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In The Presence Of Mine Enemies: Face-To-Face Killing In Twentieth Century Warfare

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7 July 1916. On this day, Arthur Hubbard painfully set pen to paper in an attempt to explain to his mother why he was no longer in France. He had been taken from the battlefields and deposited in the East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital suffering from "shell shock". In his words, his breakdown was related to witnessing "a terrible sight that I shall never forget as long as I live". He told his mother that

we had strict orders not to take prisoners, no matter if wounded my first job was when I had finished cutting some of their wire away, to empty my magazine on 3 Germans that came out of one of their deep dugouts. bleeding badly, and put them out of misery. They cried for mercy, but I had my orders, they had no feeling whatever for us poor chaps.... it makes my head jump to think about it.

In this halting, graphic account, there was little to differentiate Arthur Hubbard's letters to his family from those written by hundreds of other privates around the time of the Battle of the Somme. His active military career had lasted just three months, between May and July 1916. In his early letters, he was cheery and reassuring: "I am with the best of fellows", he chirped, and "we shall all return back safely together and before this year is through". However, as he moved closer to the front, and to battle, the tone of his letters began changing. Rain, mud, lice, rats, and "very tedious work" frustrated him. A friend he had been with since the beginning of the war (Isaacs) started to look like "an old man.... it is a pity he gets so nervous." Arthur began speaking of life at the front as "a proper hell... one cannot imagine unless one was here to witness things" and a new and bitter edge crept into his letters as he imagined his family

"sitting around the table about 8.30 enjoying a good breakfast and me miles away in this miserable place which is being and has been blown to hell by the Huns."

He was not the only man trembling under the strain: a few days before the Battle, he described going to the aid of a man who had shot himself in the foot in order to avoid the anticipated slaughter. He admitted to feeling "miserable" but confessed to his sisters that

"I don't feel inclined to tell you a pack of lies, if the truth was told a bit more often, I don't suppose the war would be on now, when you land over here, they have got you tight and treat you as they think."

Two days later, Hubbard went over the top. While he managed to fight as far as the fourth line of trenches, by 3.30 that afternoon practically his whole battalion had been wiped out by German artillery. He was buried, dug himself out, and during the subsequent retreat was almost killed by machine gun fire. Within this landscape of horror, he started screaming and was taken away.

The first letter I quoted is the only explanation Hubbard gave for why he suffered. Clearly, being buried alive and witnessing the mass slaughter of his friends (including Isaacs) contributed to his breakdown, but his own guilt-ridden aggressiveness in slaughter was given its due weight in his account. For his anxious family, the sudden shift in the way he described the enemy must also have been poignant. Whereas in his previous correspondence, he spoke only of "Huns", when describing face-to-face killing, the three prisoners pleading for their lives became (for the first and only time) "Germans".

We know nothing about what happened to Arthur Hubbard, but most likely he was given the "good news" that he would not be returning to the front. The last letter on record announced his itinerary for returning home: he planned to arrive at Vauxhill at four o'clock, catch the tram outside, and change at Streatham Library. Destination: 159 Links Road, Mitcham Lane, Streatham Vale, London. [2]

For historians, as for men like Private Arthur Hubbard, the urgency of military combat calls forth some of our most frightening narratives: their letters home, their diaries, and our history books are saturated with bloody images of torn, putrid flesh. Within this gory articulation of the experience of war, there are two stories -- both fundamental to battle and both passionately narrated by combat soldiers -- which historians in particular shield away from. The first is this: we know so much about how men *died* for their country, and barely anything about how they *killed* for it. One of the aims of my current research (of which this paper is a small part) is to put *killing* back into modern military history. The second feature which we scarcely dare to mention involves acknowledging that although the act of killing another person in warfare may invoke a wave of nauseous distress, it only rarely resulted in emotional or nervous collapse or long-term "brutalisation". How can this be? How did men -- particularly conscripted men -- cope with the demands made upon them to kill another man in battle? More specifically, how did they experience killing another human being when that person had a distinctive face and physique?

Of course, it has to be noted from the start that face-to-face killing was extremely rare in the three conflicts examined in this paper (that is, the two "world" wars and the Vietnam War; for men in the forces in Britain, America, and Australia). It is impossible to deny that most of these soldiers did not see the men they were annihilating. By the end of the Second World War, the ratio of soldiers to space was 1 man per 28,000 square metres (compared with 1:260 meters in the American Civil War). [3] The indirect character of weapons such as shrapnel, bombs, and gas meant that while dying was regularly viewed, killing was not. Despite our media-driven image, during the First World War, less than one-half of one per cent of wounds were inflicted by the bayonet. [4] What is striking, therefore, in reading the diaries and letters of combatants is their insistence upon visualising their enemy; of personifying their foe. It is this process of linking the destructive acts of ones' right hand with *individual* dead men which is the focus of this paper.

Guilt

How *did* men respond to killing? Where is *individual* guilt in modern military history? At the end of the slaughter, public pleas for *national* atonement were commonplace while the search for personal forgiveness had to be carried out in dank chapels and darkened bedrooms. Military spokesmen have been outspoken in denying the issue of responsibility and guilt. Except in the case of "atrocities", Tommy Atkins (they pledged) shared no responsibility for killing if he was obeying a legitimate order. [5] When guilt was acknowledged, little weight was given to *killing* as the precipitating factor. Indeed, it is true that most soldiers who collapsed never killed anyone. During the First World War, less than one-fifth of neurotic British soldiers had ever been anywhere near the front lines. [6] In the Second World War, eighty-nine per cent of American soldiers discharged from the services on the grounds that they were psychologically "ineffective" had not seen combat. [7] Furthermore, amongst those psychiatric casualties who *had* seen battle, it was fear of dying rather than guilt over (or fear of) killing which

to the crisis.[8] Indeed, psychiatrists recognised that more men broke down in war because they were *not* allowed to kill as collapsed under the strain of fighting. As the English psychologist, John T. MacCurdy put it at the end of the First World War, modern warfare offered many men "little personal satisfaction": in past conflicts", he explained, "men exposed themselves to the risk of death, but they were

"compensated [for it] by the excitement of more active operations, the more frequent possibility of giving some satisfaction in active hand to hand fighting, where they might feel the joy of personal prowess".

The modern soldier (in contrast) was pitted against anonymous agents and his aggression was also incognito: human emotions could not cope with that. "Survivor's guilt" (or guilt for having lived when one's comrades were killed) was frequently discussed: "killer's guilt" (or remorse for having killed) was subdued.[9]

Historians have shared with military officers a reluctance to mention issues of individual responsibility in combat. Some even argued that it would be "very dubious" to "question the morality of the individuals" who carried out actions of mass destruction in war.[10] Such scruples would be entirely correct, were it not for the fact (as we shall see in this paper) that combatants themselves constantly raised issues of personal responsibility. Indeed, they insisted upon it.

Admittedly, guilt was generally not felt in the heat of battle. Many soldiers experienced a kind of separation from the self -- including the moral self -- during battle. Ivone Kirkpatrick, for instance, recalled how, in battle, his

"body and soul seemed to be entirely divorced, even to the extent that I felt that I no longer inhabited my body... I seemed to hover at some height above my own body."[11]

Furthermore, certain forms of killing were less liable to instil guilt. In aerial warfare, for example, there was a strong correlation between altitude and guilt, with B-52 pilots and crews bombing at high altitudes being less liable to experience remorse than men on fighter-bomber missions who, in turn, were less guilt-ridden than men flying helicopter gunships where the victims were clearly visible.[12]

But, feelings of guilt inspired by breaking the Sixth Commandment could not be dismissed so dogmatically. Even long-distant killing could inspire guilt -- if only in the form of feeling guilty for *not* feeling guilty. This was the sense in which the bomber pilot, Frank Elkins, experienced his sense of sinfulness. He knew that his bombs were killing hundreds of civilians each raid. His anguish can be heard in his diary:

"The deep shame that I feel is my own lack of emotional reaction. I keep reacting as though I were simply watching a movie of the whole thing. I still don't feel that I have personally killed anyone.... Have I become so insensitive that I have to see torn limbs, the bloody ground, the stinking holes and guts in the mud, before I feel ashamed that I have destroyed numbers of my own kind?"[13]

Elkins was not alone: for most men, military training followed by combat dulled, but did not eradicate, remorse over shedding blood.[14] The moral reaction might be delayed, as in the case of R. H. Stewart after he bayoneted a German during the Battle of the Somme. "It was", he confessed,

"the first time I had to kill a man at close range and I did it with a fixed bayonet. It was not very light and he was a shadow but as I twisted the bayonet clear he squealed like a stuck pig. It was not till I was on my way back that I started to shake and I shook like a leaf on a tree for the rest of the night".[15]

Sometimes, consciences guiltily circled around and around fears of retribution: "no fox hole was deep enough to protect him from an avenging fate."[16] In the words of two black Marines, Reginald "Malik" Edwards and Arthur E. "Gene" Woodley both of whom recalled overwhelming feelings of guilt after emptying their M-16s into enemy soldiers: "I just started feeling really badly" and "I cried", they stammered.[17]

The military consequences of such fits of conscience could be serious. While (as we have just seen) many military commentators denied the importance of guilt over killing, some were forced to admit that guilt inhibited aggression.[18] Personal consciences could seriously threaten the entire military enterprise by weakening automatic obedience to orders, promoting pity for the "would-be-enemy prisoner with whom the army dare not encumber itself", and taunting men during long, sleepless nights with the chant "Thou shalt not kill".[19] At the very least, remorse was damaging to morale.[20] During particular periods of wars, guilt even resulted in waves of self-mutilation, as in the American army in Italy immediately after the end of the Second World War.[21] Understandably, the military establishment attempted to alleviate such risks. The two main groups within the military whose job it was to eradicate the "nuisance" of guilt were padres and psychologists.

After burying the dead, the most important duty for military chaplains involved counselling soldiers who confessed to disquiet about killing.[22] Padres had to "put stiffness into the muscles of the military mind" and "summon up his own, and the blood of all whom he comes into contact... for a blast of righteous hate", decreed the First World War padre, Rev. J. Smith.[23] Linked to their task as legitimators of killing, military chaplains also had a responsibility to educate their men about the rules of warfare. Pulpits (therefore) did resound with exhortations to "play the game" -- but this was as deep as the theological advice went. Although theological concepts of a "just war" were delineated (Had the war been properly declared? Was it being fought for a just cause? Was it a last resort?), many chaplains expressed extremely cynical views about whether the adherence to "rules" was *ever* an expedient policy in combat. After all, as one chaplain put it:

"It is hit anywhere you can and as hard as you can.... Really there can be no rules for the conduct of war.... Manifestly an Outlaw scheme of things."[24]

The extent to which chaplains failed to provide moral guidance can be gauged by examining their advice concerning the killing of prisoners and civilians. Clergymen were well aware that the gratuitous killing of non-combatants was proscribed by both legal precept and religious law, yet clergymen during all three conflicts were remarkably lax in their condemnation of such practices. In the words of Rev. E. W. Brereton during the Second World War:

"we are fighting for dear life against enemies who are not Christians, not human beings, but reptiles. We claim the right to fight these fiends not with kid gloves. I scorn the humanitarians who object to reprisals."[25]

Religious leaders advised combatants that even children could be killed because it was impossible to separate them from their guilty parents.[26] In 1917, the theologian and editor of the *Modern Churchman*, Rev. H. D. A. Major, was even more forthright, asserting that

"[i]f the only way to protect adequately an English babe is to kill a German babe, then it is the duty of the authorities, however repugnant, to do it. More particularly is this so when we reflect that the innocent German babe will in all probability grow up to be the killer of babes himself."[27]

There were two surveys of military chaplains which examined the extent to which padres were willing to condone the killing of non-combatants. In two separate surveys, Waldo W. Burchard and Gordon C. Zahn interviewed military chaplains, and both revealed extremely high levels of complicity in the killing of captured prisoners. In Zahn's interviews, ninety per cent expressed no problems about orders to refuse to accept surrenders and over half were incapable of even *conceiving* of a situation in which it would be their duty as chaplains to advise soldiers against obeying an order on the grounds of Christian ethics.[28] Such attitudes had tragic consequences -- most infamously during the Vietnam War and (in particular) during the My Lai atrocity.[29]

course, the combatant had to safeguard the purity of his own soul or personality, ensuring that it was not corrupted by bitter feelings toward the enemy. In this way, the *manner* in which a man took another man's life was important. Crucially, Christians revealed their righteousness in battle by killing without hatred. Thus, Father Grayson during the Vietnam War advised soldiers that it was legitimate to kill "but not with hatred in your heart".^[30] The same instruction had been offered during the First World War when Edward Increase Bosworth in *The Christian Witness in War* (1918) reminded his readers that the "Christian soldier in friendship wounds the enemy. In friendship he kills the enemy.... His heart never consigns the enemy to hell. He never hates."^[31] As they plunged their bayonets into human flesh, clergymen encouraged soldiers to murmur, "[t]his is my body broken for you", or to whisper prayers of love.^[32] In this way, it was possible to kill without sin. Clergymen went further, however, arguing that Christ himself endorsed killing -- although (rather inappropriately given twentieth-century armaments) the chosen instrument was the bayonet. When pacifists asked their audiences whether they could imagine Christ sticking his bayonet into another man, many parsons answered with a resounding "yes".^[33] Killing was not merely sanctioned, it was sanctified.

Even more important than Theology was Psychology. From the middle of the First World War, the military recognised the value of psychologists if (in the words of the English psychologist, Dr Charles Stanley Myers) the "air pilot's objection to bombing women and children" was to be countered and if pensions were to be refused to men suffering psychological disturbances as a result of combat (on the grounds that pensions rewarded them for their emotional inadequacies).^[34] A lecture entitled "Reactions to Killing" which was circulated by military psychologists during the Second World War provides a good example of their ethical function. In the lecture, the killing of prisoners is merely taken for granted. Military psychologists and other officers were simply told that if men expressed difficulty killing prisoners, they were to be advised to alleviate their guilty consciences by transferring moral responsibility to a higher authority: "obeying orders", in other words. Guilt-ridden men were to be reminded that the act of slaughtering prisoners was "shared by the group" and was necessary to safeguard not only the self and one's comrades, but also "civilized ideals". Above all, any hint that killing prisoners was an "expression of blood-lust" had to be removed.^[35] In other words, for military psychologists, the killing of non-combatants was merely a *fact* of modern warfare, rather than a problem. Whatever the *practice* of religious advisers in the armed services, they were well tutored in the theological rules of combat. The social sciences possessed no similarly authoritative moral law. Indeed, in the case of major branches of these sciences -- instinct theories and psychoanalysis, for instance -- killing was regarded as an essential, inescapable part of the human psyche. Other branches -- behaviourism, for instance -- embodied a pragmatism which was greatly favoured by the armed forces.^[36] If guilt had a place, it was a lowly one in which combatants were urged (in the popular book *Psychology for the Fighting Man*, 1944) to "face... squarely.... because killing is the main job of a combat soldier".^[37]

Furthermore, psychiatrists and other medical officers became increasingly hostile to men who broke down under the strain of killing. During the First World War, there tended to be a slightly more understanding attitude amongst doctors. The authors of one of the standard First World War books on shell shock, went so far as to point out that a combatant who suffered a neurosis because of killing had not lost his reason but was labouring under the weight of too much reason: his senses were "functioning with painful efficiency".^[38] By the Second World War, however, the inability to act aggressively was itself regarded as a psychiatric disorder. It was believed that men who were unable to kill were "dull and backward". They were men who lacked the ability to understand "complex ideas" (such as "patriotism, appreciation of the alternative to winning the war, tradition") and, having been brought up with the "christian attitude" did not possess "the capacity to adjust to what [was]... the antithesis of this attitude".^[39] Men who experienced emotional conflicts in killing were "psychologically inadequate individuals" or were "ineffectives" who required "salvaging".^[40] If they broke under the strain, they were "childish", "narcissistic", and "feminine".^[41] Pacifism was a "morbid phenomenon.... the rationalization of self-destructive wishes", according to Franz Alexander. He continued (in an article in *The American Journal of Sociology* in 1941), arguing that

"[a]nyone who is blind to the ubiquitous manifestation of human aggressiveness in the past and present can be rightly considered a man who does not face reality. If he is not of subnormal intelligence -- unable to grasp events around him -- his inability to face facts must be of emotional origin, and he must be considered a neurotic."^[42]

Such individuals needed to be "cured" of this infliction and forced to react to killing in "a human, rather than an animal, way".^[43]

Justifying this attitude was not difficult. It was obvious that, in wartime, the nation had a right to demand that servicemen gave their "nerves" for their country, as much as their limbs, eyes, or lives. In addition, forcing a combat-exhausted man back into the front lines was in his own interests since, if he was evacuated, "he would be tempted to maintain his sickness as part of a masochistic penance for having failed to return to his unit and his duty."^[44] The group rather than the individual was paramount.^[45] "The first duty of a battalion medical officer in War is to discourage the evasion of duty", Captain J. C. Dunn lectured, and this duty had to be done "not seldom against one's better feelings, sometimes to the temporary hurt of the individual, but justice to all other men as well as discipline demands it."^[46] A decade later, a similar comment was made by Lieutenant Colonel Philip S. Wagner, professor of psychiatry at the University of Madison Medical School and consultant at the Veterans Hospital at Perry Point. He reminded his readers that military psychiatrists had only one aim and that was to determine whether "additional combat usefulness" remained in an individual. The psychiatrist was not to concern himself with

"cure", nor with solicitude for the psychic pain he would have to endure to serve a few more combat days, nor even with speculations on the eventual consequence to his personality".^[47]

It was this attitude which increasingly led the military to substitute psychologists for padres -- indeed, the two increasingly became less distinguishable as padres embraced psychological languages (jettisoning the traditional grammar of repentance and forgiveness) and as military training came to portray itself as "treatment for an unadjusted conscience" according to a textbook entitled *Psychology for the Armed Forces* and published by the National Research Council in 1945.^[48] In the words of one man: "We aren't just counselors; we're almost priests. They come to us for absolution as well as help."^[49]

Emotionally "stitching up" men so that they could return to the front lines as soon as possible was not alien to civilian psychology, particularly as it was practised within industry. Scientists held multiple subject positions: they spoke of peace while providing statistics for war; healed men in order to send them to be killed; were ambivalent about their role within the military while exploiting its unprecedented research possibilities. Military psychiatrists and psychologists were "captive professionals".^[50] The medical corps was a fully integrated part of the military establishment and one which accepted that the "customer" was the commanding officer, not the patient. In time of war, clinical psychology and psychiatry took on a distinctive kind of practice: channelling the urge to kill rather than dampening violent urges.

But, as I suggested at the beginning, amoral "acceptance of killing" was not always straightforward. Although men strove to be causal agents, decisions made by moral actors in the heat of battle were inevitably confused. Simple adherence to the legal laws of warfare was insufficient. Indeed, as I discuss in another paper, these rules were so contradictory, nebulous, and subtle that they were often of little help to servicemen in the heat of combat. Combatants responded by developing their own "rules of thumb" to differentiate legitimate "killing" in wartime from guilt-ridden "murder". These rules were not identical to legal militarist formulas: in contrast, they were flexible, contradictory, and consolatory. They were, however, widely applied. So what I have done is, in my reading of over 200 series of letters and diaries, I have focused on the way combatants themselves described killing and the ways they came to terms with it. In doing this, it can be seen that combatants allayed feelings of guilt through recourse to five justifications. The first four were the weaker rationalisations: obedience, reciprocity and revenge, depersonalisation, and sportiveness. We will all be familiar with these so I shall devote no more than a couple of sentences to each:

Personal feelings of guilt were often alleviated by reminders that combatants were "merely" obeying orders, and that these orders had been handed down by a legitimate authority. Of course, the efficacy of "obeying orders" as a way of minimising emotional conflict and enabling men to act aggressively was widely recognised by military instructors who laboriously insisted upon instantaneous obedience to orders so that each man might be able to "sleep like a child and

ken refreshed -- to kill and fear not."^[51]

Even in the absence of direct orders, combatants were able to legitimise their aggressive behaviour by appealing to notions of reciprocity: "kill or be killed". This rationale was applied at varying degrees of intensity spanning from the nation, to identified strangers ("women and the weak") to comrades and, finally, to oneself. As the level of abstraction decreased, the legitimacy of killing increased. Thus, for soldiers on active service (as opposed to propagandists) the legitimacy of killing was least convincing when applied to the nation and most effective after witnessing the deaths of comrades and facing one's own imminent mortality. Indeed, most men only became willing to take another human life after seeing their wartime companions slaughtered. In the words of one soldier:

"I felt a drastic change after that.... I really loved bloody killing, couldn't get enough. For every one that I killed I felt better. Made some of the hurt went away."^[52]

Or, in the words of a Vietnam soldier, every time a friend was killed, he would personally take revenge, all the time talking to the ghosts of his comrades: "here's one for you, baby. I'll take this motherfucker out and I'm going to cut his fucking heart out for you."^[53] In this way, grief was converted into rage.

If the notion "him or me" could legitimise the most brutal acts of violence, atrocities themselves could be used to justify particularly violent combat: they reassured combatants by alleging that the enemy was too evil to warrant survival. There are thousands of examples. For instance, extermination camps of the Second World War strongly motivated many combatants. Captain John Long of an American tank division recalled "liberating" one of these camps:

"From this incidence on Jerry was no longer an impersonal foe. The Germans were monsters!.... We had just mopped them up before but we stomped the shit out of them after the camps."^[54]

Even when the story was a complete fiction (as in the case of the crucifixion of Canadians during the First World War), atrocities could feed atrocities.^[55]

Processes of dehumanisation were related to accusations of atrocities. The enemy were animals -- baboons, rats, vermin, wild beasts. They were a vaguely designated "enemy" or "ideology".

Finally, the extent to which any particular fight could be rationalised was frequently based on notions of "sportiveness". This was meant in two ways. Firstly, that killing *was* sport -- a justification in itself -- and, secondly, that because it was a sport, it allowed for the possibility of "fair play" and the punishment of those who did not "play fair". Conceptualising combat as a game and sport (particularly hunting) was extremely common, and since everyone in this room will be familiar with such metaphors, I won't discuss them here.

Guilty Survivals

These rationales did not eradicate guilt altogether: they could neither withstand the weight of violence in military conflicts nor the resilience of the modern conscience. Actual combat simply *was not* sporting, no matter how hard men tried to make it resemble civilian or chivalrous codes. If warfare was like game hunting (as thousands of men alleged), then it was the most brutal, unsatisfying form of this sport.

The rationale that "it was him or me" was equally unconvincing: long-distance artillery, sniping, orders not to take prisoners, and unequal opponents were the norm, not exceptions. Even when a combatant sincerely believed that it was "his life or mine", they might be consumed with guilt -- men like Private Daniel Sweeney who stumbingly explained to his fianc at the beginning of November 1916, that:

"The German that I shot who died afterwards was a fine looking man I was there when he died poor chap. I did feel sorry but it was my life or his, he was speaking but none of us could understand a word he said, to tell you the truth I had a tear myself, I thought to myself perhaps he has a Mother or Dad also a sweetheart and a lot of things like that, I was really sorry I did it..."^[56]

Guilt was not eliminated by recourse to a vocabulary of "kill or be killed". It was merely blunted.

Obedience to higher authorities was also fraught with difficulties: after all, what *was* the "appropriate authority"? As I discuss in a paper on atrocities, obeying orders allowed for a huge range of activities -- from enthusiastic slaughter to reluctant minimalism to avoidance behaviour and, even, to active resistance (again, *whose* orders?).

The importance of atrocity reporting should also not be exaggerated, especially in the front-lines. In one survey carried out in 1943 and 1944 only thirteen per cent of American infantrymen in the Pacific and Europe theatres had seen Japanese or German soldiers fighting in ways they regarded as "dirty or inhuman", and less than one-half had even heard of such stories.^[57] Dehumanisation worked quite well in basic training: not so well in battle. In combat situations, where human slaughter was ubiquitous, atrocities were difficult to define and were often simply ignored.^[58] It was impossible to maintain the fiction that the enemy was any different from oneself for very long.^[59] Furthermore, throughout accounts of combat, we hear men humanising the enemy, only in order to kill. For instance, a young soldier in Vietnam came across a small child with one arm already shot off, and he immediately recognised that this child was the same age as his own sister. He wondered:

"What if a foreign army was in my country and a soldier was looking at my sister just as I'm looking at this little boy. Would that foreign soldier have the guts to kill my sister?"

The answer was clear: "If he'd have the guts, then I'd have the guts", and he pulled the trigger.^[60]

In many instances, atrocity-reporting could be counter-productive. People were sceptical about the vivid tales being spread of the foe's bestiality and often responded by resenting the messenger. As William Hocking noted in 1918:

"it is never wise to make him out less than human. For anger... runs in the opposite direction; it personifies and attributes conscience to even inanimate things. If we de-humanize the foe we remove him from the reach of instinctive indignation".^[61]

In other words, portraying the enemy as a different species diminished any sense that the enemy should be held accountable for his actions, yet it was precisely this accountability that sustained condemnation. Dehumanisation could strip the killing enterprise of its moral value. As J. Glenn Gray noted in *The Warriors* (1970), viewing the enemy as a beast "lessen[ed] even the satisfaction in destruction, for there [was] not proper regard for the worth of the objects destroyed."^[62] During the Second World War (and particularly in the war against the Japanese) the use of atrocity stories ended up being questioned by military command on the grounds that they were making combatants frightened of battle or of having to bale out of their aeroplanes.^[63] Dehumanizing the enemy could increase levels of fear by transforming the enemy into "mysterious wraiths": men yearned for the reassurance that their enemy was "flesh and blood" even if this induced feelings of remorse.^[64]

It was the ultimate failure of these processes in eradicating guilt and providing pleasure in killing that led to the next, opposite principle: that of personal responsibility. Indeed, part of the function of the rationales just described was that -- by blunting the devastating impact of guilt -- they allowed feelings of remorse to be retained, and the killing to continue.

responsibility

Attempts by senior military officers to minimise (if not eradicate) remorse for killing was not shared by most combat soldiers who tended to regard guilt as an endorsement of their essential goodness and who, in many circumstances, refused to countenance attempts to alleviate the emotional pain attendant upon sincere remorse. Paradoxically, combatants maintained their ability to kill by stressing that they retained a moral faculty. This insistence that men were causal agents was crucial. Combatants strongly believed that they *should* feel guilty for killing: it was precisely this emotion which made them "human", and enabled them to return to peaceful civilian society afterwards, unbrutalised. Men who did not feel guilt were somehow less than human, or were insane. [65] This is why the face-to-face bayonet fight was so romanticised, despite its extreme rarity: as Ben Compton observed: "a war where you don't look the man in the eye when you kill him is not war. It's just a kind of butchery.... If you have to kill him, you should honor him". [66] Face-to-face fighting was thus considered to be "less brutal" than other means of causing human destruction because (in the words of Stephen Graham in 1919) it was "more personal, and human responsibility is clear". [67]

Indeed, the ability to acknowledge one's agency was crucial in preventing psychological collapse. Numerous studies show that the chief factor distinguishing combatants who participated in extreme acts of violence and suffered psychiatric collapse or attempted suicide from combatants who also participated in extreme acts of violence yet "coped" with it was that the former group had felt "out of control as a result of excessive fear or rage" while the later group felt that they knew what they were doing and although came to question the legitimacy of their action (particularly in the case of atrocities) in later times they still accepted responsibility for what they had done. [68] Embracing responsibility and the admittance of guilt warded off psychiatric collapse.

In the final analysis (after notions of obedience, reciprocity, depersonalisation, and sportiveness had been noted and accepted), combatants often insisted on taking responsibility for their actions. As one veteran put it: "[i]f you accept that you did it... then you've got to accept some guilt too." Guilt, and the associated personal and erratic rites of repentance, brought ritual back to slaughter: expressions of remorse enabled killing to continue, and to be accepted. Embracing responsibility enabled men to retain feelings of guilt minus its most maddening sting.

Conclusion

Fighting men were not merely the avenging arm of the state, nor were they simply pawns in an omnipresent moral universe against which it was impossible to struggle. They created their own moral universe which enabled them to impose an ordered, "sensible" narrative (rationalisation) on what was inherently chaotic violence while retaining the remorse-laden integrity of their moral selves (responsibility). In these ways, combatants were sheltered from the madness attendant upon knowledge of unpardonable trespass. Furthermore, to extent that they did this, they bear that measure of responsibility for the killing they participated in. This was in contrast to the military establishment which regarded guilt as an irritating (and dangerous) inconvenience which had to be minimised, if not eradicated altogether. Padres and military psychiatrists encouraged combatants to repudiate feelings of guilt and insisted that veterans' difficulties were merely "problems in adjustment". After the Vietnam War, American jargon labelled this process "deresponsibilizing" -- that is, persuading veterans that their actions were the result of external causes and that any bad feelings they might have about them were the result of "survivors' guilt".

Admittedly, although combatants applied moral criteria, they did not do so consistently and, in combat, a terrified soldier might fail to act upon his belief of what constituted legitimate killing. Furthermore, the rules applied by servicemen were not necessarily shared by civilians, politicians, and non-combatants, but they were crucial if actions which, in other contexts, would have been regarded with horror and repugnance, were to be perpetuated and, eventually, accepted. It was the differentiation made between legitimate killing and "murder" which maintained men's sanity through the war and helped insulate them against agonising and numbing brutality.

Endnotes

1. For further discussion, see my *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1996) and *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta, October 1998).
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14. Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (London, 1977), 124.
15. R. H. Stewart, quoted by Philip Orr, *The Road to the Somme. Men of the Ulster Division Tell Their Story* (Belfast, 1987), 155.

Major Edwin A. Weinstein and Lieutenant-Colonel Calvin S. Drayer, "A Dynamic Approach to the Problem of Combat-Induced Anxiety", *The Bulletin of the U. S. Army Medical Department*, ix, supplemental number (November 1949), 16.

17. Private First Class Reginald "Malik" Edwards and Specialist 4 Arthur E. "Gene" Woodley, interviewed in Terry, 1984, 12 and 243-44.
18. Major Jules V. Coleman, "The Group Factor of Military Psychiatry", *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, xvi (1946), 222.
19. Stephen Graham, *A Private in the Guards* (London, 1919), 3.
20. Irvin L. Child, "Morale: A Bibliographical Review", *Psychological Bulletin*, 38 (1941), 411.
21. Colonel Albert J. Glass and Lieutenant Colonel Calvin S. Drayer, "Italian Campaign (1 March 1944 -- 2 May 1945), Psychiatry Established at Division Level", in Lieutenant General Hal B. Jennings (ed.), *Neuropsychiatry in World War II. Vol. II. Overseas Theatres* (Washington, 1973), 105. These cases were not due to the desire to avoid battle (since the battle was over) and the men did not seem to be depressed, suicidal, or fearful of returning home. Instead, Glass and Drayer were forced to speculate that the wounds must express some underlying guilt relating to combat experiences.
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27. Rev. H. D. A. Major, "Sentimentalists and Casuists", *Modern Churchman*, August 1917, 212-13.
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