***Now Online, Diaries of British Soldiers Detail Horrors of World War I***

**By**[**STEVEN ERLANGER**](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/e/steven_erlanger/index.html)JAN. 14, 2014

LONDON — The British obsession with the centennial of World War I, the war that did not end all wars, heightened on Tuesday as the[National Archives](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/) announced that it was putting diaries from British soldiers in the conflict online.

The diaries record life in the trenches for all British military units, which were required to keep official journals daily. The archives hold about 1.5 million pages of these accounts, and about 20 percent of them have been digitized so far.

The first group of diaries describes the experiences of three cavalry divisions and seven infantry divisions, including the Fourth Dragoon Guards, which fought in the Battle of Mons, the first major action for the British, in August 1914.

Capt. James Patterson described the opening of the war. “Poor fellows shot dead are lying in all directions,” he wrote. “Trenches, bits of equipment, clothing (probably blood-stained), ammunition, tools, caps, etc., etc., everywhere. Everywhere the same hard, grim, pitiless sign of battle and war. I have had a belly full of it.”

Captain Patterson, of the First Battalion South Wales Borderers, took part in the First Battles of the Marne and the Aisne. He was killed in battle on Nov. 1, 1914, six weeks after an entry admitting that what he had seen was “beyond description.”

Volunteers have been scanning the diaries, which have been available for public view at the National Archives in Kew since the late 1960s. They can contain details that were not allowed to be sent in letters home.

Culture Secretary Maria Miller told the BBC that “the National Archives’ digitized First World War unit diaries will allow us to hear the voices of those that sacrificed their lives,” and that they are “even more poignant now there are no living veterans.”

The last known British veteran of the war, Harry Patch, died in 2009, at the age of 111.

Other diaries have also emerged. Toby Helm [wrote in The Observer](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/03/ww1-memories-imperial-war-museum-share)about the World War I diaries kept in pencil by his grandfather Cyril Helm, a doctor who served with the Second Battalion of the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. And the Imperial War Museum is working on a larger project to gather diaries from anyone who lived during the war, to be called [Lives of the First World War](http://www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org/), which is to begin next month.

In late October 1914, Dr. Helm wrote: “Many fell in our frontline trenches, causing awful casualties. Men were buried alive whilst others were just dug out in time and brought to, unable to stand, with their backs half-broken. My cellar was soon packed, but I could not put any wounded upstairs as any minute I expected the place to be blown up.”

He kept his mind on the injured, but at one point wrote, “There is nothing I know of more trying to the nerves than to sit listening to shells and wondering how long there is before one comes and finds your hiding place.”

Even the [Royal Mint](http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/royal-mint-commemorates-first-world-6456835) is issuing a new two-pound coin featuring Lord Kitchener’s mustachioed face and pointing finger, with the famous inscription: “Your country needs you!” The coin is only the first of special issues that will follow the years of the war. The Labour shadow culture minister, Helen Goodman, immediately criticized the coin as indicative of “an unnecessarily jingoistic approach” to the war’s commemorations.

There has also been a political squabble over remarks from the Conservative education minister, Michael Gove, who criticized British satirical shows, plays and films like “Blackadder” and “Oh! What a Lovely War” for promoting “left-wing myths that belittle Britain” by portraying the British command as fools who thoughtlessly sent young men to needless death.

There have also been a spate of books on the outbreak and causes of the war, followed by opinion pieces in the newspapers. The three most prominent books so far have been by Christopher Clark, “The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914,” which was quoted at a summit meeting by Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany; Margaret MacMillan, “The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914”; and Max Hastings, “Catastrophe 1914: Europe Goes to War.” But this is just an early skirmish: Publishers plan many more, including novels and the reissuing of classics like Barbara Tuchman’s “The Guns of August” and Erich Maria Remarque’s “All Quiet on the Western Front.”

Other countries, especially those that had so much combat on their soil, will have their own commemorations; the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra will perform in Sarajevo, Bosnia, on the anniversary of the assassination there of Franz Ferdinand, the Austro-Hungarian crown prince, which set off the war.

And in the journalistic tradition of finding odd connections to current obsessions, the [Edinburgh Evening News](http://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/rare-world-war-1-fungus-found-in-edinburgh-1-3265889) wrote that a rare fungus discovered in Scotland, on the grounds of an old military hospital, “may have been carried from Flanders Fields on the boots of First World War soldiers.”

A version of this article appears in print on January 15, 2014, on page A6 of the New York edition with the headline: Now Online, Diaries of British Soldiers Detail Horrors of World War I.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/15/world/europe/now-online-diaries-of-british-soldiers-detail-horrors-of-world-war-i.html?smid=fb-nytimes&WT.z_sma=WO_NOD_20140115&bicmp=AD&bicmlukp=WT.mc_id&bicmst=1388552400000&bicmet=1420088400000&_r=1>

****CUMBRIA

**16 January 2014** Last updated at 15:44 GMT

**WWI soldiers' writing unearthed in Somme tunnels**

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**Archaeologists have uncovered a labyrinth of World War One tunnels left untouched for nearly 100 years and found poems and the signatures from three soldiers from a Cumbrian regiment. But who were those men and what does this find tell us about their experiences?**

Under the site of the 1916 Battle Of The Somme in northern France lie hundreds of artefacts, including ammunition and discarded food tins. And on the walls are perfectly legible signatures and poems written in pencil.

"It is such an amazing piece of history and it's so fresh," said genealogist Glen Phillips.

"The signatures have been there for nearly 100 years and because the tunnels have been sealed up, they are as fresh as the day they were made... like a doodles on a notebook these days."

Historians and volunteers have spent the past few years in La Boisselle exploring this part of the Western Front which has remained untouched since the end of WWI.

An appeal is now on to trace the descendants of the men who scribed their personal messages there.

"When I first saw them I was blown away," added Mr Phillips, who is part of La Boisselle project.

"The thought of being able to share that with some of the families of some of those men is what really motivates me and drives me on to do this research."

**Underground service**

The Somme was not only one of the bloodiest battles of World War One, but one of the bloodiest in history.

More than 1.2 million men are believed to have died during the main battle, but a group of soldiers fought their own private hidden war underground.

The tunnels, 80ft (24m) down, were dug so that troops could plant explosives below enemy lines.

Most of the British work in the tunnels was done by miners, many of them from the north of England, but a lot of infantrymen were pressed into service underground too.

The three messages on the tunnel walls are from Privates William Carr, William Chard and Obadiah Henderson who all left Carlisle to go overseas with the 11th Lonsdale Battalion in November 1915.

All of these men helped the tunnellers prepare for the Battle of the Somme and all attacked on the first day of battle on 1 July 1916.

Pte Obadiah Henderson was from Riding Mill in Northumberland and worked as a farm labourer before volunteering to go to war.

Pte William Chard was a joiner from Longtown, Cumberland. Both of these men survived the Battle of the Somme and returned home after.

Pte Carr was wounded on the first day of battle and returned home to Carlisle to recuperate after being shot in the leg.

He then returned to war in the Battle of Arras, serving for the 2nd Battalion, during which he suffered fatal wounds and died on 24 June 1917.

One of the poems found, which is not attributed to any of the men, reads: "If in this place you are detained, don't look around you all in vain, but cast your net and you will find, that every cloud is silver lined. Still."

**'Absolutely fascinating'**

Stuart Eastwood, curator of the Border Regiment Museum at Carlisle Castle, is now helping La Boisselle Project to try and find the soldiers' descendants.

He said war diaries from their time in France stated the three men were providing working parties for the royal engineers and there was "no mention" of them working underground.

"The fact that the names of these three soldiers were found scrawled in pencil on the walls of one of the chambers during the excavation work is absolutely fascinating.

"It means that they weren't just working parties for the royal engineers, these were ordinary infantrymen who were underground backing up the tunnellers and no doubt hauling bags of rubble as well.

"They were taking the same risk that the tunnellers faced, so if something went wrong underground, whether it was a natural thing like a collapse or fighting underground, they would be there as well."

About 90% of the Lonsdale Battalion came from Cumberland and Westmorland and few numbers from County Durham, Northumberland and Lancashire.

Mr Eastwood said it would be "absolutely marvellous" to find the descendants of the men.

He said: "Anything like this is really important, it's another little snippet that can help build up the picture of what happened during WWI.

"It was very local and somebody would know somebody who had served or who was serving, so it was very poignant indeed."

Peter Barton, author and historian for La Boisselle Project, said: "Finding graffiti like this, particularly names, is probably the most thrilling part of this project... to find the names of the men who actually served here and then to be able to try and find their families, that gives it an entirely different dimension.

"Very often we think of World War One as something rather impersonal, we talk about it in tens of thousands of casualties, but each one of those was a man with a history and a legacy.

"I bet there wasn't a day went past when they didn't think about these tunnels."

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-25748393?print=true>



WWI-era German helmets on display at the City History Museum in Erfurt, Thuringia. Photo: DPA

Young more keen to learn about WWI than parents

Published: 16 Jan 2014 16:34 GMT+01:00
Updated: 16 Jan 2014 16:34 GMT+01:00

**Young Germans are more interested in World War One than generations before them, a poll released on Wednesday revealed. The results come amid controversy over the government's lack of plans to commemorate the centenary.**

* [**Germany yet to plan official WWI events**](http://www.thelocal.de/20140113/german-government-no-plans-to-commemorate-world-war-i) (13 Jan 14)
* [**Digger driver killed by British WWII bomb**](http://www.thelocal.de/20140103/digger-driver-dies-after-hitting-wwii-bomb)(03 Jan 14)
* [**Germans improve Pisa education results**](http://www.thelocal.de/20131203/german-improve-pisa-education-results)(03 Dec 13)

The study by pollsters Forsa revealed 69 percent of the 1,004 people questioned said they were "very interested" in the subject. But among 14-to-29-year-olds that figure jumped to 77 percent.

Published in Stern magazine, the research comes after news that, whilst it will sponsor some local events through 2014, the [German government has as yet no plans](http://www.thelocal.de/20140113/german-government-no-plans-to-commemorate-world-war-i) for any large official public ceremonies of to mark the start of the conflict which resulted in 37 million casualties.

Forsa's results also suggest a majority consensus among Germans that responsibility for the outbreak of war in 1914 was shared between Europe's great powers, rather than being the fault of any one country in particular.

Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed said the blame rested with all the states involved in the war, while just 19 percent believed the German Empire, under Kaiser Wilhelm II, had been the nation at fault.

Nine percent pointed the finger at other warring states for instigating the conflict, Stern reported.

And asked whether they were worried a similar conflict could break out in Europe today, 39 percent said they were concerned. Eight percent were scared such a war might take place, while 53 percent said they were not worried.

[**READ MORE: Digger driver killed by British WWII bomb**](http://www.thelocal.de/20140116/digger-driver-dies-after-hitting-wwii-bomb)

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