansion into an imperial organisation which had the added benefit of being a physical reassertion of empire following the anti-imperialist movements of 1916. Therefore, it has been possible to show the ways in which military operations and responses can be shaped, or rather reshaped, by political will.

This history of military burials and identification practice can be used as a case study to allow for the interrogation of issues relevant to contemporary soldiering, e.g., humanitarian partnerships during war, the administration of death, the transportation of those killed-in-action, and responding to public expectations. Drawing upon these areas can also allow us to re-assess regimental or force histories, considering the cultural and operational variation observed between different regiments, armies and dominion armies which will be described in this thesis, to allow us to think more critically about the retention of knowledge in the British Army during the First World War. This information can be used to interrogate contemporary British soldiering, and the retention of knowledge from historical wars in relation to current identification practice, as a means to assess whether the British Armed Forces are prepared to respond to mass casualties in a future conflict.

The combined historical and archaeological findings have military policy relevance, as demonstrated by Ashbridge and Barnes in 'Bring Out Your Dead? Dealing with the Fallen in Future Conflict', published by the Wavell Room (WR)- a military think tank predominantly written by soldiers, for soldiers.⁶⁴⁷ The WR reflects a modern equivalent to the informal structures of learning observed by Fox in 'Learning to Fight', providing a soldier led means of communication and learning, though more similar informal structures do still exist.⁶⁴⁸ Recent WR articles also highlight that there is a continued failure to retain organisational memory with regards to death. Rob Clarke described that the restructures proposed under the Army's 2020 REFINE plan will place 'an increased demand on logistics and the resupply chain of the British Army, which has been shown to have been overburdened in recent conflicts' such as Afghanistan (20 June 2002 – 12 December 2014).⁶⁴⁹ This presents concerns as to the ability

⁶⁴⁷ Ashbridge, Sarah and Barnes, Paul (2021). Bring Out Your Dead/ Dealing with the Fallen in Future Conflict. *Wavell Room: Contemporary British Military Thought*. Accessed 28.05.2021 <https://wavellroom.com/2021/05/19/bring-out-your-dead-dealing-fallen-future-conflict/>

⁶⁴⁸ Fox, Aimée (2018). *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

⁶⁴⁹ Clark, Rob (2019). What implications will the ongoing developments in artificial intelligence and robotics have for remote warfare in the future?, *Wavell Room: Contemporary British Military Thought*. Accessed 16.09.2020: <https://wavellroom.com/2019/02/28/developments-artificial-intelligence-robotics-remote-warfare-future/>

to transport and repatriate bodies during a war. An alternative response would be to consider that any flexible response to future wars will also include the capacity to absorb or work in partnership with an external organisation. The disbandment and suspected future disbandment of Pioneer regiments and regiments of the broader Logistics Corps as a result of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and Army 2020 may only serve to reinforce these issues in future wars. During SDSR the Army also lost its mass grave registration capacity, creating a number of areas of potential weaknesses which may hinder future operations.

Whilst the British Army has a long history of an indirect approach to the operational issue of dead on the battlefield, bolstered a flexible doctrine which allows a flexible response to a military issue, as facilitated by the 1909 Field Service Regulations Part I & II, it also has a long history of not learning from its historical failures, with many structural and operational issues encountered during the First World War taking decades to resolve, if at all.⁶⁵⁰ This is in keeping with Arnel P. David et al.'s assertion that the present British Army suffers 'a cognitive dissonance between concepts and strategy, which is rooted in a lack of foundational theories'.⁶⁵¹ The operational and civic duty to identify, recover and bury soldiers during and following war was solidified during the First World War, yet recent conflicts, and even the recent military response to the Covid-19 pandemic, suggest that the British Army is not prepared to deal with sustained mass casualties in either a military or civilian context, despite the skill of existing medics within the forces.

The findings of this thesis also act as a useful case study to demonstrate the consequences of ignoring death in planning, showing that reform can only be meaningful if developed with an awareness of war. It also illustrates the need to be ready to respond to contemporary public expectations about the treatment of fallen soldiers in a democratic society. The task of clearing the dead has always required an element of collaboration with external organisations. If the Army remains unprepared to respond to the issue of fallen soldiers, and lacks the ability to reinvigorate its organisational memory, then it is essential to consider which partners may

⁶⁵⁰ *Field Service Regulations, Part I: Operation 1909* (Reprinted with amendments 1912). London: HMSO. Accessed 16.09.2020 <https://archive.org/details/pt1fieldservicer00greauoft/page/n3/mode/2up>; *Field Service Regulations, Part II, Organization and Administration, 1909* (Reprinted with amendments 1913). London: HMSO. Accessed 16.09.2020 <https://archive.org/details/b2900276x/page/n11/mode/2up>

⁶⁵¹ David, Arnel P., Lt. Col. Allen, Dave, Nesic, Aleksandra and Krohley, Nicholas (2020). Why We Need a Modern Theory of Special Warfare to Thrive in the Human Domain. *Wavell Room: Contemporary British Military Thought*. Accessed 16.09.20 <https://wavellroom.com/2020/05/14/why-we-need-a-modern-theory-of-special-warfare-to-thrive-in-the-human-domain/>

be able to respond to this gap if there is a future need, and to establish these relationships in advance of need to ensure a reactive response is possible if required.

During the First World War this relationship was largely centred around Fabian Ware's Organisation along with the British Red Cross. During the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, British soldiers worked closely with American equivalents to offer a 'Mortuary Affairs' service. More recently, during the ongoing pandemic, the British Army has worked closely with voluntary and veteran-run organisations such as RE:ACT Disaster Response (formerly Team Rubicon) to provide services relating to the transportation of the recently deceased and the rapid erection of medical structures. In high-intensity war, such relationships may be necessary to support military goals, but have these essential partners been identified by the British Armed Forces?

British soldiers were repatriated in coffins draped in national flags, with some funerals well televised at the time, creating a new public expectation with regards to the respectful treatment of soldiers who have died in service, which must be anticipated during planning for future wars.⁶⁵² However, knowledge of the historical development of identification practices reveals that the British Army has failed to retain an organisational memory of learning with regards to the identification, transportation and burial of soldiers, meaning that proposed restructures do not yet reflect this potential requirement of war. Rather than being a learning organisation, the Army is an organisation which re-learns once it is forced to remember painful memories, which are forgotten again as soon as budget changes or restructures require.

The case study of the First World War was used to highlight potential areas for weakness, but also the potential to establish humanitarian partnerships that reflect Ware's partnership with the British Army during the First World War. Fabian Ware's letters held in the CWGC archive provide a unique opportunity for Armed Forces policy makers to consider how the Army should advocate for its needs to the government to encourage the allocation of appropriate resources to plan for how a reactive response to death might look in future wars. Though the Imperial War Graves Commission was able to provide graves registration services during the Second World War, with Ware still at the head of the organisation; the Commission is no longer designed to respond to these duties, with responsibility for the

⁶⁵² Ibid.

management of British armed forces casualties belonging to the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC).⁶⁵³

There is the potential to build upon the positive relationship with RE:ACT forged during the pandemic, as they have proven a good cultural fit with the military response. This would also present the Armed Forces or Ministry of Defence with the opportunity to interview RE:ACT staff to interrogate required costs for such work, to identify areas for improvement or to adopt examples of best practice to improve existing provisions. This would respond to the identified lack of organisational memory suffered by the present-day Army, which disbanded the mortuary affairs teams following Afghanistan, and disbanded the War Graves training course at some point since 2001. This forces us to return to the subject of the thesis, the identity discs. During the course of this project, a number of soldiers, ex-service personnel and veterans have shared their own understanding of the identity discs that they wore and explained the training (or absence of training) that they experienced. It appears that the First World War culture of informal learning remains with regards to the identity disc. Not all soldiers were able to correctly identify that only one disc should be removed from a body, perhaps reflecting the scarcity of recent military deaths comparatively, reducing a reliance on identifying objects with so few dying in each instance (comparatively with the First World War). RAF personnel were particularly likely to report leaving their identity discs in their lockers, as the fibre discs weren't likely to be useful in the event of a plane crash. The reported experiences are indicative of a continued culture of informal learning with regards to the disc, further demonstrating the value of this study.

Despite the absence of documents available to inform us about the development and use of identity discs, through the utilisation of a interdisciplinary methodology inspired by forensic practice it has been possible to present a detailed history of the ways in which identity discs were used during the First World War. The results attempt to encapsulate the huge levels of variation in landscape, practice and personal experience in relation to the use of identity discs during the war, as a worn object, and an object used to confirm death. Most crucially, this thesis has enabled a significant addition to the historiography of the 'Missing', providing an explanation for failures of identification that occurred prior to their commemoration in the elegiac tones of war memorials. For archaeologists, this thesis has provided evidence to support the previously accepted, but unevidenced, fact that officially issued British identity discs are rarely recovered during archaeological works today. The lack of historical evidence

⁶⁵³ For more information visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/joint-casualty-and-compassionate-centre-jccc>

to confirm the presence of asbestos within identity discs provided the opportunity for scientific collaboration to assess the presence of asbestos within the discs (publication in preparation). The presence of asbestos within the discs would have had implications for the storage and handling of British and Commonwealth discs within museum and archives, resulting in the need to declare them as Asbestos Containing Materials (ACM's) in accordance with the 2012 Control of Asbestos Regulations, and the consequent need to alter engagement with the discs. The results demonstrated that asbestos could not be located, disproving existing theories about the use of asbestos fibre within British identity discs.

The results of this thesis suggest a need to nuance common perception of the nature of First World War recovery and the practice of identification. There is a need to reconcile present day expectations about identity discs and DNA analysis with the realities of a war fought one hundred years ago. These public perceptions are important for the British Armed Forces today, necessitating a review of how any restructure may affect the ability of the Armed Forces to continue to provide the level of care provided to soldiers who fell in Iraq and Afghanistan during a future war. This suggests a need to reflect upon the lack of organisational memory with regards to learning and to consider how existing training might be adopted or expanded to incorporate grave registration services, in keeping with an adaptive, flexible ethos. Alternatively, it suggests the need to consider the potential for pre-established humanitarian partnerships which will become part of any flexible response to future war. This interdisciplinary investigation has drawn upon evidence from a variety of fields to provide an all-encompassing narrative for the elusive British fibre identity disc used during the First World War. Consequently, the results have implications beyond the field of history, with findings which can be used to adapt or build upon existing methodologies, processes, or organisational relationships within a variety of professions. Though Wilfred Owen asked that his 'death be memoried on this disc...until the name grow vague and wear away'; the failures of the British identity disc did not result in the destruction of individual identity, but rather the creation of an architectural empire to the fallen to reflect the experience of mass loss and to mitigate the creation of so many unknown soldiers. Thus, the identity disc is both the cause of and response to Fabian Ware's empires of the dead and the reason for the built legacy of the 'Missing'.

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Appendix 1: Victorian Burial Practices and the Military Body

In order to understand the significance of the First World War upon military burial traditions, it is important to reflect upon dramatic social change within the British Expeditionary Force, and the democratisation of the Army as a result of rapid expansion. The Army had traditionally recruited other or ordinary-ranked soldiers from the lower classes of British society before the Great War, people who had little expectation of an individual, marked grave. This was reflected in pre-1914 military burial practises, which were not dissimilar from the unmarked mass graves which were used in England for those who could not afford to pay for a funeral or individual grave plot. Responses to the recovery of soldiers remains during the centenary revealed a lack of knowledge of pre-war burial traditions in England which were still heavily influenced by Victorian culture, particularly with regards to ‘mass’ graves. Here, common civilian burial types are described, to provide context to the discussions about British burial traditions which permeate this thesis:

‘Pauper’s’ Grave The common grave is not dissimilar to what would be called a mass grave today. The pauper’s grave was often referred to as a ‘pit’ representing the large hole in which the bodies of the poor would be deposited. Pauper’s graves were usually opened within cemeteries which did not have private burial rights. A long trench would be filled, typically over a number of days with the bodies of people who could not afford to pay for a plot with private burial rights, though on occasion this process could take months. Those who could not afford a burial at all, such as workhouse paupers, would be buried at public expense, administered by the Board of Guardians. Coffins were usually used, though many were reported to be flimsy, adding to the ‘ultimate degradation’ of the individual.⁶⁵⁴ Usually, it was not prohibited to install a headstone over a public grave which prevented commemoration and ‘reinforced the anonymity and indignity of the public interment’.⁶⁵⁵ Strange describes the pauper grave as the “antithesis of the ‘respectable’ funeral”.⁶⁵⁶

Pauper’s graves are technically a form of common grave in that they contain the bodies of multiple individuals. However, public graves, another type of common grave, differ in that they contained the bodies of those whose families had pay the burial fee, with the parish paying for the interment fee. This fee did not provide exclusive rights over use of the grave plot, allowing for the collection of multiple fees as the grave was filled. The term pauper grave usually refers to interment at the expense of the ratepayers,

Whilst many paupers would be deposited in these common graves, they could also be filled with the bodies of individuals whose families had paid for their space within the grave.

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⁶⁵⁵ Strange, Julie-Marie (2005). *Death, grief and poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 147

⁶⁵⁶ Strange (2005), p. 13

Public or Common Grave A public grave is another form of common grave in which multiple bodies were deposited, though at the expense of the family or the parish rather than the state. Like the pauper grave, the public grave would be left open until filled with bodies, with families paying for a space within the grave. The common grave presented an option for parish burials, and poorer members of the community, allowing the family to retain control over the body until the burial. The Friends of York Cemetery have provided information on the cost of internments in public and Second Class graves (to be described later) between 1837-1965, which highlights the stark contrast in price, as seen in the figure on the following page.

Though these public or common burials were paid for, they were still occasionally associated with or referred to as pauper graves, because of the stigma of shared graves, and also because of the restrictions placed upon burials within this type of grave which prevented clear differentiation from the pauper grave. Strange reports that the ‘restrictions made upon interments in common graves made no distinction between corpses interred at the cost of families and those at the expense of guardians, thus penalising families who actually paid for interment’.⁶⁵⁷

Second Class Grave The Second Class Grave was a concept introduced in 1848, which limited the number of bodies which could be interred to six (later increased to twelve). This responded to the idea that it was repugnant to share a grave, and provided a service which was more personal than the public grave, but did not result in the need to pay for a headstone. Though a Second Class grave was still a shared grave, the family could pay for an inscription which would be carved into the ledger stone placed over the grave when full. Where an inscription is found, this type of grave can be referred to as an ‘inscription grave’. Though inscription was an Option, Strange reports that of 542 internments in common graves in Bolton in 1920, only four families chose to pay for a personalised inscription, indicating that this was not a popular option.⁶⁵⁸ Second Class graves featured multiple internments, completed at different times. Between each deposit, the grave was backfilled until the total number of bodies permitted had been placed within it. In contrast, public graves would be left open until the last body had been deposited, providing a less dignified resting place for those who were first placed within the grave. This type of grave can most commonly be found along path edges within cemeteries. Between July 1867- October 1939 1,292 bodies were buried within 192 Second Class Graves within York Cemetery alone.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁷ Strange (2005), p. 134

⁶⁵⁸ taken from a table of ‘Total Number of Interments in the Corporation’s Three Cemeteries Over Five Years’. BALS ABCF 15/39. Cited in Strange (2005), p.147

⁶⁵⁹ Friends of York Cemetery (2017). York Cemetery – Public Graves Trail. p.7. Accessed 15.01.2021
<https://yorkcemetery.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/York-Cemetery-Public-Graves-Trail-Dec-2017.pdf>

COST OF INTERNMENT IN PUBLIC & SECOND CLASS GRAVES			
YEAR	PUBLIC GRAVE		SECOND CLASS GRAVE
1837	4s 6d	(Category 1)	
1848	4s 6d	(Category 1)	£1 15s 0d
1870	4s 6d	(Category 1)	£1 15s 0d
	7s 6d	(Category 2)	
	10s 6d	(Category 3)	
1912	6s 6d	(Category 1)	£1 15s 0d
	7s 6d	(Category 2)	
	10s 6d	(Category 3)	
During WWI	17s 6d	(Single Category)	£2 5s 0d
1921	£1 2s 0d	(Single category)	£2 15s 0d
1922	£1 7s 6d	(Single Category)	£2 15s 0d
1932	£1 10s 0d	(Single Category)	£2 15s 0d
1939			£2 15s 0d (Phased Out)
1963	£9	(Single Category)	
1965*	£10	(Single Category)	

*By this time, in a more affluent society, Public burials had become the exception rather than the rule but it was not until after the York Cemetery Company went into voluntary liquidation in 1966 that the practice ceased.

Ian Scott, the first liquidator, who ran the Cemetery while the legal winding-up process ground inexorably on, wrote in March 1969 to the York undertakers informing them that, as there had been no recent Public burials, he had told his staff to fill in the still open graves. Thereafter the Cemetery would not provide for such burials.

NOTES 1:
Category 1
Houses rated under £5/year
Category 2
Houses rated between £5 & £10/year
Category 3
For all others who could not afford either a Second Class or Private grave

NOTES 2:
Conversion from £.s.d to Pence (p)
4s 6d = 22½p
6s 6d = 32½p
7s 6d = 37½p
10s 0d = 50p
17s 6d = 87½p
£1 2s 0d = £1 10p
£1 7s 6d = £1 37½p
£1 10s 0d = £1 50p
£1 15s 0d = £1 75p
£2 5s 0d = £2 25p
£2 15s 0d = £2 75p

Figure 1 Cost of Internment in Public and Second Class Graves. Friends of York Cemetery (2017). York Cemetery - Public Graves Trail, p.8. Accessed 15.01.2021 <https://yorkcemetery.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/York-Cemetery-Public-Graves-Trail-Dec-2017.pdf>

Locked Graves Lock-up graves were used until approximately 1890 in Britain, offering additional security against grave robbing. There are multiple different ways in which people sought to protect the dead including the use of impenetrable coffins (produced from materials such as lead or iron) which could not be accessed or mortsafe devices.⁶⁶⁰ There are multiple forms of mortsafe, the most common being a metal frame device, placed over the top of one or more graves to prevent grave robbers from digging up the newly deposited body. Another type of mortsafe involved placing a stone slab beneath the coffin, fitted with an iron metal cage which was placed over the coffin and attached to the stone to protect the coffin. This structure was buried within the grave cut. Some graves and vaults were fitted with lockable doors or gates. Other methods included placing a wooden plank or iron slab over the coffin before filling the grave. These methods were not always effective, and their popularity was short-lived.

Private Grave A private grave was a burial within a plot of land which had burial rights, issued by the Burial Grounds Committee. Fees were payable for the plot itself, for each person burial within the plot, for the marking or lining of any grave, and for the rights to erect a headstone or identifying monument. Burial within a private grave was an indicator of respectability, devoid of the stigma of the anonymous pauper burial.

A private grave plot could be purchased for a specific number of years (after which time the grave plot could be 're-used' to allow for a new deposit), though there are reports of families paying the cemetery authority to ensure rights to the grave plot for all time, referred to as a 'perpetuity'. Once the lease on the grave was up, the plot could be sold to the next user, so the concept of a permanent burial in perpetuity was only a notion possible for those who could afford it. Medieval practises of cemetery

⁶⁶⁰ John Knott (1985). Popular Attitudes to Death and Dissection in Early Nineteenth Century Britain: The Anatomy Act and the Poor. *Labour History*. No. 49, p. 3

management were utilised, involving the opening of the grave to exhume the known inhabitant, digging the grave deeper, repositing the original inhabitant, and placing in the new corpse before sealing the grave again.

Burial Reform

During the industrial revolution, concerns were raised over population movement from rural to urban areas, resulting in burial plots being reused too quickly. By the 1850's, the spotlight was on London's inner-city cemeteries, which were overcrowded and poorly maintained, resulting in bad smells, which were believed to cause illness. Recent corpses could be disturbed by both the cutting of a new grave, or the works of body snatchers, leaving the burial grounds in a poor state. Following the 1848 cholera epidemic, during which 60,000 people were killed, the British government would be forced to take action, passing a number of burial acts over the next decade, starting with the Metropolitan Burial Act in 1852, which would make the burial grounds more hygienic. The acts were consolidated in 1857 establishing public cemeteries across the nation, with Burial Boards appointed by the Parish to assume the responsibility of managing the cemetery, the fees and the sale of plots. The Burial Act 1857 would regulate where people could be buried, and how many people could be buried within a plot, making it illegal for the first time to disturb a grave for any reason other than an officially ordered exhumation. The Act did not specifically prohibit the theft of a dead body, only the opening of the grave itself.

The issue of body snatching had become particularly prevalent following the opening of new universities and medical schools in the eighteenth century. The influx of students created an increased demand for cadavers to meet their training needs. A buried body was not considered to be legal property, meaning they could legally be sold or traded without restriction, despite public distaste, hence the development of practises such as the lock-up grave. Notorious corpse dealers such as William Burke and William Hare, sentenced in Edinburgh in 1828 for 17 murders (known as the West Port Murders) which took place in order to sell the corpses to anatomist Robert Cox, would inspire gangs of body snatchers such as the London Burkers to develop the trade further, becoming known as resurrection men. John Bishop, of the Burkers, would admit to stealing between 500-1,000 corpses over a twelve-year period.⁶⁶¹ These corpses were sold to anatomists and surgeons at a number of hospitals and institutions including King's College. These murders, amongst others would lead to the passage of the Anatomy Act 1832. The Act allowed researchers and surgeons to obtain pauper bodies for dissection, training and research, granting powers which allowed the Guardians of the deceased to hand over the body to the medical profession, who would use the bodies in the training of medical research and for conducting research. In the event that the body remained unclaimed for burial, anatomists were entitled to take the corpse (Bourke 1996:217).⁶⁶² Around 1914, approximately seven per cent of those who died in Poor Law institutions were unclaimed for burial.

⁶⁶¹ 'Confession of bodysnatcher John Bishop 1831', TNA HO17/46/122

⁶⁶² Bourke, Joanna (1995), p.217 – Bourke notes that by around 1914, approximately seven per cent of those who died in Poor Law institutions were unclaimed for burial.

Dissected bodies were often reduced to only partial remains, which would later be buried. Sen describes the case of Margaret Longmine who attempted to recover the remains of her father from the workhouse master to provide “a proper headstone”, only to be told days later that his corpse ‘had been “submitted to *complete* dissection”’ with the remaining “fragments” of his body having been buried already.⁶⁶³ Fragmented remains can be found within the archaeological record today in various states of completion.⁶⁶⁴ Though there are examples where there has been an attempt to bury the dissected remains in a typical supine position, even placing them within a coffin, highly fragmented remains would more typically be disposed of by the most convenient means, e.g pits, throughs or night cart.⁶⁶⁵

The inclusion of a clean, presentable body was essential for many middle- and upper-class funerary rituals. For them, the notion of dissection was abhorrent, an annihilation of the mortal body. To subject a body to unwilling dissection was offensive to most social classes and Christian denominations, however, the practice remained legal, with many corpses being claimed from workhouses. Following dissection, the failure to return the body for participation in funerary traditions, and later, commemorative traditions such as the erection of a headstone over the grave to act as a physical focus for grief, added further distress to their experience of loss. Placement in an unmarked grave resulted in what was perceived as a shameful obliteration of identity, with no marker to allow for the maintenance of memory. The Anatomy Act and the subsequent burial acts were fuelled by popular concern over a lack of respect for the dead, leading to debate over the sanctity of the grave and the increased focus on the whole presentable body in funerary ritual. This was particularly true for the middle and upper classes of society. These debates would result in the portrayal of public, shared graves within cemeteries as an unhygienic, overcrowded practise worthy of scandal and shame.

Despite the sustained public debate about the ownership of the pauper body, and the importance of good burial hygiene in the nineteenth century, these conversations do not appear to have been extended to the burials of soldiers. Thus, at the start of the war in 1914, existing professional soldiers would have held little expectation of an individual grave, with an unmarked, common grave being a realistic expectation for many ordinary ranked soldiers whether they died at home or in service. Even after the First World War and the transformation of military burial practice, the issue of enforced dissection remained in the public eye. Bourke describes how those who were pro dissection argued that it was better to ‘dissect a dead body than a live dog’, with those against dissection insisting that it ‘was bad enough to conscript live bodies without taking the dead ones’.⁶⁶⁶ The latter quote helps us to

⁶⁶³ Sen, Sambudha (2017). From Dispossession to Dissection: The Bare Life of the English Pauper in the Age of the Anatomy Act and the New Poor Law. *Victorian Studies*. Vol. 59(2), p.249

⁶⁶⁴ See Cherryson, Annia (2010). ‘In the pursuit of knowledge: Dissection, post-mortem surgery and the retention of body parts in 18th- and 19th-century Britain’. In Rebay-Salisbury, K., Stig Sørensen, M. L., and Hughes, J. (eds.). *Body Parts and Bodies Whole*. Oxford: Oxbow Books

⁶⁶⁵ Roberts, W. (1843). *Mr. Warburton’s Anatomy Bill, thoughts on its mischievous tendency, with suggestions for an entirely new one founded upon an available anti-septic process*. London: J. Olivier, pp. 9-10. Cited in Cherryson (2010): p. 139

⁶⁶⁶ ‘Debate amongst the Bermondsey Board of Guardians’. *Evening Standard*. 17 September 1921, PRO MH74 Cited in Bourke, p. 219

understand the complex relationship between military traditions, and civilian ones. The war in some ways reinvigorated the nineteenth century discussions about the ownership of the corpse, and the right of the family to claim ownership of a body in order to perform funerary rituals. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, it is not so simple as to suggest that the use of public, common or mass graves in a military context represented a disrespectful burial. Military burial traditions represented a perhaps slightly outdated version of civilian burial traditions, where the right to a private marked grave was determined by an individual's access to wealth and their place within the rigid British class system. Thus, shared, or mass graves used during the First World War can be considered both a continuation of existing military culture, but also a reflection of working-class burial traditions in nineteenth century Britain.