

“Where Youth and Laughter Go:” The Experience of Trench Warfare from
Petersburg to the Western Front.

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

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April 17, 1997
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Trench warfare, Petersburg Va., Western front, Experience,
Fraternization, Shell-shock
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(ABSTRACT)

The study of soldier's experience is important to understanding the effect that wars have on society. In the latter part of the 19th century the experience of warfare changed due to advances in weapons technology. The defensive tactic of trench warfare gained new importance. The most prolific use of trench warfare occurred on the Western Front in the First World War, but it was during the siege of Petersburg in the American Civil War that extensive trenches were first used with technologically advanced weapons. By comparing the siege of Petersburg with the Western Front, it is clear that similar conditions elicited similar emotional reactions from soldiers.

The most common reactions were fraternization and war neurosis. Fraternization was more prevalent during the siege of Petersburg than at other times during the war. Fraternization was also common on the Western Front. The reasons for this vary, but are all linked to the nature of trench warfare. War neurosis was also caused by the conditions of the trenches. It was a bigger problem at Petersburg and on the Western Front than it was for soldiers in other conflicts. Trench warfare created these emotional reactions.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my thesis committee members James I Robertson Jr., Hayward Farrar, and Steven Soper. They have made themselves available to me and invested their time in this project despite their own busy lives.

I would also like to thank my parents for helping me through graduate school without ever questioning the wisdom of it.

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Introduction

“Suicide in the Trenches”

I knew a simple soldier boy
Who grinned at life in empty joy,
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
And whistled early with the lark

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
He put a bullet through his brain.
No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.

-Siegfried Sassoon, 1918.¹

Thousands of young soldiers who experienced trench warfare on the Western front during the First World War felt the pain of Sassoon's "simple soldier boy." The stark reality of the trenches transformed "boys" into jaded soldiers. The conditions that they were forced to live with can best be described as horrendous.

The same was true of the siege of Petersburg in the closing days of the American Civil War. Although it only lasted ten months, the life of the soldier at Petersburg closely resembled the life of the soldier on the Western Front. Trench warfare created similar emotional responses among soldiers at Petersburg and on the Western Front.

Even though soldiers of those two conflicts had similar experiences, they were not the first or the last to experience the hardship of war. The life of the soldier in war has never been easy. Soldiers in war face sickness, starvation, lack of sleep, physical exhaustion, and deplorable living conditions. In addition, they have to deal with the anxiety of their own death and the pain of witnessing the death of their comrades. In these circumstances, survival becomes the only concern of the soldier.² A few examples from the last few centuries illustrate this point.

¹ Siegfried Sassoon, "Suicide in the Trenches" in The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London, 1983), 119.

² One of the most influential books on the behavior of soldiers in combat is John Keegan, The Face of Battle (New York, 1974). It is a case study of three different battles: Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme. The book emphasizes the "wildly unstable physical and emotional environment" of combat, and the narrow perspective that soldiers have on the events surrounding them.

In October, 1781, Johann Conrad Doehla endured the stress of combat at the siege of Yorktown, Virginia, during the American Revolution. He was a Hessian soldier fighting with the British who experienced the intense bombardment of the town and the food shortages that resulted from the siege. On October 11, French and colonial troops fired thousands of shells on Yorktown and the British works. It was one of the most brutal bombardments of the siege. In his journal Doehla reported that the earth shook and most of the men were pinned down, unable to move for fear of being killed by a shell. Many of them sought refuge in caves along the York river. Doehla commented, "One saw men lying nearly everywhere who were mortally wounded and whose arms and legs had been shot off."³

A week later, on October 18, Doehla got some rest while the generals discussed terms of surrender. The only food on hand for him and his starving German comrades was chocolate from a captured Dutch ship. They made a feast of it and celebrated their survival. Doehla wrote in his journal: "We greatly enjoyed ourselves after the great loss of sleep, the work, and the hardships which we had experienced day and night with the greatest danger to our lives."⁴

During Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, Jakob Walter also complained about rain and hard marching. Walter was a German conscript who served for several years with the French army. As he marched through Poland on his way to Russia, heat and dust choked the soldiers. They were required to march shoulder to shoulder; and when the army came to bridges and narrow roads, they had to stand in ranks and wait for troops in front of them to pass. They endured the march without food or water. Food became so scarce in Poland that the men began to starve. Several soldiers committed suicide rather than starve to death. One officer slit his own throat. As the troops crossed the border into Russia, it began to rain. Walter marched for two days in a steady downpour without the benefit of being able to change his clothes or even find a dry refuge. Life was hard for a Napoleonic conscript, and this was at a time when Napoleon was still the conqueror of Europe.⁵

In some ways, the life of the soldier has changed very little since the 18th Century. Even as recently as the Vietnam conflict, soldiers dealt with the psychological trauma of witnessing death on a daily basis. They lived a basic existence oriented toward survival. As in all wars, the men who fought in Vietnam were young. Phillip Caputo was a Marine lieutenant in 1966 when he was sent to Vietnam. He wrote of his experiences in war:

Most of all we learned about death at an age when it is common to think of oneself as immortal. Everyone loses that illusion eventually, but in civilian life it is lost in installments over the years. We lost it all at once and, in the span of months, passed from boyhood through manhood to a premature middle age. The knowledge of death, of the implacable limits placed on a man's existence, severed

³ Johann Conrad Doehla, "The Doehla Journal," William and Mary Quarterly Historical Journal XXII (1965), 251.

⁴ Ibid., 255.

⁵ Jakob Walter, A German Conscript with Napoleon: Jakob Walter's Recollections of the Campaigns of 1806-1807, 1809 and 1812-1813 ed. and trans. by Otto Springer (Lawrence, Kan., 1938), 15-19.

us from our youth as irrevocably as a surgeon's scissors had once severed us from the womb.⁶

The hardships of war and the will to survive them matured Caputo faster than any other experience could have. Johann Conrad Doehla, John Davis, Jakob Walter, and Phillip Caputo all shared the knowledge of what it was like to be a soldier in war, and all four of them were undoubtedly as affected as Caputo.⁷

The soldiers at Petersburg and on the Western Front were not exceptions to the hardships of war. They experienced fatigue, hunger, and unbearable living conditions just like soldiers in others wars. The difference was they experienced them relentlessly from the perspective of the trenches. They were forced to live underground in squalid earthworks. Soldiers in other wars only had to experience the fear of death occasionally during battle. In the conflicts discussed here, soldiers faced the possibility of sudden death every minute they were in the trenches. They lived with the accumulated filth of an army in combat and the ever present threat of random death.

The intent of this study is to examine how soldiers during the siege of Petersburg and on the Western Front psychologically and emotionally reacted to trench warfare. Some of the similarities in trench warfare in the conflicts studied here are due to a common heritage of military theory. The science of fortification can be traced to the 15th Century. Although it was changed in the 18th and 19th Centuries to adapt to advancements in weapons technologies, the basic principles of fortification and siege warfare remained the same. As a result, there is very little difference in the physical construction of trenches in the Civil War and the Western Front. The similarities of trench construction meant that the soldiers in both wars lived in similar environments and experienced similar problems.

Soldiers have always led a hard life, but trench warfare involving rifles and advanced artillery created its own set of difficulties that soldiers had to cope with. In addition to fighting a war, they had to combat the effects of an immobile army exposed to the elements of nature for an extended period of time. They lived with rotting corpses, rats, and lice. They experienced mud that made that made movement a chore, deteriorated their fortifications, and made everything around them filthy. They endured weather such as extreme heat at Petersburg, or incessant rain in the fields of Flanders.

As if survival in these conditions was not hard enough, soldiers at both Petersburg and the Western Front were also subjected to artillery bombardment, sniper fire, and mines. They knew that at any instant they could be killed by a shell, bullet from a sniper, or mine explosion. Shelling was so bad on the Western Front that veteran soldiers trained themselves to identify types of shells and a shell's proximity to the soldier by the sound it made as they flew through the air. Soldiers in both conflicts grew accustomed to staying low in the trenches, because even slight

⁶ Phillip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York, 1977), xiii.

⁷ A 1992 book by J.T. Hansen, A. Susan Owen, and Michael Patrick Madden, *Parallels: The Soldiers' Knowledge and the Oral history of Contemporary Warfare* (New York, 1992) compared the experiences of American veterans of Vietnam and Russian veterans who served in Afghanistan. It examined the similarities between these two groups of soldiers as well as their similarities to soldiers of other wars such as Desert Storm and World War II. Although they concluded that the experience of soldiers after World War II was different because of a lack of political and military goals, the basic difficulties of soldiers in war still exist.

exposure to the enemy meant certain death from a sniper's bullet. The practice of exploding a section of the enemy's trench by mining under it also caused anxiety among soldiers at Petersburg and the Western Front. Although this practice was more common on the Western Front than at Petersburg, it existed at Petersburg and was in the minds of soldiers.

Soldiers reacted to the mental and physical strain of trench warfare in two ways. First, knowing that their enemy must be enduring the same hardships, they developed sympathy for him that allowed soldiers from opposing armies to work together for their own survival. Fraternization was rampant at Petersburg and on the Western Front. Throughout the Civil War, fraternization was common because soldiers shared a common language and cultural background, despite their differences. At Petersburg fraternization became even more widespread because of soldiers' proximity to one another and mutual interests, such as comfort and a desire to live to see the end of the war. The same type of closeness and survival instinct also led to fraternization on the Western Front despite cultural differences.

The discussion of forms of fraternization in Chapter 3 is based largely on the work of Tony Ashworth. His 1980 book, Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System, closely examined fraternization of the Western Front. He demonstrated that fraternization was governed by the "live and let live" system.⁸ Soldiers instituted this system informally by agreeing not to fire on one another. The system derived from a mutual understanding between combatants that the best way to survive the war was to make a truce.

According to Ashworth, fraternization through the live and let live system can be categorized into direct and indirect types. The most common form of fraternization was direct. It took the form of truces arranged by common soldiers on the front lines, through arrangements made by verbal or written communication with the enemy. Direct fraternization did not have to involve a meeting between the sides. Frequently, it was just a cease fire agreement arranged by common soldiers by shouting back and forth.

Indirect fraternization involved cease-fire agreement without direct communication. One soldier communicated his desire for a cease-fire by simply not firing at his opponent. Hopefully, the enemy would interpret his lack of aggression correctly. When such a truce was instituted it was generally understood that a breach of the agreement would result in harsh retaliation. For example, if a British soldier killed a German with his rifle, the Germans might retaliate with machine guns or artillery. This kind of indirect fraternization was prevalent at both Petersburg and the Western Front and involved all types of combat troops, including artillery troops in rear areas.

Where this study differs from Ashworth is in its consideration of Petersburg. By extending Ashworth's categorization of fraternization to Petersburg, it is clear that the live and let live system applies to trench warfare in general, not just to the Western Front. By using Ashworth's system to examine Petersburg, fraternization can be better understood in context with the horrors of the trenches in general rather than as unique to the First World War.

Understanding fraternization also helps shed light on the relationship between the homefront and the soldiers in the trenches. It was difficult for civilians to have a clear comprehension of the horrors of war and the nature of the enemy. Because of their lack of

⁸ Tony Ashworth, Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System (London, 1980).

understanding, there was a gap between the attitudes of soldiers and civilians. Soldiers realized that they had more in common with their enemy than their loved ones at home.

War neurosis was the other common emotional response to trench warfare, besides fraternization. War neurosis is a general term that includes a wide range of psychological problems ranging from depression to complete mental collapse. It is a psychological reaction to the stress and anxiety of combat. It was prevalent in the conflicts studied here because of specific conditions such as the defensive nature of trenches, and constant exposure to death. The most extreme form of war neurosis that will be examined in this study is shell-shock, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as it is known today.

On the Western Front, evidence of war neurosis is easy to obtain. Shell-shock was a common medical problem that doctors recognized early in the war. At first, they thought it was the result of shells exploding near soldiers and causing internal damage to the nervous system. Then they began to see cases that had not been under artillery bombardment. Some doctors used the new theories of psychotherapy pioneered by Sigmund Freud and recognized that Shell-shock was the result of mental fatigue.

During the Civil War, psychotherapy was non-existent and psychology was in a prenatal state. There was very little detailed study of mental disorders. Soldiers who displayed extreme symptoms of lunacy were diagnosed as insane and discharged from the army. Severe war neurosis did not exist as a medical diagnosis and its symptoms are usually subtler than insanity; it is difficult to find evidence of it at Petersburg. However, by looking at other nervous diseases, it is clear that war neurosis could be easily mistaken for something more common such as sunstroke, nostalgia, or inflammation of the spinal cord. Doctors tended to link nervous disorders with physical rather than mental causes. From official sources it is known that cases of nervous disease increased in the last year of the war, during the siege of Petersburg.

The sources that have been used in this study are necessarily biased, particularly where the Western Front is concerned. Most of the sources that have been used are British. The reason for this is the wealth of British war literature that resulted from the experience of trench warfare. There is an abundance of British memoirs, novels, and poetry that were published after the war. In contrast, there are very few German or French accounts. There are also a number of American accounts of the Western Front, but they were not chosen because the United States entered the war too late for emotional reactions due to trench warfare to exhibit themselves. This is not to say that American troops did not spend time in trenches, but the war itself had changed to a more mobile one. The reactions of that I am studying here were the result of accumulated stress from trench warfare. Very few American troops spent long enough time in the trenches to experience the live and let live system or shell-shock. Wherever possible, I have tried to incorporate cultural sources such as poetry and music. These types of sources written by participants in trench warfare are wonderfully expressive of the emotional state of soldiers.

This study should be useful to viewing the experience of trench warfare as something different in the history of the soldier. By examining Petersburg in comparison to the Western Front, it is hoped to tie the emotional reaction of soldiers who fought in these places to the experience of trench warfare, rather than a specific conflict. To understand the soldiers who fought at Petersburg, it is necessary to compare them to others who fought in trenches, as well as to other Civil War soldiers. The same is true of soldiers on the Western Front. Rather than

considering their experience as unique to that time and place, it should be seen in context with others who experienced trench warfare. The soldiers at Petersburg can be better understood as a single group sharing common knowledge, rather than separate topics in different times.

Chapter 1: The Evolution of Field Fortifications

On the night of June 14, 1864, soldiers in the Army of the Potomac wearily crossed the James river unaware of the nightmares waiting for them. They were already worn out from the past month as Gen. Ulysses S. Grant led them south toward the Confederate capital of Richmond. They had faced the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, commanded by General Robert E. Lee, at the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Courthouse, North Anna, and Cold Harbor. All of those battles had ended in Union frustration, but the Army of the Potomac continued south. On June 14, Federals crossed the James in order to step around the Confederate army and capture the city of Petersburg. A vital supply link for the Confederacy, it had five railroads that brought goods from all over the Confederacy, particularly the North Carolina ports of Charleston and Wilmington. By June, 1864, Petersburg was the major supply line for Richmond. If the Army of the Potomac could seize Petersburg, Richmond would soon fall.

After four days of fighting from June 14 to June 18, Grant was forced to lay siege to Petersburg. The men of both armies dug in and trench warfare began. It was not until April 2, 1865, that Union troops were finally able to force the Confederates from their earthworks.

Fifty years later and thousands of miles away, another decision to dig in was made. From the first days of August, 1914, and the start of the First World War, until the first week of September, the German army marched through Belgium and fought its way through northern France to reach the outskirts of Paris. On the verge of success, the German advance was halted short of its objective. On September 5, they met a large French force that had come from Paris to the Marne river. During September 5-10, the Germans met defeat at the battle of the Marne. For the next four days they retreated back the same way they had come, with British and French troops in pursuit. When the German army reached the banks of the Aisne river on September 14, it turned and faced its pursuers.¹ On a ridge known as Chemin des Dames, overlooking the river, the German VII Reserve Corps dug trenches to block the path of the British I Corps. By the middle of October the trench line extended south to the Swiss border and north to the North Sea. The German General Staff determined that it would not give up the land that had already been taken in France. Instead, the German army fortified and let the Allies come to them. The British and the French decided that the only way to get rid of the deeply entrenched German Army was to lay siege to it. Trench warfare on the Western Front began.²

The reality of the trenches originated centuries before the Western Front and far away from Petersburg. British soldiers, known as tommies, were not the first soldiers to dig into the earth for protection. Nor were the Confederates around Petersburg the first to build earthen walls to defend a city against an enemy with superior numbers.

Since the advent of warfare, combatants have built structures to protect themselves from their enemies. In the Middle Ages, strong castles protected a village or a lord. Walls ringed European cities to protect them from invading armies. Throughout the Middle Ages the

¹ James L. Stokesbury, A Short History of World War I (New York, 1981), 57.

² John Ellis, Eye-Deep in Hell: Trench Warfare in World War I (New York, 1976), 10.

construction of fortifications became an art. City walls were straight and high with occasional guard towers built into them. Castle walls were similarly constructed with towers for guards and a water-filled moat to hinder attack. Most fortifications were constructed of heavy building materials such as stone. Despite the strength of these structures, by the end of the 15th Century they were becoming obsolete.

New developments in artillery were making castles and city walls easily penetrable. New designs for fortifications were needed to meet the threat of artillery and to incorporate artillery into an effective defensive structure. Around the 1530s, Italians began to construct forts that used artillery for defense. The design that came into prominent use was called the "bastion." They covered all the approaches to the fort with artillery. In other words, they were designed so that no way existed to attack the fort without subjecting the attacker to artillery fire. Bastions were angular forts with triangular sections jutting out from the corners. Generally bastions were surrounded by a ditch known as a dry moat. The moat acted not only as hindrance for attacking troops, but also as a deadly trap. Once in the moat, it was difficult for attackers to scale the walls of the fort. Defenders could easily sweep the moat with artillery fire from the corner positions of the bastion.

Because of the slow improvement of artillery technology in the 16th Century, the bastion design met the needs of fortification. It was not until the next century that the art of fortification became a science. The man responsible for the transition was Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban. He was a French engineer who lived from 1633 to 1707 and was the chief engineer to King Louis XIV. Vauban was the first to realize the importance of fortification and military engineering to warfare. He incorporated engineering and the practice of war by establishing the first professionally trained corps of military engineers. Vauban trained engineers according to his own writings and designs, which consisted of elaboration on the bastion with multiple lines of defense and fortifications for small fire arms as well as artillery. Under his direction, many French cities were fortified and new forts were built. Vauban's teachings became the authoritative work on military fortification for the 18th Century.

His most lasting contribution was the development of a systematic method for siege warfare. Vauban's system was the foundation for all subsequent developments in trench warfare. The vocabulary that he used to describe the basic elements of trenches remained in standard use among military engineers up through the First World War. Vauban's system for laying siege to a fortified position consisted of concentric lines of entrenchment running parallel to the defensive works of the fort or city under siege.

His master plan was first to dig a ditch parallel to the enemy's fortifications but just beyond range of his artillery. This ditch was approximately three to four feet deep. The diggers threw the dirt they were removing in front of the ditch facing the enemy. The mound the soldiers created was known as the parapet, and it protruded above the ground three to four feet. Hence, a soldier standing in the ditch was protected by six to eight feet of earth. This ditch was known as the first parallel. Directly from this parallel soldiers constructed a "zigzag" approach. They built a trench of equal depth with the same size parapet as the first diagonally toward the enemy, starting at a break in the parapet of the first parallel. In this way the enemy was not able to fire directly down the approaching trench. It could be constructed in relative safety.

After a short distance the direction of the zigzag approach would change to go diagonal toward the enemy in the opposite direction. When the zigzag trenches reached to within the attackers' artillery range, a second parallel was constructed exactly like the first. From this parallel, artillery moved into position to batter the walls of the defenders. If the defender had not already surrendered by this time, the process was repeated until a third parallel took shape within point-blank artillery range. This allowed the complete demolition of the defensive fortifications and an easy assault by infantry.³ Vauban's system was very effective, and armies used it repeatedly in the many wars fought by the European powers during the 18th century.

An excellent example of Vauban's system in use came during the 1781 siege of Yorktown, near the close of the American Revolution. The siege began on September 28, when a force of 16,000 French and American troops arrived on the outskirts of the Virginia town. Gen. George Washington commanded the allies and General Cornwallis commanded the British troops holding the town. Several days later, French and American soldiers occupied the outer line of British earthworks on the eastern side of Yorktown. The British had abandoned the earthworks in order to consolidate their forces on lines closer to the town. Starting from this new position and using the system of Vauban, the colonial army dug two parallels. Each closer to the town than the last. Finally, on October 17, under intense artillery bombardment, the British surrendered.⁴

French military theory in the tradition of Vauban reached its zenith during the Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the next century. Napoleon's victories in Europe inspired a new military French military theorist, Antoine Henri Jomini. A staff officer in Napoleon's army, Jomini during the period 1804-1839 rejected the emphasis Vauban put on fortification. Instead, he favored the offensive. His favorite tactic was the massed frontal assault. To Jomini, outmaneuvering one's opponent was too difficult with a large army and required the tactical genius of Napoleon to be effective.

This did not exclude fortifications completely. Jomini still advocated fortifying encampments with earthen fortifications like Vauban's siege works, but he emphasized the offensive in battle. Jomini's teachings became the dominant method of conducting war until he was superseded by Clausewitz after the 1870 Franco-Prussian war. Even in America, Jomini's writings were standard reading for West Point cadets.⁵

In America, an army engineer named Dennis Hart Mahan began in the 1830s to challenge Jomini. Mahan graduated first in his 1824 West Point class. He spent several years studying military engineering at the prestigious School of Engineering and Artillery at Metz, France. In 1830 he returned home to accept a faculty position at his alma mater.

Mahan rejected the offensive spirit of Jomini because he felt that it was unsuitable to American armies. He realized that in the United States armies consisted of professional officers leading undisciplined militia. Ordinary citizens who were integral parts of their communities were the type of men who were members of militias. They could not be wasted in large frontal assaults. Instead, he preferred an active defense consisting of earthworks, or field fortifications as they were technically known. His designs for earthworks drew heavily on Vauban; all Mahan did was

³ Christopher Duffy, *Fire and Stone: the Science of Fortress Warfare 1660-1860* (Vancouver, 1975), 11.

⁴ Burke Davis, *The Campaign that Won America* (New York, 1970), 198-225.

⁵ Edward Hagerman, "From Jomini to Dennis Hart Mahan," *Civil War History* XIII (1967), 197-98.

update them and adapt them into a larger strategical concept. His tactics called for an army to construct field fortifications based on Vauban's design in front of the enemy. This would compel the opponent to launch massive assaults against the works that would shatter his army and bring victory for those who had entrenched.⁶

Mahan went beyond his contemporaries and took into account the latest developments in weapons technology. In the early part of the 19th Century, rifled muskets began to come into widespread use among armies. This was due in part to easier manufacturing measures, but also to the invention of a conical bullet that could be quickly loaded. The bullet was known as a Minié ball and was invented in 1843 by Claude Etienne Minié. Rifles had an advantage over their smoothbore predecessors in both their increased range and greater accuracy. They had a rifled groove on the inside of the barrel that spiraled along its length. This gave the bullet a spin that increased its firepower. Although, rifled muskets were being mass produced by 1855, it would take some time before they became common weapons.⁷

The rifle is important to the development of trench warfare because of the "zone of aimed fire." This is the area in front of the trenches that can be accurately covered by musket fire from within them. This distance is approximately 100-160 yards with smoothbores. The distance increases to 500 yards with rifles. That means that an army attacking field fortifications defended by troops armed with smoothbore muskets will only take two minutes to cross the zone of aimed fire if Jomini's tactics are considered. The defenders will only be able to load and fire twice in that time. The attacker will not sustain enough casualties to stop the attack in most cases. The zone of aimed fire is four times as large if the defenders are armed with rifles, giving them four times as long to fire at the attackers. Direct assault becomes suicidal in this situation.⁸

Most military thinkers did not realize the impact that rifles would have until it became obvious in the slaughter of the Civil War's first battles. Mahan was the exception. He realized it early and taught it to his students at West Point. Since the top ten to twenty percent of each West Point graduating class went into military engineering, at the time of the Civil War most of the divisional commanders and above were engineers who had learned from Mahan. Unfortunately, they were also heavily exposed to Jomini. Therefore, those two opposing philosophies were both used in the Civil War. It was not until near the end of the war that generals realized how obsolete and costly frontal assaults had become.

At Petersburg, Mahan's tactics saw their zenith. Confederates knew they were unable to defeat the Union forces in open combat, so they entrenched and waited for the Federals to destroy themselves against the Confederate earthworks. Grant realized that he could not hope to pry the Confederates out of their trenches by frontal assault, so he chose to follow Vauban's teachings and lay siege to the army.⁹

During the Petersburg campaign, Mahan even personally influenced the way that the trenches were constructed. His most well-known student was James St. Clair Morton, the chief engineer for the IX Corps. Morton was a strong advocate of Mahan's teachings. In 1858, he

⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁷ Ibid., 207.

⁸ G. Fiebeger, A Text-Book in Field Fortifications (New York, 1913), 4.

⁹ Hagerman, From Jomini to Dennis Hart Mahan, 206.

wrote several essays for Secretary of War John B. Floyd on how to adopt Mahan's principles to protect the eastern coast of the United States. Morton served first in the Civil War in the western theater as chief engineer of the Army of the Ohio and the Army of the Cumberland. In the spring of 1864, after briefly serving with the Chief Engineer of the Army in Washington, D.C., he was assigned to the IX Corps.

Morton laid out the trench works for the IX Corps on the eastern side of Petersburg. This front was the most crucial because it was closest to the city and the Union supply base at City Point. On the last day of the opening battle for Petersburg, June 17, 1864, Morton was killed. By then, he had already dictated that the trenches around Petersburg would be laid out according to Mahan's principles.¹⁰

Mahan had another outstanding former pupil at Petersburg. Gouveneur K. Warren had Mahan as an instructor at West Point and later became a distinguished engineer within the army. At the time of Petersburg, Warren was in command of the Union V Corps. He actually left the front during the campaign to consult with Mahan about the proper way to conduct the siege. Mahan's prophecy that rifled weapons would force a change in battlefield tactics favoring the defensive was verified at Petersburg. His former pupils recognized the need for his tactics and responded.¹¹

Since trench systems on both sides descended from the work of Vauban, they consisted of

parallel trench lines connected by zigzag approaches running perpendicular to the main lines. In practice the trenches were a maze of narrow subterranean pathways.

At Petersburg, soldiers dug trenches about three feet deep and six to eight feet wide. The dirt that was excavated formed the parapet. Using a construction technique known as revetting, sandbags or timber were incorporated into the wall to keep it from collapsing. A small ledge, known as a fire-step, ran along the front wall. It acted as a platform to stand on in order to see or shoot over the parapet.¹²

In front of the front line trenches were rifle pits. These were holes dug big enough for two men. They acted as sentry posts. From here



Figure 1. Trench line near Fort Morton. (Courtesy: Library of Congress)

¹⁰ Ibid., 211.

¹¹ Ibid., 216.

¹² Warren Wilkinson, Mother May You Never See the Sights I have Seen (New York, 1990), 193.

soldiers could harrass the enemy trenches with sniper fire, or act as advance warning of an attack.

In addition to the zigzag approaches, there were long straight trenches extending through the lines to the front. They were called covered ways. Occasionally they were roofed with timber, but they were called covered ways because they were dug deep enough to be completely covered from enemy fire. Some of these trenches were so large that supply wagons could pass through them.

The lines at Petersburg were punctuated by a series of enclosed forts. The forts were designed as strong points in the line positioned at key places such as roads or rivers. They varied in shape but were usually not more than fifty yards square. They were constructed above ground and were surrounded by ditches. Since they sat above the lines and had a better command of the surrounding terrain, they contained artillery. In addition to artillery they were manned by a garrison of several hundred men. The Federals had more forts than the Confederates, but

Confederate forts tended to be larger and more heavily armed.¹³

Within the forts and dug into the lines were bomb-proofs. These were shelters for taking cover from artillery bombardments. They were usually small earth huts covered with sandbags, or caves dug into the sides of the trenches. They varied in size, but typically they were about ten feet long, eight feet wide and four and a half feet high. They were not very comfortable, but they were only intended to provide shelter for short periods of time.¹⁴

Wooden entanglements were scattered around the trenches of both sides to hinder an attack. Some, known as fraise, were fence rails driven into the ground toward the enemy. Other entanglements, called abatis, were

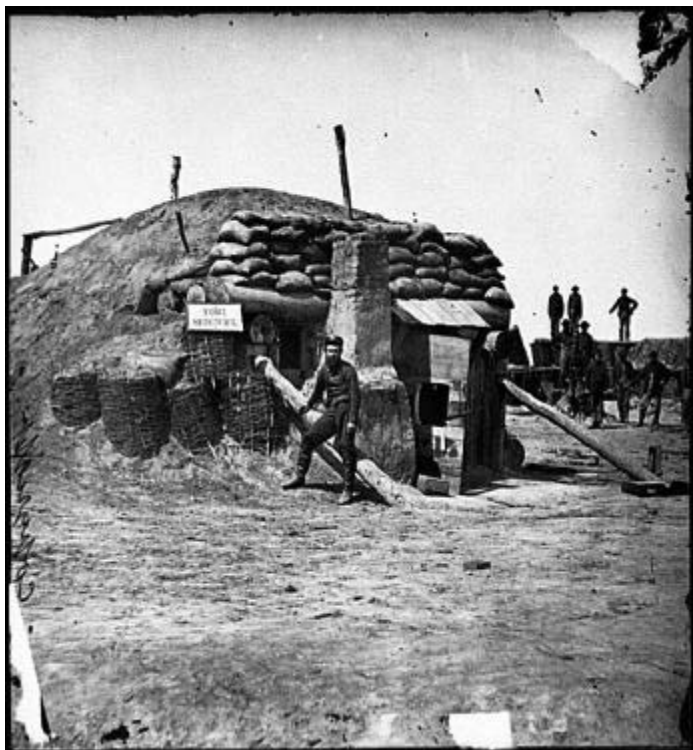


Figure 2. Bomb-proof inside Fort Sedgewick. (Courtesy: Library of Congress)

¹³ Noah Andre Trudeau, The Last Citadel: Petersburg, Virginia, June 1864 - April 1865 (Boston, 1991), 289.

¹⁴ Franklin Layfayette Riley, Grandfather's Journal: company B, 16th Mississippi Infantry Volunteers, Harris Brigade, Mahone's Division, Hill's Corps A.N.V. May 27, 1861-July 15, 1865 ed. Austin C. Dobbs (Morningside, 1988), 204.

merely the tops of trees with the branches sharpened, driven into the ground facing the opposing trenches. The landscape was littered with these obstacles.¹⁵

Some soldiers like Henry Mervine, a federal artilleryman, augmented their meager living conditions with material from nearby houses. Mervins and his comrades had a piano, sofa, and marble top table in the trenches with them.¹⁶ They were certainly deviating from Mahan's principle of active defense enough to make life comfortable.

Lieutenant George Breck of the 1st New York Light Artillery summed up the tactical situation at Petersburg in a letter to his hometown newspaper. Breck wrote: "Truly 'spades and trumps' and no mistake. If in by gone days, they were considered indicative of bad generalship and a disgrace of American soldiery, they are now emphatically a powerful 'adjunct' to cannon, muskets, rifles and all the ordinance of war."¹⁷ Even though Breck was just an artillery lieutenant, this was a very perceptive observation of how warfare changed.

After the Civil War, trench warfare continued to evolve according to advancements in weapons technology. The first of these occurred in 1869, when breech- loaded weapons were introduced. Instead of ramming a bullet and gunpowder down the barrel to load it, now it was possible to open up the back of the rifle and place the bullet directly into the breech. The new breech-loaders were capable of firing twelve shots a minute at a range of 1300 yards. In 1892 these weapons were replaced by magazine rifles that could load several bullets at once. They were capable of firing twenty rounds a minute and had a range of 2000 yards. They were a big improvement over the muskets of the Civil War and were the type of weapon that would be used twenty two years later in the First World War.

One change in battlefield tactics caused by the new magazine rifles was the desire to conceal earthworks. Magazine rifles were the first to use smokeless gunpowder. Before this time, it was pointless to conceal one's entrenchment because the smoke from gunfire would give him away. With smokeless gunpowder it became advantageous to conceal one's trenches.

Another development that encouraged concealment was rifled artillery. By the end of the Civil War, rifled artillery was just coming into use. By the turn of the century it was common. Rifled artillery had the same advantage as rifled muskets. Yet in addition to increased range and accuracy, it also possessed the power to destroy earthworks. Trenches began to be deeper, more concealed and no longer had large forts incorporated into them, such as were present at Petersburg.¹⁸

The Boers were the first to demonstrate the advantage of camouflaging field works during their 1899-1902 war with the British. The Boers were hunters who used rifles and waiting tactics in the same style as hunting prey. Their skills easily translated into trench warfare in their conflict with the British. They were good at building hidden trenches in strategic locations that the British were unable to locate with artillery and infantry fire.

¹⁵ Trudeau, The Last Citadel, 289.

¹⁶ Henry G. Mervine, to his wife, July 24, 1864, Henry G. Mervine Letters, 1864-1865, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Va.

¹⁷ Rochester Union and Advertiser, July 20, 1864, Item #265, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg Va.

¹⁸ Fiebeger, Field Fortifications, 5-6.

Trenches played a major role in the Boers siege of the cities of Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking. In these sieges they relied heavily on the psychological impact of starvation and artillery bombardment, even though they only were small in number and had but a few pieces of light artillery. None of the cities were taken, but the Boers were innovative in their use of artillery and concealed trenches. These were tactics that would become a matter of course in the First World War.¹⁹

The Russo-Japanese war in 1904-1905 also foreshadowed the trenches of the Western Front. At the beginning of the war the Russians were slow to realize the importance of trenches. On May 1, 1904, the Russians lost a vital river crossing on the Yalu river because they failed to fortify it. The Japanese easily overran it. Later, at Nanshan Peninsula, the Russians built extensive earthworks but failed to conceal them or construct them properly. Japanese cruisers bombarded the position and infantry seized it by direct assault.²⁰

The biggest battle of the war occurred between February 23 and March 10, 1905, at the crucial rail junction of Mukden. The Russians held the city and protected it by surrounding it with entrenched positions. They were opposed by entrenched Japanese troops. Throughout the winter, the Russian generals hesitated to attack. Finally, on February 23, the Japanese took the initiative and made an assault. Instead of remaining in well fortified positions, the Russians left their trenches to fight the Japanese in the open. By doing this, they defeated the purpose of field fortifications. On March 10, the Japanese took the city of Mukden.²¹

The Russo-Japanese War attracted worldwide attention among military authorities who were interested in seeing the latest technology in war. Most of them missed the importance of trench warfare. Using the Americans and the Germans as representative examples, this is evident. The Americans came away with the impression that frontal assault by infantry with fixed bayonets was still a viable tactic. One observer, Major Joseph E. Kuhn, reported that “the Japanese have shown that frontal attacks by infantry over open ground are still feasible when made by good troops, well handled, and supported by an adequate artillery fire.”²²

Another observer, Capt. Morrison, wrote: “As regards infantry the war has shown that the days of the bayonet are not yet numbered.”²³ These American observers misinterpreted Russia’s improper use of field fortifications as the ineffectiveness of them.

German observers were a little more perceptive. They looked closely at the earthworks around Mukden and came to the conclusion that the Russian trenches were hopelessly antiquated in their construction. They noted that the Japanese trenches were much better suited to defend against rifled artillery and concealed the infantry more effectively.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid., 85.

²⁰ Ibid., 91-92.

²¹ David Walder, The Short Victorious War: The Russo-Japanese Conflict 1904-1905 (London, 1973), 267.

²² U.S. Second (Military Information) Division, Reports of the Military observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria During the Russo-Japanese War (Washington, 1906), 3: 229.

²³ Ibid., 1:276.

²⁴ Historical Section of the German General Staff, The Russo-Japanese War between San-de-Pu and Mukden, trans. Karl von Donat (London, 1913), 86-101.

Although Americans and Germans closely studied the Russo-Japanese War, both came to different conclusions. Neither foresaw trench warfare on the scale it would take in the First World War. The Americans believed that the war showed that there would be little need for trenches given the advanced rifles that were in use at the time. The fact that the French and British adopted the same tactics in the First World War that the Americans recommended in their reports on the Russo-Japanese War showed that they came to similar conclusions. The Germans saw the value of field works, but missed seeing the effects that field works would have on their troops. In the Russo-Japanese War soldiers did not spend enough time in trenches for the torment that trench warfare produced to become evident.

In the First World War, soldiers spent four years in trenches, more than enough time to construct an elaborate network of trenches and experience trench warfare to its fullest extent. Armies on both sides laid out trench systems consistent with their observations of the Russo-Japanese War and the old theories of Vauban. There were three major types of trenches on the Western Front: fire, cover, and communicating. Fire trenches were the most forward front line trenches. They directly faced the enemy. Behind them were cover trenches. They supported the front line and were manned by reserve troops. They also contained essential services such as forward first aid stations, latrines, and headquarters. For this reason they were sometimes known as command trenches. There was usually at least three lines of cover trenches behind the fire trenches.

The trenches on the Western Front were much deeper than the ones at Petersburg because of the need to conceal them. They were typically dug into the ground about ten feet with a small parapet extending above the ground. Like the trenches at Petersburg, they also had a fire-step so that soldiers could fire over the top. In British and German trenches, the walls were almost completely covered with sandbags to prevent them from collapsing. The French preferred a technique known as hurdling that used tree branches incorporated into trench walls to support them.²⁵

Fire and support trenches were divided into sections by walls known as traverses. Each section was known as a bay and was about 18-30 feet long. Traverses were usually about 9-13 feet thick. This system prevented too many men from being killed at one time. If one bay was hit by an artillery shell, the traverses on either side would protect the other bays.

Communicating trenches were the equivalent of Vauban's zigzag approaches. They were narrow winding trenches connecting fire and cover trenches. They performed the same function as covered ways at Petersburg, although communicating trenches were more narrow, so all supplies had to be brought up by hand.²⁶

Dug-outs, that were similar to bomb-proofs, were incorporated into the trench systems in order to protect soldiers from artillery shells. The difference between dug-outs and bomb-proofs was that dug-outs were deeper because artillery was stronger in the First World War than in the Civil War.

²⁵ John Ellis, Eye-Deep in Hell (New York, 1976) 12-13.

²⁶ Fiebeger, Field Fortifications, 10.

On the frontlines, dug-outs were very simple. The most common type was funk holes; niches carved into the sides of trenches just big enough for one man. Other dug-outs were simple caves dug just below the surface; accomodating several men.

In the support lines dug-outs were deeper and more complex. The main reason for this was that artillery shelling was heavier there than in the front lines. Shelling frontline trenches with heavy artillery was difficult, because there was a risk of hitting one's own trenches. All the support services, such as headquarters, were located in dug-outs sometimes as much as thirty feet below ground. There was no standard size for dug-outs, and some of them consisted of several rooms connected by hallways. The Germans, who tended to put more work into construction of their trenches, built dug-outs complete with wood paneling, wall-paper, mirrors and even carpet. All dug-outs, no matter how deep, were dank and damp. There was no ventilation, and most of the areas of the Western Front were low lying areas that soaked up rain water.²⁷

Instead of using wooden entanglements, like at Petersburg, soldiers used barbed wire as an obstacle. Barbed wire was staked in the ground usually 20 yards into the area between one's own front line and the enemy's, known as no-man's land. There was a continuous line of it about ten feet wide and three feet off the ground.

Also in no-man's land, there were observation posts where sentries could watch the enemy's trenches and gather intelligence or report an impending attack. They were connected to the front line by "sap" trenches.²⁸ Observation posts were the equivalent of rifle pits at Petersburg.

Overall, the trenches of the Western Front were very similar to those at Petersburg in form and purpose. Why the world powers did not study Petersburg more closely is open to debate, but too big a question to discuss here. It is possible that they thought they had nothing to learn from Petersburg since by the standards of 1914 it was fought with antiquated weapons. What is clear is that although they encountered in the First World War the same type of weapons and tactics of the Russo-Japanese struggle, nobody saw the impact that this would have when used in a large-scale war among European armies.

²⁷ Ellis, *Eye-Deep in Hell*, 19.

²⁸ Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London: 1980), 5.

Chapter 2. Rats in a Maze

The 1913 textbook of field fortifications used by U.S. army cadets stated: The object of each fortification is: 1. To increase the destructive effect of the fire of the troops covered by the fortification and to facilitate their free movement upon the field of battle. 2. To decrease the destructive effect of the fire of the attacking troops and to interfere with their free movement.¹

The author of this book, Col. G. J. Fiebeger, envisioned trench warfare fought in symmetrical trenches laid out according to meticulous designs for maximum “destructive effect.” There is a certain neatness implied by Fiebeger’s definition. He reduced trench warfare to a simple set of principles and objects. His work was rooted in the theories of Mahan and Vauban. It was dedicated to building trenches that gave a defender distinct advantage over an attacker. One gets the impression from reading Fiebeger’s book that fortifications protect from danger, and that soldiers attacking them merely have their “free movement” hampered.

That was not the reality Siegfried Sassoon encountered on the Western Front. After returning home in April 1917, he wrote: “I’m back again from hell /With loathsome /thoughts to sell;/ Secrets of death to tell;/ And horrors from the abyss.”² Sassoon did not see interference of “free movement.” He saw death.

Veterans of Petersburg did not see efficiency in the trenches either. William H. McLaurin of the 18th North Carolina commented on his experience at Petersburg: “Even those who went through the trying ordeal, can not recall a satisfactory outline of the weird and graphic occurrences of that stormy period.”³ Both McLaurin and Sassoon obviously experienced something different than the textbook version of trench warfare. Even though trenches were constructed according to engineering manuals, they created difficult living conditions for soldiers.

It is essential to examine the reality of life in the trenches in order to understand the emotional reaction of soldiers to trench warfare. In subsequent chapters, it will become apparent how the conditions of the trenches effected the mental state of the soldier. In order to gain an appreciation for their impact, it is first necessary to examine the disparity between the theory of trench warfare as it has been described in Chapter 1, and the way it was experienced by soldiers.

Soldiers encountered two types of problems that military theorists had not anticipated: natural, and technological. The engineers who designed the earthworks at Petersburg and on the Western Front discounted the effects of nature on their plans. They also underestimated the power of a determined enemy armed with the latest weapons. The combination of these factors meant that, in addition to surviving exposure to extreme temperatures, rain, snow, mud, and vermin; soldiers also had to deal with mine explosions, snipers, and intense artillery bombardment.

¹ G. Fiebeger, A Text-Book in Field Fortifications (New York, 1913), 3.

² Sassoon, “To the Warmongers,” in The War poems of Siegfried Sassoon ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London, 1983).

³ Walter Clark (ed.), Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War 1861-1865, (Wendell, N.C., 1982), Vol II., 123.

Although both sides experienced the hardships of weather, the Army of the Potomac was better supplied than its opponent, and did not suffer as much. At the time of the siege of Petersburg, the Northern industrial complex was in full gear, and factories shipped a steady flow of clothing and equipment to the armies surrounding Petersburg. All of the supplies that came from the North were shipped to City Point, a small town located at the conflux of the James and Appomattox rivers. The most prominent feature of the town was the Eppes family plantation. The estate house sat on a high bluff overlooking the point where the rivers met. Before the war, the Eppes family had been prominent in Virginia, with ties to Thomas Jefferson. When The Army of the Potomac came to Petersburg, Grant requisitioned the plantation as his supply base. The family home became headquarters for the army, and large wharves were built to accommodate the 40 steamboats, 75 sailing ships, and 100 barges that brought supplies to City Point. It took 1900 workers unloading ships around the clock to keep up with the steady stream of supplies arriving. To get food and clothing from the wharves to the troops in the trenches, Grant had a railroad built from City Point running behind the trenches.⁴

The Union soldiers felt the benefits of an efficient supply system. From the front line, Henry Mervine, the federal artilleryman that furnished his trenches, wrote his wife that he was eating well. His letter of July 24, 1864, told her: "We are better supplied than ever before by Uncle Sam. We have more variety particularly of vegetables."⁵ By contrast, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia spent Winter, 1864-1865, freezing and starving. Supplies reaching the Confederates were severely limited. The Union army was slowly cutting off the roads and railroads leading into Petersburg. Consequently, Confederate soldiers had to go without adequate winter clothing or food. William Hubbard of the 16th Virginia Infantry, complained of the lack of supplies, and his frustration at the Confederate leaders who were unable to feed him. On February 7, 1865, he sent a letter to his parents. "We are living on nothing but corn bread. We have had nothing else for four days. If they do not give us something else besides bread they will have to fight it out themselves. We are living worse now than we ever have since the war commenced."⁶

The situation worsened for Confederates when in early December, 1864, the entire area was covered with 3-4 inches of sleet and snow. In this weather, most of the Confederates were dressed only in a thin wool jacket, cotton shirt, wool pants, and a worn blanket. Some of them were barefoot. The weather also caused the trees that had not already been used for firewood to ice over. Branches snapped from the ice causing hazards for passing soldiers of both sides.⁷

Large-scale operations were not usually carried out in this sort of weather. Soldiers could only sit in their trenches and endure the weather. Franklin Riley, a soldier in the 16th Mississippi Infantry Regiment, joined the army in May, 1861, and was present at Petersburg. He echoed

⁴ William B. Jordan, Red Diamond Regiment: The 17th Maine Infantry, 1862-1865 (Shippensburg, Pa., 1996), 177, 227.

⁵ Henry G. Mervine, to his wife, July 24, 1864, Henry G. Mervine Letters, 1864-1865, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Va.

⁶ William S. Hubbard, to his parents, Feb. 7, 1865, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg Va.

⁷ Franklin Lafayette Riley, Grandfather's Journal: company B, 16th Mississippi Infantry Volunteers, Harris Brigade, Mahone's Division, Hill's Corps A.N.V. May 27, 1861-July 15, 1865 edited by Austin C. Dobbs (Morningside, 1988), 223.

Hubbard's sentiments in his journal. The entry for January 11-15, 1865, reads: "Rumors and stories, about all we have to do is talk and shiver. We are bored and our morale is low."⁸

Although the Federals were better supplied than the Confederates, both sides contended with mud created by winter rain and snow. Drainage in the trenches was very poor. Mud transformed the trenches into bogs, and made wretched living conditions. On January 12, 1865, John White of the 34th Virginia Infantry told his wife: "it makes me feel muddy to think of the immense quantity [of mud] we have had to deal with." He added that he awakened that morning with three inches of mud and rainwater in his bed, and within minutes there was six inches.⁹

Wilbur Fisk of the 2nd Vermont Infantry Regiment attributed the tremendous amount of mud to Virginia's extreme weather changes and its unique soil. Fisk served for most of the war, and acted as a war correspondent for his hometown newspaper. He reported that while snow drifts were not nearly as bad in Virginia as in Vermont, snow did occasionally pile up. According to Fisk, Virginia weather dumped snow on the ground one day and melted it the next, creating muddy conditions that defied the "wildest calculations" of a Vermonter. He also suspected that the soil might have had something to do with the mud. Fisk concluded: "Either Vermont soil is very peculiar, or that of Virginia is remarkably so."¹⁰

George Breck of Rochester New York also thought Virginia soil partly to blame for the wretched conditions. He reported that in some places mud was knee deep and that movement was difficult. Even horses were tottering in the mud. He observed: "Napoleon had the Alps and Apennines to climb and pass over, but he never had the sacred soil of the 'Old Dominion' to wade through."¹¹ It seemed that even dirt conspired against the Federals in Virginia.

On the Western Front, mud also plagued soldiers of both sides. Things were particularly bad for the British and German troops that occupied the Flanders region. It was a low lying area with large amounts of rainfall. The ground in Flanders was like a soaked sponge. Soldiers only had to dig down a foot or two before they encountered pools of water. As a result, British troops were forced to build command trenches in this area. They constructed them by digging down to the water level, and then building a large parapet out of sandbags. These trenches were usually 7-8 feet high with a parapet that was 6-7 feet wide. Although command trenches helped alleviate the mud problem, they were conspicuous and made easy targets for German artillery.¹²

In places where command trenches were not built, mud made life difficult. In a letter home, Lieutenant Bernard Pitt of the British army wrote: "What is life like in the trenches, well, muddy, and cramped and filthy. Everything gets covered with mud; you can't wash, for water has to be fetched for a mile. . . Of course one gets greasy and smutty, and the place smells bad as you can imagine."¹³

⁸ Ibid., 229.

⁹ John Milton White, to his wife, 12 Jan. 1865, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg, Va.

¹⁰ Wilbur Fisk, Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865 ed. Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt (Lawrence, Kans, 1993), 310.

¹¹ Rochester Union and Advertiser, Feb. 25, 1865, Item #265, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg Va.

¹² John Ellis, Eye-Deep in Hell (New York, 1976), 12.

¹³ Quoted in: Andy Simpson, Hot Blood and Cold Steel: Life and Death in the Trenches of the First World War (London, 1993), 5.

Not only was mud on the Western Front uncomfortable, but it could also pose a threat to one's safety. For example, Captain Geoffrey Dugdale came across a man stuck in mud up to his waist. The man begged the Captain to help him out. Dugdale tried to dislodge the man, but could not do it without enlisting the help of two others. Finally, the three soldiers were able to extract the man, but he lost part of his clothes in the mud. Even his boots were left behind, leaving the man completely naked from the waist down. Although this story has a humorous ending, in many instances men actually drowned in the mud.¹⁴

Trench foot on the Western Front was a common ailment caused by wet, muddy conditions. It can easily be described as an extreme form of athlete's foot. Some soldiers had trench foot so bad that their feet swelled up and were sensitive to the touch. Men that were so afflicted would sometimes scream at anyone who got near them out of fear that their feet might get brushed up against.¹⁵

As the weather warmed up, soldiers at both Petersburg and the Western Front discovered a new problem posed by nature. Vermin of all types were attracted to the filth of the trenches. Creatures inactive in the winter time emerged in droves during the spring.

On the Western Front, parasites were attracted to decomposing bodies that lay everywhere. Soldiers killed in previous attacks littered the battlefield because they could not be buried by either side without attracting sniper fire. Bodies would sometimes remain unburied for weeks or months before receiving proper attention. They created a nuisance to soldiers because of both their smell and the flies they attracted.

Rats were a common form of vermin drawn to the dead, that soldiers resented. Private A.S. Dolden expressed the prevailing attitude by writing: "We were filled with an instinctive hatred of them, because however one tried to put the thought out of one's mind, one could not help feeling that they fed on the dead."¹⁶ Rats were considered disgusting parasites, that threatened the sanctity of the bodies of the dead.

Dolden's sentiments were echoed by Robert Graves, a well known writer and a good friend of Siegfried Sassoon. During the war he served as an officer in the Royal Welch Fusiliers. After the war he became famous for his poetry and literature. In the 1920s Graves recorded his experiences on the Western Front.

Rats were particularly present in the trenches around the town of Cuinchy. While Graves was there, army authorities assigned a new officer to his regiment. The veteran officers of the regiment gave a spring bed to the new man as a welcome gift. During his first night in the bed, the officer was awakened by sounds of a scuffle at his feet. When he shined a light at the foot of his bed, he discovered two rats fighting over a human hand.¹⁷

Occasionally, British soldiers turned their hatred of rats into a form of entertainment. Clarrie Jarman was a private in the Queen's Royal West Surreys. He was fortunate enough to survive the war. In his old age he remembered the rats in 1915 and how soldiers played with them. Jarman recalled: "Up on the firestep -the raised platform on the front of the trench- we used

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ Tom Quinn, Tales of the Old Soldiers (Dover, NH, 1993), 129.

¹⁶ Ibid., 40.

¹⁷ Robert Graves, Good-Bye to All That (New York, 1929), 138.

to have a bit of fun now and then by putting a piece of cheese on the end of our bayonets. A rat would soon come sniffing up and the one that got the cheese also got the bullet.”¹⁸

Lice were another pest that hassled soldiers on the Western Front. Lice were not new to soldier life, but they added to the misery of trench warfare. They are worthy of mention, because they were another major discomfort of soldiers in the trenches, but they were not a problem created by the conditions of trench warfare. Since the men could not bathe while they were in the trenches, lice permeated every inch of their clothing, causing them to scratch incessantly. The chore of evicting lice from one’s clothing was a popular pastime.

One night Robert Graves came across a group of his men huddled together picking lice off each other. They asked him to settle a dispute they were having about how to dispose of the bugs. One soldier said to Graves: “We was just having an argument as to whether it was best to kill the old ones or the young ones, sir. Morgan here says that if you kill the old ones, the young ones will die of grief, but Parry here says that the young ones are easier to kill and you can catch the old ones when they come to the funeral.” The soldier called upon Graves to make a decision saying, “you’ve been to college, sir, haven’t you?”¹⁹

Despite their constant efforts to rid themselves of lice, soldiers were never quite able to, until they were sent to the rear. The delousing station was the first place that troops visited when they were taken out of the line to rest. There, soldiers completely stripped and threw their clothes into an incinerator. The incinerator did not actually burn clothing, but it did give them a high pressure, high temperature cleaning to kill the lice. While their clothes were being treated, soldiers were doused with scalding hot water.²⁰

Lice also troubled soldiers at Petersburg, as they did throughout the Civil War. Soldiers at Petersburg referred to lice as “creepers.” It was generally accepted that everyone from the generals down to the front line soldiers were infested with them.²¹

In the summer a bigger problem for Union and Confederate troops was suffocating heat and humidity. The area around the trenches was denuded of trees for firewood and building purposes. As a result, the men had no natural protection against the sun. They made shelters out of pine boughs brought up from the rear, or strung blankets up to provide shade. Throughout the month of July, 1864, Confederate soldier Franklin Riley began every entry in his journal by commenting on the weather. Each one begins with the word “hot” with an occasional departure to “hot and lazy” or “humidity is high.” He also complained bitterly about the flies. Riley was from Mississippi, and not a stranger to heat, but the summer of 1864 was particularly oppressive.²²

The summer presented other difficulties for those in the trenches as the soil that had turned into a sea of mud in the winter and spring became a cloud of dust in the summer. Dirt covered every soldier and all of his belongings, including his food and water.²³ Captain William W. Tinkle, of the 7th Indiana Infantry complained to a friend. “It is very [fatiguing] lying in the

¹⁸ Quinn, Tales of the Old Soldiers, 6.

¹⁹ Graves, Good-Bye to All That, 104.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

²¹ Frederick Stall Rees, to his father, Sept. 9, 1864, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg, Va.

²² Riley, Grandfather’s Journal, 200-221.

²³ Fisk, Hard Marching, 310.

ditches all the time and the heat makes it all most suffocating it has not rained here since the 3rd of June. We can not move without a cloud of dust follows us.”²⁴

As summer became fall the dramatic changes in temperature created health problems for many men. Union soldier Frederick Rees complained to his father in September, 1864, of the fickle weather and its effect on the army. “We have to take quinine and whiskey twice a day for to keep the chills and fever off of us. We have pretty cool nights and the days aint so warm now as they was. There is a great many sick now. Hundred are going to the hospital every day.”²⁵ The cool nights were just a prelude of the winter conditions coming ahead.

At Petersburg and the Western Front, soldiers in exposed trenches were subjected to all sorts of difficulties posed by nature, although the type and severity of the problems differed. At both places soldiers dealt with wet and muddy trenches in the winter time, and infestation by nature’s creatures, although difficulties posed by rats, lice, other vermin were more pronounced on the Western Front. Soldiers at Petersburg were not as concerned about vermin as they were they were about problems created by climate. In the summer they suffered from brutal heat and humidity, despite their efforts to provide themselves relief. Overall, Confederate soldiers suffered more than their adversaries due to the Union supply system, but both sides endured harsh conditions in the trenches.

In addition to living day to day with hardships imposed by nature, soldiers at Petersburg and the Western Front constantly experienced combat. In trench warfare, it did not consist of specified objectives, or pitched battles. The tactics of trench warfare were methods of harrasing the enemy and causing his attrition. Aside from occasional frontal assaults, the type of fighting that took place in the trenches involved mining, artillery, and sniping. Soldiers lived with the constant fear of death from these three methods.

One of the most horrible ways to be killed at Petersburg was from a mine. Death from mines was rare, but the activity of military engineers engaged in mining made soldiers in the trenches nervous. The idea of mining as a battle tactic was to dig a tunnel, or gallery as it was technically known, under the opposing army’s fortifications, then pack the end of it with gunpowder and explode a section of the line. This created a gap that could be exploited by an immediate infantry assault.

The most famous example of mining in the Civil War occurred at Petersburg and resulted in the Battle of the Crater. To the east of town was a section of the Confederate line known as Elliot’s Salient. At this point, the Union and Confederate lines were only 500 feet apart. They were closer there than at any other point around Petersburg. The Union lines opposing Elliot’s Salient were manned by soldiers from the IX Corps, including coal miners of the 48th Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment. The miners hatched a plan to dig a mine under the salient. They began work on June 25, 1864, with the approval of Gen. Ambrose Burnside, the IX Corps commander. On July 17, they finished the main gallery. For the next several days they dug side galleries underneath the Confederate earthworks and packed the mine with eight thousand pounds of gunpowder.

²⁴ William W. Tinkle, to Captain J.M. Jones, July 10, 1864, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Va.

²⁵ Frederick Stall Rees, to his father, Rees Family Papers, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg Va.

The original plan was to detonate the mine on July 30, just before sunrise. The explosion would be quickly followed by an attack from two divisions of Federal soldiers. At 3:30 A.M. on the 30th, everything was ready for the mine to be detonated. The commander of the 48th Pennsylvania, Col. Henry Pleasants, lit the fuse and waited for the explosion. After an hour, nothing happened. Any further delay would eliminate the advantage of surprise gained by launching the attack while the Confederates still slept. Lt. Jacob Doughty and Sgt. Henry Reese volunteered to go into the mine and find out what the problem was. They discovered that the fuse had gone out within forty feet of the powder. Doughty and Reese relit the fuse and quickly evacuated the mine gallery. At 4:44 A.M. the mine exploded, tearing a massive hole in the Confederate lines and killing 278 South Carolina soldiers. The Crater that resulted from the blast was 150 feet long, 60 feet wide and 30 feet deep.

The ensuing attack failed miserably for a variety of reasons. The Fourth Division of the IX Corps had originally been trained to lead the attack but were replaced the day before by the First Division, which was not trained for the assault. The Fourth Division consisted entirely of United States Colored Troops, and Generals Grant and Meade were afraid of the political repercussions if African-American soldiers were sacrificed in an unsuccessful attack. The colored troops did take part in the initial attack, but they were sent in after their white counterparts in the First Division. By that time, the battle had already been lost, and they were slaughtered in the bottom of the crater. The attack also failed because the generals in command of the First and Fourth Divisions, James Ledlie and Edward Ferraro, were not present at the Crater. They were behind the lines hiding drunk in a bomb-proof.²⁶

In the weeks before the Battle of the Crater, the Confederates were not oblivious to the mining operations around Elliott's Salient. They suspected a federal mine and dug some countermines to try and locate it. Obviously, they were unsuccessful at Elliot's Salient, but they did dig their own mines at other points in the lines.

On the evening of August 5, 1864, a Confederate engineer, Captain Hugh Thomas Douglas, sent his commanding officer a progress report concerning three mines he was overseeing. One was a countermine at Elliot's Salient in case Federal engineers had any other plans for that area. Another was at Colquitt's Salient and the third was at Gracie's Salient. Douglas reported that the Gracies' Salient mine was packed with 850 pounds of powder and had been detonated that evening around 6:30 P.M.²⁷

It exploded forty yards in front of Federal lines. It did very little damage to the earthworks and only injured a Colonel. Since forty yards was pretty far off the mark to be considered a near miss, and the explosion was not followed by an attack, the Union generals were confused by this incident.

One possible explanation was offered by a Maryland Confederate deserter who entered Union lines in the early morning hours on August 5. He was questioned extensively concerning the whereabouts of Confederate mines, but he claimed not to know of any. He did tell his

²⁶ Trudeau, The Last Citadel, (Baton Rouge, La., 1991), 105-110.

²⁷ U.S. War Department. (comp.), War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1902), Ser. I, Vol. 42, Part 2, 1163.

inquisitors that Confederates soldiers were afraid of another mine exploding under them.²⁸ There is no official explanation from the Confederates for the mine detonating so far from the Federal earthworks, but if they were afraid of another union mine, they would have detonated the mine at Gracies's Salient as a precaution. A Confederate soldier named M. N. Love told his mother on August 6, that everyone was afraid of another mine and that countermining operations were being undertaken. He attributed the explosion of the previous day to a countermine.²⁹



Figure 3. (Courtesy: Library of Congress)

underneath Fort Sedgewick. It appeared to him that the gallery had filled with water and forced the project to be abandoned.³⁰ His story is confirmed by a Matthew Brady photograph of a mine shaft in Fort Mahone taken in April 1865 (Figure 3.). Washburn reflected: “Those lines don’t look much like they did a month ago. Then they were alive with men and glistening with guns, now they are lonely and deserted . . . but they are interesting those old work[s] are. Pieces of shell lay all about, broken garb and equipment and here and there a little rust spot where some victim offered up his life on the alter of his country.”³¹

The Battle of the Crater was the most extensive mining operation at Petersburg, but it sparked other operations that were equally frightening. The sudden carnage of the explosion on July 30, made a distinct impression on the minds of soldiers of both sides. They suddenly became

There is also some evidence to suggest that the Confederates tried an offensive mine of their own underneath Union Forts Sedgewick and Stedman. An artilleryman named Washburn was part of the IX Corps Artillery Reserve around Fort Stedman. In April, 1865, after Lee’s surrender, he toured the abandoned earthworks of both sides. In several letters written to his brother during that time, he described seeing mine shafts at Fort Stedman and Fort Sedgewick. According to Washburn, Federal engineers knew about mining operations around Fort Stedman and successfully countermined. At Confederate Fort Mahone, he inspected a mine that ran directly

²⁸ Ibid., 52.

²⁹ M.N. Love, to his mother, Aug. 6, 1864, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg Va.

³⁰ Washburn, to his brother, April 14, 1865, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Va.

³¹ Washburn, to his brother, April 24, 1865.

aware how vulnerable they were. Countermining operations, particularly by Confederates, were increased. After the Crater, soldiers on both sides had a new fear to face.

The threat was increased on the Western Front, where mining operations became systematic and even more deadly. Germany, France, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia all had specially trained units to dig mines. Germany was the first combatant to use mines. They exploded a series of them on Dec. 20, 1914, at Festubert on the French-Belgium border.³²

The next time mines were used, the British detonated them. The area they chose for their first mining operations was the Ypres Salient in Belgium. It was the most active sector of the war. There, British lines jutted into Belgium in order to protect the strategically important town of Ypres. In March, 1915, the German trenches around Ypres were built on a rise known as Hill 60, overlooking the town. From the hill, the Germans were able to shell mercilessly the British and the town. Since the position was nearly impossible to take by direct assault, the British decided to undermine it.

The water table in this part of the country was so high that miners had to dig deep to find a layer of clay that would support a mine gallery. Even then they had to shore up the tunnel with thick timber. As the gallery lengthened, it became suffocating and the miners could only work for short intervals of time before they passed out. Meanwhile, the Germans had realized the British plans and were desperately countermining to foil them. When the British mine was finished, the miners packed it with four tons of explosives. On April 19, 1915, they detonated it. The Germans were so decimated that it only took fifteen minutes for the British to capture what was left of the hill.³³

As the war continued, mining operations increased and became more complex. By 1917, the British employed 24,000 miners who sustained 1200 casualties a month. Mines and countermines formed a labyrinth as men played an elaborate subterranean game of cat and mouse. Occasionally, miner and counterminer met, resulting in hand to hand fighting in cramped stuffy spaces. Mining became a constant source of worry for the soldiers in the trenches.³⁴

The escalation in mining that occurred during the war reached its' climax in June, 1917. For months ahead of time, British miners had been busy digging nineteen separate mines along Messines Ridge. The plan was to detonate all of these mines at once and obliterate the ridge. They were packed with a total of 933,200 pounds of ammonal, an explosive made of TNT, ammonium nitrate, and aluminum powder. On June 7, the mines were detonated, causing an explosion so loud that it was heard in London. The Germans were caught off guard but quickly recovered and allowed the British only a slight advance.³⁵

Snipers were an even more immediate concern than mines for soldiers engaged in trench warfare. At both Petersburg and the Western Front, all front line soldiers were encouraged to shoot at the enemy whenever possible. Pickets on duty in rifle pits or observation posts spent their time shooting at any target that dared to present itself above the parapet. Whizzing bullets was a

³² David W. Rhyne, "War in the Lithosphere," *Army*, XXXVI (1986), 61.

³³ Lyn Macdonald, *1915: The Death of Innocence* (New York, 1993), 180-181.

³⁴ Simpson, *Hot Blood and Cold Steel*, 46.

³⁵ Rhyne, "War in the Lithosphere," 60.

fact of life in the trenches. As dangerous as shots fired from regular infantry soldiers were, they were not as deadly accurate as shots fired from specially trained sniper units.

During the Civil War snipers were known as sharpshooters. Both sides had regiments designated as special sharpshooters. The most acclaimed of these in the federal army was Berdan's Sharpshooter Regiment. At the beginning of the war, it was armed with heavy benchrest rifles, equipped with a special loading device and telescopic sights. The rifles had a range of 800 yards compared to the 400-yard range of the Springfield rifle issued to regular infantry. Although very effective, these weapons were so heavy they had to be rested on a fixed object to be aimed properly. They were also slow to load. Both of these factors made them cumbersome in battle. By 1863, they were replaced by regular Springfield rifles or brand new Sharps Breechloaders. At Petersburg, the static battle conditions allowed for benchrest rifles to make a reappearance alongside Sharps and Springfield rifles. Confederate sharpshooters units preferred the British-made Enfield rifle. This weapon was similar to the Springfield and was standard issue to many Union and Confederate units.³⁶

Whether using Enfield, Springfield, or benchrest rifles, sharpshooters thrived in the static conditions of trench warfare. There they could take time to conceal themselves carefully without the chaos of a mobile battle surrounding them. Sniper fire was a lethal nuisance to soldiers at Petersburg. To display any part of one's body above the parapet could mean instant death. When a soldier was in the front line, he lived with this reality day in and day out.

Early in the siege, Gen. E. Porter Alexander, Chief of Artillery for the Confederate First Corps, and Col. Walter H. Stevens, Chief Engineer for the Army of Northern Virginia, were in the front lines around Elliot's Salient surveying the trenches. Stevens wanted to get a better look at the enemy works, but heavy sniper fire prevented him from sticking his head over the parapet. Instead, Stevens held a mirror up and angled it so that he could view enemy lines without exposing himself. In an instant, the mirror was shattered in his hand by a sniper's bullet, and the two officers heard someone shout from the Federal trenches: "Set it up again Johnny!"³⁷

On June 18, 1864, during the opening battles for the city, Sgt. Charles Bowen's Federal regiment received orders to entrench and prepare to lay siege to Petersburg. They constructed earthworks nine feet deep and four feet high. Despite this considerable protection, sniper fire forced them to lay crouched together in their trench all day. They could only move at night. In a letter that he wrote on June 21, Bowen complained of the constant firing and his boredom from having to hide in his trench all day. At one point in the letter, he interrupted himself to let them know that as he had been writing, a man was shot through the side not more than ten feet from him.³⁸

³⁶ Ron Banks, "Death at a Distance," *Civil War Times Illustrated* XXIX (April 1990): 48-55.

³⁷ E. Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy* ed. Gary Gallagher (Chapel Hill NC, 1989), 435.

³⁸ Sgt. Charles Thomas Bowen, to friends at home, June 21 1864, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg Va.



Figure 4. A dead Confederate soldier in the trenches. (Courtesy: Library of Congress)

The area around Union Fort Sedgewick and Confederate Fort Mahone was notorious for sniper activity. The two forts opposed each other along the Jerusalem Plank Road, an important north-south route. Forts Sedgewick and Mahone constantly fought for control of it. Because of the high level of sniper activity in the area, Federal soldiers nicknamed Fort Sedgewick, “Fort Hell.” Soon afterward, Fort Mahone became known as “Fort Damnation.” For this reason, pickets stationed in rifle pits between the forts got in the habit of using “between Hell and Damnation” as a return address on letters home.³⁹ This was a lighthearted, although somewhat morbid, attitude toward a very real threat.

Armies on both sides of the Western Front saw it as a method for harassing the enemy. A 1917 U.S. Army manual on trench warfare described the purpose of sniping: “It annoys the enemy, helps to shake his morale, and causes his losses.” Because of the accuracy of the rifles, targets as small as an eye peeking through a loophole, or a hand placed on a parapet were legitimate targets.⁴⁰ As at Petersburg, sniping was carried out by both regular infantrymen and specially trained troops.

Trained snipers were employed in a similar manner by all armies on the Western Front. The United States Army made snipers of the two best shooters per company. They acted as part of the company and occupied the same sector of line. Initially, the British had the same system, but by early 1916, they developed independent squads of snipers. A special sniper school located behind the lines trained each British sniper squad consisting of about twenty five soldiers. There was generally one squad of snipers per battalion.⁴¹ The Germans used an almost identical system. The snipers of all armies worked in teams of two. One did the actual shooting and the other acted as an observer. The observer used a telescopic sight to gather intelligence about enemy fortifications, and spot targets for his partner.

³⁹ Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 289.

⁴⁰ Maj. James A. Moss, *Trench Warfare* (Menasha, Wis., 1917) excerpted in *Relevance: the Quarterly Journal of the Great War Society* V(April 1996) 33-38.

⁴¹ In the British army, a battalion consisted of about 1000 men, and 35 officers. It was broken down into four companies. Each battalion had its separate identity. It had its own name, tradition and history. Soldiers took pride in their battalion and identified stronger with it than any other unit association such as division, corps, or army. See Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London, 1980), 10-11.

The key to being a successful sniper was to remain undetected. For that reason, they hid in trees, abandoned buildings, and used every available bit of shrub or rise in the ground as cover. A good sniper would move from a spot and never return to it, if more than two shots came close to hitting him. One sniper was such a nuisance to the enemy that any means necessary would be taken to eradicate him if he were discovered.⁴² For this reason, snipers were excellent at concealing themselves.

As a result of British and German organization, almost every inch of the front was covered by a sniper. A typical battalion took up about 1000 yards of front line trenches. Counting the company snipers and each battalion's sniper unit, that distance was covered by a total of 46 snipers. That equated to one sniper per 21 yards. At any given time half of these would be observers, but the armed snipers were each carrying a rifle that could fire 2000 yards into enemy territory. That was more than enough to make every soldier on the front vigilantly cautious.⁴³

Despite the proliferation of snipers on the Western Front, they were not the most common form of death for soldiers. Only forty percent of British soldiers were killed by bullets from rifles or machine guns, the other sixty percent were killed by artillery.⁴⁴ All types of artillery were fired around the clock at important strategical sites behind the lines and at soldiers in the front lines.

The use of massive quantities of artillery resulted from a common misconception concerning the cause of the stalemate on the Western Front. From the beginning of trench warfare in September, 1914, generals saw the problem as a lack of firepower. They reasoned that if they could overwhelm the enemy with more troops, and artillery shells that the deadlock would be broken. To the strategists, it was simply a matter of outshelling and outnumbering your opponent. In practice, both sides dug deeper dugouts, built more trench lines, and laid out more barbed wire. When the enemy's lines were penetrated, the landscape was so torn up by shell craters that the troops could not advance very far before a counterattack could be organized.

This happened to the British at the battle of the Somme in July 1916, and again in 1917 at the battle of Paschendaele. During the latter engagement, four and a half million shells were fired by 3000 medium guns and 1000 heavy guns in preparation for an infantry assault. That equated to four and three quarter tons of shells per linear yard of front for the area to be assaulted. When the soldiers finally went forward, they found muddy terrain almost impossible to navigate. The result was disastrous losses.⁴⁵

Artillery was used on regular basis to harass the enemy and strike at key points in his line. It was placed in rear areas and relied on Forward Observation Officers to give it instructions on where to fire. These officers used balloons and planes to spot enemy targets and communicate their location to gun crews on the ground. Occasionally, they resorted to using haystacks as observation posts. Because those who were doing the firing could not actually see their target, shells tended to land haphazardly around a given target, causing havoc for soldiers nearby.⁴⁶

⁴² Moss, Trench Warfare, 35.

⁴³ Ashworth, Trench Warfare, 1914-1918, 58.

⁴⁴ John Terraine, The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti-Myths of War, 1861-1945 (London, 1980), 132. This figure does not include those killed by mines.

⁴⁵ Eric J. Leed, No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I (New York, 1979), 99.

⁴⁶ Simpson, Hot Blood and Cold Steel, 53.

Mortars were the type of artillery feared most by soldiers on the Western Front. They were close range weapons intended to lob shells in a high arc. Instead of being located in the rear, they were positioned in front line trenches where crews could easily pick their own targets. Because they were designed with a high trajectory, they were capable of landing inside of trenches killing soldiers and damaging earthworks.

Both sides used mortars frequently, but at the beginning of the war the Germans had more mortars and better crews. At the start of the war the Germans had 160 mortars of varying sizes. The British and the French had none. The allies quickly realized that they would have to obtain mortars to prevent the Germans from having an advantage. The British army bought up whatever mortars they could find, but it was not until 1916 that they had standard issue medium and heavy mortars, and trained crews to man them. The heaviest British mortars could fire a 150 lb. shell, but the heaviest German mortars, known as Minnenwerfers, fired a 200 lb. shell.⁴⁷

Minnenwerfer shells traveled slow enough that soldiers could watch them climb through the air, but it was difficult to tell where one of these monsters would land. When they did land they made craters as much as twenty five feet deep. As a result, soldiers felt helpless as they watched mortars shells coming toward them. Some soldiers tried to make themselves feel safe by scurrying to another section of trench. Others adopted a fatalistic attitude and stayed rooted to the spot. In reality, chances of being hit were the same whether one moved or not.⁴⁸

Like the Allies on the Western Front, the Army of Northern Virginia was outgunned by the mortars of its enemy. At the outset of the siege of Petersburg, the Union forces were armed with 60 mortars ranging from 24 lb. Coehorn mortars to 120 lb. heavy siege mortars.⁴⁹ This was in addition to the numerous smoothbore cannons that were manned by regular artillery units. The mortars and rifled cannons were manned by the 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery. During the siege, this unit fired 61,884 rounds, a total of 879 tons of shells.⁵⁰

The most common mortar used by both sides was the Coehorn. Its design was simple and effective. It was essentially a short bronze tube mounted on an oak base. It had an eight inch bore and was only about a foot and a half long, but was extremely heavy. Like most mortars at this time, it had a fixed elevation of forty five degrees. Since it had no wheels on its base, it had to be aimed by a crew of four. Two men on each side manhandled it into position, and the distance it fired shells depended on the amount of powder used. Exploding shells were the most common form of ammunition used. They were hollow iron balls filled with gunpowder and a protruding fuse. The fuse was designed so that it would light at the same time the mortar was fired, and it was measured so that it would finish burning at same moment the ball arrived at its target. When

⁴⁷ Ashworth, *Trench Warfare*, 64.

⁴⁸ Quinn, *Tales of Old Soldiers*, 58-59.

⁴⁹ Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 436. The weight designations used here indicate the weight of the shell a particular gun was capable of firing. Artillery guns were usually referred to by the weight of their ammunition or the diameter of their bore. For example a 24 lb. Coehorn mortar can also be referred to as an 8 inch mortar. That means that it typically fired a 24 lb. shell out of an 8 inch bore. These two methods of reference were used interchangeably depending on the gun.

⁵⁰ Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 292.

the ball exploded, it spread shards of iron throughout the trenches, and penetrated every inch of the surrounding area.⁵¹

In addition to the mortars, the 1st Connecticut also manned forty 30lb. and six 100lb. rifled cannons. These were brand new cannons that worked on the same principle as the rifled musket. The inside of the barrel was grooved to put a spin on the shells. This gave them more power and greater accuracy.

At first, the power of the Union mortars made life difficult for the Confederates.

E. Porter Alexander later remembered: “Every man needed a little bombproof to sleep in at night, and to dodge into in the day when the mortar shells were coming. They soon honey combed the rear side of the trenches with all sorts of little caves and cellars in which all sorts of individual ingenuity was displayed in the arrangement of these sleeping dodging places.”

In contrast to the Federals, the Confederates only had a few 12lb. mortars which were delivered just weeks before the siege began. They helped to combat the Union mortars, but lacked the accuracy of the larger mortars. The Confederates also lacked rifled artillery. All they had was smoothbore artillery. They soon made up the mortar deficit, but never acquired the same firepower as their adversaries.⁵²

Despite the inferiority of the Confederate Artillery, they still managed to harass the Federals. The Confederate mortar crews preferred to work at night. Darkness hid them from snipers and return fire from Federal mortars. Once mortar crews discovered the correct amount of powder and position for the mortar, they could hit a stable target at any time of day. For instance, if a mortar crew was able to lob shells inside a given fort during the day, all they had to do was use the same calculations at night to hit the same fort. Since the small mortars were not very accurate anyway, it did not matter if the shells did not land in the exact same spot every time. The problem with this tactic was that the fuses made the mortar balls easier for federal infantrymen to see and dodge. Soldiers were treated to a deadly fireworks display as the burning fuses tossed and turned in a slow arc over the trenches. Whether fired at night or during the day, mortar shells of all types elicited the “warm personal interest” of all the soldiers at Petersburg. They could be seen coming and easily avoided so soldiers were ever vigilant for them.

John Billings of the 10th Massachusetts Battery wrote years after the war about his experiences. When Billings and his comrades saw that a mortar shell was likely to land nearby, he recalled: “business of a very pressing nature suddenly called us into the bomb-proofs; and it was not transacted until an explosion was heard, or heavy jar told us that the bomb had exploded its’ violence in the ground.”⁵³

Billings used non-threatening language to describe his experiences with mortar fire, but it is doubtful that his tone accurately reflects the terror he must have felt, not only from mortars but from all aspects of life in the trenches. Trench warfare imposed horrible conditions on soldiers. Filth, vermin, and exposure were just another part of the daily routine. At Petersburg soldiers

⁵¹ Albert Manucy, Artillery Through the Ages: A Short Illustrated History of Cannon Emphasizing Types used in America (Washington DC, 1949), 56-60.

⁵² Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, 436.

⁵³ John D. Billings, Hardtack and Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life (Boston, 1887), 60.

endured mud, brutal heat, and wet winters. On the Western Front soldiers lived with rats, and lice in addition to mud. Even without having to fight a war, living was wretched.

The business of war developed a particularly nasty character in the trenches. Sudden death could come from mines, snipers or artillery. Although artillery caused more casualties on the Western Front than mines, there were plenty of examples of destruction by mines for soldiers to fear them. The same was true at Petersburg where the spectacle of the battle of the Crater and the mines that followed it caused every soldier to be on edge. As if mines and artillery didn't pose enough of a threat, there was the continual sniper fire to remind men of the need for caution.

Trench warfare at Petersburg and on the Western Front was not the clean safe strategy that generals and military theorists thought that it would be. It was a nasty brutal affair. One factor that was never included in battle plans, fortification theory, or strategy was how the human element would react.

Chapter 3. Friends Among Enemies

On Christmas eve, 1914, the incessant sniping and shelling stopped. Opposing German and British soldiers put aside the war to celebrate the holiday. They crawled out of their trenches on the Western Front and greeted one another in no-man's land. Throughout the night and into the next day, they traded gifts, sang carols, and reminisced about home.¹ Although a truce on this scale never occurred again on the Western Front, fraternization among soldiers was a common occurrence.

The conditions of the trenches promoted fraternization for a variety of reasons. One is the simple fact of proximity to the enemy. Soldiers spent long periods of time in trenches only yards from their enemy. It is only natural that they would communicate with one another.

Another reason for fraternization was survival. Both sides realized that life was difficult enough without shooting at one another. Soldiers had to deal with a great deal of hardship, as was described in the last chapter. The fact that both sides experienced the same conditions promoted sympathy between enemies. Sympathy could develop into rapport between opposing soldiers, and a realization that it was in both of their interests to arrange truces.

A live and let live system developed at both Petersburg and on the Western Front. The live and let live system consisted of informal truces between front line soldiers for the sake of their own survival. It relied on trust between enemies not to open fire on one another. It was understood that if the truce was broken by one side retaliation by the other would be swift and brutal. For instance, if a British sniper shot a German, the British troops could expect every German soldier on that part of the line to open fire on them. It was all part of an informal and mutually understood system.

The live and let live system was not condoned by the high command of the armies at Petersburg or on the Western Front. They felt that it was detrimental to the offensive spirit and could result in bad morale. This was especially true of the British High Command who saw the stalemate of trench warfare as a temporary situation. They predicted that at any moment a breakthrough could come, and the men needed to constantly be prepared to launch an assault.

Some units on the Western Front adhered to the official offensive spirit more than others. In those units, soldiers were interested in pressing the war to its' fullest extent in order to win it quickly. There was no live and let live system with those men. In the British army they were usually regular army units, like the Royal Welch Fusiliers, that had seen extensive combat before the war in the many colonial conflicts fought by the British empire. Unlike units that had been formed specifically to fight on the Western Front, regular army units had preexisting reputations as fighters to protect. In the German army the regular Prussian units had the same sort of reputations.

The difference in units and importance of trench lines resulted in active some sections being more active than others, during both conflicts. At Petersburg, some units consisted of hardened veterans with reputations for valor in combat. Others were new and consisted of men

¹ See: Malcolm Brown and Shirley Seaton, Christmas Truce: the Western Front, December 1914 (London, 1994).

who had been drafted or were at least reluctant participants. Some areas, like Fort Sedgewick at Petersburg, were strategically important necessitating vigilance. The Ypres Salient on the Western Front was an active area. In active sections, very little fraternization took place, and a system of “kill or be killed” developed. In less active sections, fraternization was rampant, and live and let live existed.²

Fraternization took two forms: direct and indirect. Direct fraternization involved verbal or written communication with the enemy. It could occur to arrange a temporary truce, or a meeting between the lines to trade items and chat. Indirect fraternization happened by communication through action. It usually meant establishing a truce by not firing on the enemy. If one unit wanted to form a truce with the unit opposite them, but was unable to do this through direct communication, they would simply not fire their weapons in the hopes that the enemy would correctly interpret this as an invitation for a cease-fire. This form of fraternization was more common among support units, such as artillery, who were not able to establish verbal communication with the enemy.³

Throughout the Civil War fraternization was common. Similar interests, cultural backgrounds, and long periods of inactivity between battles led to meetings with the enemy. They would often meet to trade tobacco, coffee, or just to discuss the war. For many soldiers it was difficult to sustain personal hatred for an adversary so much like themselves. By the time of Petersburg, the proximity of the opposing trenches and the conditions that both sides had to endure helped to perpetuate fraternization.⁴

By November 30, 1864, fraternization became so widespread that Gen. Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac, found it necessary to reissue an earlier order forbidding any “intercourse with the enemy.” In general order #44, Meade pointed to “recent occurrences” that made it important to remind the army: “All other communication [other than receiving a flag of truce] is strictly prohibited, whether by means of conversation, signals, or otherwise, or by an interchange of newspapers or commodities.”⁵

The officers of the Army of Northern Virginia issued similar orders to Confederate soldiers. Some, like W.L. Faulkner of the 18th South Carolina strictly obeyed those orders. On July 3, 1864, he wrote in a letter home, “We are so close we can talk to each other but it is against orders, some of our [Regiment] is killed or wounded every day.”⁶ His comment concerning casualties indicates that his refusal to communicate with the enemy may not have been solely due to orders. He may not have wanted to communicate with people who were killing his friends. Many soldiers shared this attitude, and could not set aside their animosity, even if it was in their best interest.⁷

Other soldiers such as S.F. Beyer of the 110th Pennsylvania, did what they could to make friends with the enemy, despite the objections of their officers. In his section of line the pickets

² Tony Ashworth, Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System (London, 1980), 19-20.

³ Ibid., 32-39.

⁴ James I. Robertson Jr. Soldiers Blue and Gray (Columbia, SC, 1988), 140-142.

⁵ U.S. War Department. (comp.), War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1902), Ser. I, Vol. 42, Part 3, 752.

⁶ W.L. Faulkner, to his parents, July 3, 1864, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg Va.

⁷ Robertson, Soldiers Blue and Gray, 140.

were only thirty yards apart, and a brisk trade of coffee, hardtack, writing paper, and tobacco was kept up.⁸ Officers were the only hindrance to this and soldiers were constantly on the look out for them.⁹

Some soldiers fraternized with the enemy for relief from sniper fire. Lt. George Breck reported on July 6, 1864, that at the start of the siege soldiers in his area became adept at the “art of dodging and keeping low” in order to avoid being shot by a sniper. Since then, pickets had arranged a truce and soldiers of both sides were on the best of terms. Meetings were taking place between the lines where soldiers shook hands, traded goods, and socialized with one another. They even played card games such as Euchre and Seven Up.¹⁰

One New York soldier recalled an incident when he and a few of his comrades played poker with Confederate soldiers in no-man’s land. They played for the outcome of the war. The Confederates tried hard to win their independence, but in the end the New Yorkers won the poker game and the Union was preserved.¹¹

Occasionally, fraternization even occurred between Confederates and African-American soldiers. The 55th Virginia was positioned near Fort Harrison, southeast of Richmond. Opposite them were United States Colored Troops. On one occasion, an African-American soldier shouted over to the Confederates, asking them if he could borrow some dry firewood. They told him he could have some if he came over to get it. The soldier promptly got out of his trench and walked over to the Confederates. Once he got to the opposing lines, he realized he had been duped. Instead of dry firewood, Gen. Richard Ewell was waiting for him. Ewell was the Corps commander in charge of that section of line and he wanted to know what units opposed him. After being interrogated the soldier was released back to his own lines.

This story is significant because of the trust shown by the African-American soldier. Before this incident, there was an informal truce in that part of the line and Confederate soldiers got along well with the Colored Troops. They conversed with the Union soldiers, calling them, “Corporal Dick.”¹² The fact that an African-American soldier was not afraid to enter Confederate trenches based on the simple promise of dry firewood shows that he trusted them to keep the truce. This despite the fact that the Confederate government promised to sell any captured African-American soldier back into slavery. Such casual relations between Colored Troops and Confederates was not typical at Petersburg, but it illustrates how fraternization occurred even between troops who had personal reasons for hating each other. The reason for this sort of fraternization and an arrangement of an informal truce was a mutual desire to survive the war.

Union prisoners fraternized with Cephus Walton of the 1st Va. Battalion, to keep from starving. Walton was guarding the recently captured prisoners when they complained of being hungry. They offered to sell their belongings to Walton so that they could buy food from someone else. Walton agreed and bought a gold pen, inkwell, and eating utensils for just a few dollars. In

⁸ Hardtack is a hard cracker type bread that was issued to soldiers as rations.

⁹ S.F. Beyer, to Martha B. Dysart, Aug. 30, 1864, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg Va.

¹⁰ Rochester Union and Advertiser, July 6, 1864, Item #265, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg Va.

¹¹ Trudeau, The last Citadel, 292.

¹² Richard O’Sullivan, 55th Virginia Infantry (Lynchburg, Va., 1989), 84.

this instance, both sides had no trouble fraternizing with the enemy when it was beneficial to both parties.¹³

Soldiers on the Western Front also did not hesitate to converse with the enemy when it was to their advantage. Initially, truces were arranged to bury the dead. This was based on a long standing European military tradition of cease-fire agreements for the purpose of burying fallen comrades. Not only did this show respect for the dead, but it made life more comfortable for the living. Neither side wanted to live with rotting corpses near.¹⁴

The arrangement of truces was aided by many German soldiers' ability to speak English. Before the war, the English restaurant business employed a number of young German males. When the war broke out, these former waiters and busboys returned to Germany to fight for the fatherland. As a result, a large portion of the German army spoke English. The British soldiers joked that if one British soldier stuck his above the parapet and shouted "waiter," fifty Germans would jump out of their trenches and shout back, "coming sir."¹⁵

On Christmas eve 1914, the Germans' ability to speak English, a desire to bury the dead, and the holiday season led to the largest incident of fraternization to take place in the war. This was the first Christmas of the war, and for many soldiers of both sides, it was the first Christmas they had ever spent away from home. In the weeks before Christmas, they received packages from family and from civilian relief organizations. Germans in the front lines even received Christmas trees.

As soon as night fell on December 24, German soldiers on some parts of the front mounted the trees along the parapets. They were illuminated with candles and created a spectacular display for soldiers on both sides. The Germans then began to sing carols. They sang "Silent Night," and "Die Wacht am Rhein." Soon, the British soldiers joined them. Before too long, the Germans and British left their trenches to meet in the middle. They swapped gifts, and chatted with one another about home. This did not happen on all parts of the line, but it has been estimated that about two thirds of the British army on the Western Front took part in the truce.¹⁶

Corporal John Ferguson of the Royal Seaforth Highlanders, was among the first in his Regiment to leave the trenches on Christmas eve, to meet with the Germans. He was known as "Fergie" by his friends, and when they followed him into no-man's land, they called out his name to find him in the darkness. The Germans, thinking they were being greeted, politely smiled and answered, "Fergie!"¹⁷

Like at Petersburg, some soldiers on the Western Front obeyed orders and avoided fraternizing with the enemy. Captain C.I. Stockwell tried to take that course, but was charmed by a German officer. On the afternoon of Christmas day, Stockwell received a message that a German officer wished to meet with him to discuss a possible truce. Stockwell met the officer between the trenches, but he refused to arrange a truce with the Germans. The most he agreed to was a cease-fire for the duration of the day. During this time no soldiers were to leave their

¹³ Cephus Walton, to his wife [Nancy], June 24, 1864, Walton Family Papers, Special Collections, Carol M. Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Va.

¹⁴ Malcolm Brown and Shirley Seaton, The Christmas Truce, 69.

¹⁵ Ashworth, Trench Warfare, 46.

¹⁶ Brown and Seaton, Christmas Truce, 66-69.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

trenches. The German officer agreed, and concluded the negotiations by having a keg of beer rolled out for the British to enjoy. Stockwell responded by ordering some plum pudding brought up as a gift. The German officer then had two bottles of beer and two glasses brought out. The officers toasted each other and enjoyed their beer while men from both sides cheered.¹⁸

French and Belgian soldiers had more success maintaining discipline. For them the Christmas truce was limited to individual soldiers trading small gifts with the Germans. When German soldiers made overtures to the French and Belgian units for a truce, more often than not, they were fired on. The reason may have more to do with personal feelings than the threat of army discipline. Like Private Faulkner's unit at Petersburg, many French and Belgian units had suffered heavy casualties in the months before Christmas, and the survivors could not bring themselves to fraternize with the Germans, even on Christmas. Many French and Belgian soldiers also had families that were under German occupation. Stories of atrocities committed against civilians made more of an impact on these men than it did on their British allies.¹⁹

For similar reasons, Christmas 1864, passed without any fraternization in Petersburg. The only Christmas lights that soldiers were treated to came from Union gunboats as they shelled Fort Fisher wounding 23 men.²⁰ Both armies were war weary, cold, and not in the mood to celebrate. On Christmas eve George Breck reported to the homefront that the weather was extremely cold, and Confederate soldiers were deserting in droves, most without coats or blankets. Christmas passed without festivities.²¹

The armies on the Western Front soon began to suffer too much for any large scale fraternization like the Christmas truce to be repeated. Although, meetings and conversations between individuals did continue. In 1915, Robert Graves' Battalion moved into a section of line where a cease-fire agreement had been arranged between the previous occupants and the opposing Germans. Soon, the Germans, not realizing the previous British unit had been replaced, sent over two unexploded rifle grenades. One of them contained the following message: "We all German Korporals wish you to a good German dinner tonight with beer (ale) and cakes. Your little dog ran over to us and we keep it safe; it became no food with you so it run to us. Answer in the same way, if you please." The other grenade contained a German newspaper. Graves' unit was a regular army regiment, so they did not respond. Graves himself had only signed up for the war and felt no animosity toward the Germans. He considered himself to be doing his duty to his King without any personal grudge against his enemy.²²

In some instances, fraternization was purely for the sake of doing one's duty to country without making the supreme sacrifice. Indirect fraternization involved conditional truces between soldiers who never talked with one another. It differed from direct fraternization in that there was no social element involved. Soldiers involved in indirect fraternization only communicated with the enemy when it was necessary to maintaining an arranged truce. They did not trade items with

¹⁸ Ibid., 120.

¹⁹ Ibid., 144.

²⁰ U.S. War Dept. The Official Records Series I, Vol. 42, part 1, 856.

²¹ Rochester Union and Advertiser, Dec. 24, 1864, Item #265, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg

Va.

²² Graves, Good-Bye to All That, 137.

the enemy or converse with him. Indirect fraternization was for the sole purpose of self preservation.

The most common form of indirect fraternization was ritualized aggression. Ritualized aggression regulated combat so that none of the participants was harmed. Types of ritualized aggression included purposely unaimed shots, firing at the same time daily, or advance warnings of attack. Soldiers concealed truces from officers who did not approve, without injuring enemy soldiers and upsetting the integrity of the truce.

Ritualized aggression was common in artillery where direct fraternization was impossible, but indirect fraternization was not. Artillery units would send over the same number of shells aimed at the same place every day at the same time. It did not take very long for the enemy to realize the pattern and interpret it as ritualized aggression.²³

In some areas indirect fraternization developed around times when it was inconvenient for both sides to be engaged in combat. That included during meal, when men were working on the trenches, or when a soldier was visiting the latrine. Soldiers did not consider it fair to shoot someone at these times. The practice began early in the war when both sides realized that they were eating breakfast at the same time. Things naturally got quiet during this time, and eventually it was accepted by both sides that hostilities would be suspended during the meal. Over time, this truce was extended to other meals and aspects of routine life.²⁴

Capt. Geoffrey Dugdale remembered that in his section of trenches there was a nightly truce for work parties. It was necessary for both sides to send work parties into no-man's land to fix barbed wire, work on observation posts, or bury the dead. In active sections, work parties had to crawl on hands and knees to avoid attracting enemy fire. They also had to worry about running into an opposing party, and engaging in hand to hand combat in the dark. To avoid these unpleasanties, the men on Capt. Dugdale's line, formed a truce with the Germans. Instead of crawling around in the dark, work parties drove a supply wagon into no-man's land. As soon as the sun came up, hostilities resumed.²⁵

Capt. Dugdale's knowledge of the truce makes it clear that not all officers disapproved of fraternization. Tom Broach remembered that he was given orders not to shoot at the Germans unless there was a good reason. In Broach's part of the line, such an action could provoke a "panic stations" response from the Germans. That meant that every German gun would immediately be fired at the British.²⁶

It was very important to soldiers to maintain truces, because of the repercussions of breaking them. On one section of the British lines a truce was broken by a German artillery barrage. As the British were swearing at the Germans and preparing to open fire on them, a German soldier jumped on the parapet and called over, "we are very sorry about that; we hope no one was hurt. It is not our fault, it is that damned Prussian artillery."²⁷

²³ Ashworth, Trench Warfare, 102.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁵ Andy Simpson, Hot Blood and Cold Steel: Life and Death in the Trenches of the First World War (London, 1993), 13.

²⁶ Tom Quinn, Tales of the Old Soldiers (Dover, NH, 1993), 126.

²⁷ Ashworth, Trench Warfare, 146.

At Petersburg, it was also important to maintain truces established through indirect fraternization. On the part of the line where Federal soldier Frederick Rees was positioned, a truce was established by virtue of the proximity of the trenches. Rees wrote to his father: “the pickets is as close as 50 yards apart, and we ain’t no more than 100 yards from them. We can see them plain in their [rifle] pits and they can walk about, as if their ain’t no body in front of them. They made it up not to fire on each other until they get orders and then they would fire up in the air to [give] them notice before they would fire on each other.”²⁸ By letting the Federal pickets know before they fired, the Confederates were engaging in ritualized aggression. The truce in this case resulted from the proximity of the pickets and the knowledge that casualties would be high unless a truce was kept. By firing above the heads of the Federal pickets as a warning, they left open the possibility of continuing the arrangement.

The soldiers under the command of Union Gen. Robert McAllister had a similar arrangement with the men opposite them, but on their part of the line the Confederates were not as cooperative. A truce existed that allowed the pickets of both sides to walk around, shake out their blankets, and converse with one another. The Confederates promised that if they were ordered to fire, they would warn the Federals first. They also agreed not to shoot at each other in the evening during the change of pickets.

One evening the Confederates broke the agreement and fired on the Federal pickets. Since no one was seriously injured, the Union troops did not respond. The next night the Confederates opened fire again. On the third night, the Federal soldiers let loose several volleys on the Confederate pickets in retaliation for the previous two nights’ treachery. After that incident, the pickets were changed in peace.²⁹ In this case, the truce was enforced by punitive actions taken against the soldiers who broke it. Significantly, even after both sides fired on each other, the truce was continued. They understood the consequences of breaking the truce and accepted them without eliminating the live and let live system.

Truces by indirect fraternization became so extreme in some parts of the line, that one side would warn the other before a major attack. Soldiers had no way of avoiding taking part in a frontal assault, but they could give advance notice to the enemy in order to maintain his trust and allow for future agreements. On Franklin Riley’s part of the line such an agreement was made. In early September, the truce broke down and heavy sniper fire resumed. In his journal, Riley expressed anger over the Federal betrayal, and worried that an attack might now take him by surprise. He had come to expect trust between the opposing forces, to keep the truce and preserve one another’s lives.³⁰

All forms of fraternization required trust and rapport between soldiers who should have been enemies. The natural outcome of that relationship was a sympathy for one’s opponent. A British soldier, 2nd Lt. D.O. Barnett, considered the Germans across from him to be a “very cheery

²⁸ Frederick Stall Rees, to his father, July 23, 1864, Rees Family Papers, Petersburg National Battlefield, Petersburg, Va.

²⁹ James I. Robertson Jr. ed. The Civil War Letters of General Robert McAllister (New Brunswick, NJ, 1965), 500.

³⁰ Riley, Grandfather’s Journal, 212.

lot” who liked to sing, and hold up targets for the British to shoot at. It was as if the two sides were friends playing a game, and not in the midst of war.³¹

Some Germans also had a high regard for the British, especially after the Christmas truce. On New Year’s eve, 1914, one extremely drunk German wandered into the British lines carrying two bottles of beer that he intended to share with the British friends that he had spent Christmas with. The soldiers who found him did not know what to do with him. They should have taken him prisoner because he had seen the inside of the British trenches. Instead, they escorted him back to his own lines. They decided that he was in no condition to gather any useful intelligence.³² At this early stage of the war, the incident showed how both sides had already developed mutual respect and sympathy.

The relationship between opposing soldiers in front line trenches contrasted sharply with the perceptions of the enemy held by the homefronts of both the Civil War and the First World War. Since most men volunteered to fight while women stayed at home, a gender gap developed between the front and home. While men faced the enemy and developed a bond with him through fraternization and common experience, women remained in the relative security of home and cultivated a deep hatred of the enemy encouraged by state controlled propaganda.

Soldiers began to feel alienation and resentment toward a homefront that they perceived as not fully understanding the horror of their experiences. The contrasting attitudes of soldiers and women at home toward the enemy was symptomatic of the rift between the two.

For Confederate soldiers at Petersburg, the dichotomy of front and homefront was stark and immediate due to their proximity to one another. Confederates could easily travel into the city of Petersburg and see how life for the civilian population differed from their own. Even though food was growing scarce in the city, social life continued with dances, and “starvation parties.” Day to day life for women in Petersburg changed very little during the siege. The continuity of life was an illusion maintained by women of the homefront to ease their own suffering, but from the perspective of the soldiers it seemed as if little had changed for the women, while everything had changed for him.³³

Franklin Riley expressed his feelings of alienation from the civilian population in a letter he wrote to his wife on Sept 24, 1864. He had just returned from a visit to Petersburg when he wrote: “The people there are friendly, but they are too clean, too decent (Is that the right word?) for me to feel comfortable around them. I wonder - when and if I return home - will I be able to fit in?”³⁴ Riley noticed a strong difference between himself and the homefront. Compared to the filth and death of the trenches the people of Petersburg seemed “too clean” and “decent.” In other words they seemed too unspoiled to be a part of the war as Riley knew it.

³¹ Simpson, Hot Blood and Cold Steel, 13.

³² Brown and Seaton, The Christmas Truce, 172.

³³ Thomas Cooper DeLeon, Four Years in Rebel Capitals: An Inside View of Life in the Southern Confederacy, from Birth to Death (New York, 1962) 398; For more information on the City of Petersburg during the siege see: Nelson D. Lankford, "The Diary of Thomas Conolly, M.P.: Virginia, March-April 1865." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography XLV (1987), 75-112.

³⁴ Riley, Grandfather’s Journal, 214.

Even though he is basing his thoughts on his observations of Petersburg, he equates Petersburg to his own home, indicating that he doesn't perceive much of a difference between the people of Petersburg and his friends and family. In that context, Riley's words could be seen as a gentle warning to his wife that the experience of war has changed him, and he fears that he will not be able to relate to her when he returns.

While Riley felt uneasy about interacting with the civilian population, and feared what he would feel when he again saw his wife, he and his comrades had no trouble fraternizing with the enemy. Most of the soldiers who visited Petersburg must have noticed the difference between themselves and the local inhabitants. Riley's feelings of alienation would not have been unusual given the situation at that time.

In the 1st VA Battalion Virginia Regulars the perception that the homefront was living in safety and luxury while soldiers suffered, created resentment. The Battalion was positioned along the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad, guarding that vital link. As the siege dragged on the newer soldiers of the Battalion had to be ordered to keep the veterans from going into Petersburg, getting drunk and stealing from local citizens. On the surface this incident can be seen as simple disorderly conduct by disillusioned veterans. Since the trouble is widespread enough that soldiers have to be ordered to guard their comrades, and veteran soldiers are stealing from the same people they have been fighting to defend, there must be more to the problem than criminal activity by a few soldiers. With the proximity of the battalion to the city, they can view for themselves the apparent lifestyle lived by the civilian population while they have been suffering and dying. In these circumstances, the Confederate must have felt betrayed by a homefront that was supposed to be making sacrifices to support them. Their resentment would alleviate any feelings of guilt they might have about abandoning their duty to obtain their share of the perceived wealth and decadence of the homefront.

Feelings of resentment and alienation reflected in the words and actions of these Confederate soldiers caused increased fraternization. As soldiers visited Petersburg, they could not help but notice the contrast between the homefront and their own existence. From their observations it, it did not take them long to realize they had more in common with their enemy who understood their pain than with their own loved ones at home.

On the Western Front differing attitudes toward the war and perceptions of the enemy also created feelings of resentment and alienation which both contributed to and were caused by fraternization. As trench warfare dragged on, soldiers of all countries began to notice a difference between the way their own viewpoint and that of the women at home.

Even among French soldiers, whose loved ones knew the war better than any other civilians, there was gulf between the front and the homefront. French soldiers believed that the concerns of women at home were frivolous compared to their own experiences of life and death in the trenches. French women did not seem to fully comprehend the magnitude of the horror at the front. One French soldier, George Fabri, did not think it was possible to impress civilians with war stories unless one referred to, "something more horrible; the rationing of pastry or the closing of the stores at 6:00 PM." Only then would they realize the impact of war experiences.³⁵ Fabri's

³⁵ Mary Louise Roberts, Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France (Chicago, 1994)

remarks are bitterly sarcastic and underscore the resentment felt by soldiers toward a homefront that was seen as living in luxury. As with Confederate soldiers at Petersburg, French soldiers could not help but see their common interests with the enemy as opposed to their animosity toward the homefront.

In Britain, the contrast between the perception of the people at home and the reality of the trenches was also distinct. Most British soldiers did not have personal hatred toward the Germans that kept many French soldiers from fraternizing. As they fraternized with the Germans they came to resent the people at home that had encouraged them to fight against an enemy they did not hate. Patriots such as Jessie Pope pleaded with young men to sign up. In one of her most popular poems, "The Call" she wrote:

Who's for the khaki suit-
Are you, my laddie?
Who longs to charge and shoot-
Do you, my laddie?
Who's keen on getting fit,
Who means to show his grit,
And who'd rather wait a bit-
Would you, my laddie?³⁶

Pope's words guilt men into going to war while appealing to their sense of masculinity. Her language implies that a young man who joins the army will become a stout warrior in a "khaki suit." The image of soldiery along with the challenge to join makes Pope's poem a strong inducement to join the army. The fact that the challenge was issued by a woman makes it even more powerful.

"The Call" is the type of rhetoric that women used on men in order to convince them to join the army. When men saw the horrors of the trenches and contrasted them with the comforts of home experienced by those who had urged them to join, contempt and resentment resulted.

In his poem "Disabled," Wilfred Owen Told the story of one young soldier who went off to fight at the front and was crippled. Owen wrote of the boy's reason for joining: "Someone said he'd look a god in kilts,/ That's why; and may be, too, to please his Meg;/ Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts." Like many other British soldiers, this one joined to win the affection of his girl and the adoration of all women. In the end the soldier only won their pity. The last stanza expressed the soldier's frustration with the homefront:

Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
Tonight he noticed how women's eyes
passed from him to the strong men that were whole.

³⁶ Jessie Pope, "The Call," in Catherine W. Reilly, ed., Scars Upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War (London, 1981), 88.

How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?³⁷

In this poem Owen expressed contempt for the women at home, like Jessie Pope, who encouraged men to make sacrifices they did not understand. Owen's cynical attitude toward the homefront was shared by many British soldiers. Their animosity was in conflict with their attitudes towards the Germans. Owen's commented on his soldier's feelings toward the Germans: "Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,/ And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears/ of Fear came yet."³⁸ In a situation where a soldier could not relate to home, but shared the same experiences as his enemy, it was only natural that they would fraternize.

Both at Petersburg and on the Western Front soldiers engaged in fraternization in an effort to escape the realities of trench warfare. Because of the proximity of the trenches and the similar interests of the soldiers, fraternization seemed natural. Not all soldiers participated, but enough did to say that fraternization was commonplace in trench warfare. Examples abound in soldiers diaries and letters.

Fraternization took place to make life easier for soldiers who were already suffering from horrible living conditions. Whether they met with the enemy and traded items through direct fraternization or arranged truces by signals, fraternization brought together soldiers sharing the common goal of survival.

³⁷ Wilfred Owen, "Disabled," in World War I and European Society: A Sourcebook, Marilyn Shervin-Coetzee and Frans Coetzee (Lexington, Mass., 1995), 313-314.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 314.

Chapter 4. Lost in the Trenches

“The London Lads”

Along the road in the evening
the brown battalions wind,
With the trenches’ threat of death before,
the peaceful homes behind;
And luck is with you or luck is not
as the ticket of fate is drawn,
The boys go up to the trench at dusk,
but who will come back at dawn?¹

This verse was written in 1915 by Patrick MacGill as he waited to march to the front. In its lines, the author’s own uncertainty and his fear of the “trenches’ threat of death” are evident. MacGill expressed the anxiety of all soldiers in the trenches. They felt torn by the painful comparison between the brutal existence of trench warfare and the quiet life they had once lived. At the Front, they were not individuals but soldiers bound to the trenches by sudden and random forms of death. They felt their fate did not rest with themselves, but rather the luck of the draw.

The conditions of trench warfare, as described in chapter 2, placed an intense emotional strain on soldiers. They experienced a constant fear of sudden death from snipers, artillery, mines. The squalor of the trenches combined with random death created mental fatigue that not very many soldiers were able to escape. Some became depressed, others experienced a complete mental breakdown that left them incapacitated. They felt an emotional and psychological impact known as war neurosis.

Severe war neurosis requiring hospitalization, was first diagnosed on the Western Front. Doctors used the term shell-shock to refer to patients that suffered mental collapse from service in the trenches. Symptoms ranged from nervous anxiety, paranoia, nightmares, and what is clinically known as “neurasthenia” to physical symptoms such as mutism, paralysis, or spasms.²

Today, patients exhibiting neurasthenic symptoms would be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The major symptoms of PTSD include nightmares, flashbacks, survival guilt, fear of the traumatic, short temper, confusion, and amnesia. Victims also develop self-destructive behavior such as suicide attempts, alcoholism, and drug abuse. Shell-shock and PTSD are very closely related.³

It was widely recognized during the First World War that the conditions of trench warfare created shell-shock, but there was no similar research to show how war neurosis effected soldiers at Petersburg. Since the circumstances of trench warfare were similar during both conflicts, it stands to reason that if war neurosis was prevalent on the Western Front, it was also present at Petersburg. Finding cases of war neurosis in the Civil War is extremely difficult because of the

¹ Patrick MacGill, "Soldier Songs" in The Great Push (London, 1917); On Internet, available from http://raven.cc.ukans.edu/~kansite/ww_one/memoir/macgill.html (Accessed 2/20/97)

² Eric J. Leed, No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I (New York, 1979), 164.

³ Helen Cox, et. al. Clinical Applications of Nursing Diagnosis: Adult, Child, Women’s, Psychiatric, Gerontic and Home Health Considerations (Philadelphia, 1993), 908.

comparative lack of psychological knowledge at that time. It was frequently misdiagnosed as one of a variety of physical ailments common to soldiers. Few doctors specialized in mental disease. Despite the lack of direct medical evidence, it is possible to show that soldiers at Petersburg suffered from war neurosis caused by the constant stress of trench warfare. In some cases, treatment varied from that received by soldiers suffering from shell-shock on the Western Front, but the symptoms were the same.

During the First World War, the British army alone suffered 200,000 cases of shell-shock. One hundred treatment centers had to be set up across Great Britain to handle the flood of victims. French, Belgian, and German soldiers also suffered in massive quantities. When cases first started appearing, no one was quite sure what they suffered from.⁴

Shell-shock first received notice during the Russo-Japanese war. R.L. Richards, a British doctor, noticed an unusually high number of mental patients being admitted to the army hospital at Harbin. He speculated that the cause was the new advanced artillery and the large scale of the war, but took no notice of the trenches.⁵

During the First World War, cases of shell-shock began to show up as early as November 1914, less than two months after trench warfare on the Western front began. At that time, Dr. Charles F. Meyers examined three different cases, all of whom suffered from loss of senses and memory. Since they had all been close to exploding shells when they first suffered their symptoms, Meyers diagnosed concussions from the blast of the shells. He published his findings in the February, 1915 issue of "The Lancet." He called the illness shell-shock. Soon, other cases began to appear that had not been subjected to artillery fire. It was obvious that Meyers' diagnosis was wrong, but the term shell-shock stuck.⁶

The Germans and Austrians also noticed cases of shell-shock early in the war. Doctors used the theories of Hermann Oppenheim to diagnose the first cases. Oppenheim was a prominent psychiatrist in the 1880s, and continued to be followed in Germany and Austria. By consulting his work, doctors determined that shell-shock victims, or "Granatschock" victims in German, had lesions on their nerves and brain. There was no cure for this except rest in rural areas. In the same month that Meyers' published his findings, German and Austrian medical professionals held a conference. There, Max Nonne announced a cure for shell-shock based on the work of Sigmund Freud. Freud characterized shell-shock the same way he did peacetime hysterical ailments, as an escape from unendurable realities of the physical world. Nonne's cure involved hypnosis and psychotherapy to help patients face their fears, rather than simply rest. He viewed shell-shock as a mental disorder rather than a physical disease. His cure gained acceptance in Germany because it eliminated long term treatment. Soldiers could be quickly treated and returned to the trenches, rather than sitting on a farm somewhere. British and French psychiatrists also started to develop treatments based on psychotherapy and hypnosis.⁷

The central issue that surrounded treatment on both sides was whether or not shell-shock was the result of trench warfare. Some doctors believed that it was a natural response to modern

⁴ Eric T. Dean, "War and Psychiatry: examining the diffusion theory in light of the insanity defence in post World War I Britain," History of Psychiatry, IV (1993), 61.

⁵ Eric J. Leed, No Man's Land, 165.

⁶ Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and the English Culture (New York, 1985), 167.

⁷ José Brunner, "Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Politics during the First World War," Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences XXVI, 353.

warfare with heavy artillery, powerful rifles, machine guns and other products of technology. They agreed with Dr. Richards' assessment during the Russo-Japanese war. These doctors sympathized with shell-shock patients and primarily used psychoanalysis to treat them. That involved hypnosis and long discussions with patients. Other doctors thought shell-shock was an effort to shirk one's duty. Soldiers either consciously or subconsciously developed shell-shock to save themselves from the trenches. For these doctors, treatment consisted of electro-shock treatment designed to frighten patients into abandoning their symptoms. In other words, they tortured shell-shock patients until the victims were convinced that they were better off at the front. Doctors practiced both types of treatment during the war in all countries.⁸

Recent scholarship has come up with a number of possible explanations for shell-shock. One influential study has used Freud's concept of the ego-identity to explain shell-shock. Erik Erikson studied shell-shock among combat soldiers in the Pacific theater during World War II. He theorized that shell-shock was the result of a break in the continuity of the ego-identity. The ego-identity is one's subconscious belief in one's own self. It is what a person thinks himself or herself to be. This includes perceptions about one's own personality, and moral values. In war, one is forced to take actions or have feelings that are inconsistent with the ego-identity. For example, killing or seeing someone die without emotional response is contrary to what most people would think themselves capable of, but in war it becomes commonplace. The result is a break in soldiers' ego-identity, and a mental breakdown.⁹

In the Civil War and in the First World War, the theory of ego-identity makes even more sense considering the pre-war societies. Prior to the Civil War, most Americans had not personally experienced war since the War of 1812. Even those who fought in the Mexican War never saw combat on the scale that it reached in the Civil War. The men who marched off to war in 1861 had no idea of what the war would entail, let alone what they were capable of. The collective ego-identity of the country did not fit with the type of warfare that it experienced.

The same was true of Europe. Prior to the outbreak of war in 1914, Europe had not fought a major war since Napoleonic times. France had been invaded in 1871, but a generation had passed since then. Great Britain had fought a number of colonial wars, but aside from the small number of soldiers who were actually there, nobody else knew what war was like. Germany had also not fought any recent major wars. Europeans concept of war was so outside of reality that the ego-identities of the soldiers in 1914, were sure to be shattered.

The natural conditions of the trenches also lent themselves to disrupting the ego-identity. Vermin, mud, and rotting corpses upset soldiers' sense of order. Soldiers could not imagine themselves capable of living in such filth, but they were powerless to do anything about it. They could not bathe regularly, keep the rats away, or bury the dead. Over time, this upset their psyche.¹⁰

According to studies conducted during the First World War, the detached and random form of combat in trench warfare also promoted emotional collapse. Soldiers, whether at Petersburg or on the Western Front, were forced to submit to an impersonal force trying to kill them. They had no way to defend themselves against artillery, mining, or a sniper's bullet; and the

⁸ Leed, *No Man's Land*, 180.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12; 18-19.

trenches limited their means of escape. The situation created a sense of powerlessness in soldiers, resulting in emotional trauma.¹¹

Not all of the cases of war neurosis caused by trench warfare resulted in shell-shock. Siegfried Sassoon had a feeling of defenselessness that resulted in deep depression. Most of his poetry reflects his sense of disillusionment with the war and his frustration with his inability to defend himself against the potential means of his death. In his diary he wrote of his comrades: "The cheerless monotony of their hourly insecurity, a monotony broken only by the ever-present imminence of death and wounds - the cruelty and malice of these things that fall from the skies searching for men, that they may batter and pierce the bodies and blot the slender human existence." Sassoon was eventually diagnosed with shell-shock and spent time in a military sanitarium, but he never totally lost control of his mental functions. Most shell-shock victims did and were removed to a military sanitarium in the Britain where they were diagnosed with shell-shock and treated.¹²

Artillery caused some soldiers to experience the same type of emotional strain as Sassoon. Artillery bombardment caused more anxiety than rifle fire because it could be heard coming. For instance, mortar rounds could be heard and seen coming, but soldiers only had a vague idea of where they might hit. Even if they could determine the area a shell would hit, some shells were so large they were impossible to dodge. The result was a brief period of intense fear between the time a shell was first noticed and the time it hit. Eventually, shelling resulted in a constant state of emotional duress.¹³

Sometimes, all it took was one particularly bad artillery bombardment to be effected. On his way to the front for the first time, Lt. Hugh Quigley of the 12th Royal Scots, was at a railway station near Ypres. His battalion was forming up to march to the front lines when a shell suddenly plunged into them. Sixty men were killed and the rest of the battalion was badly shaken. Quigley wrote of the incident: "Even when going through the market square of Ypres, beneath the yellow flash of great howitzers and the roar of naval guns, we thought shells were bursting among us and looked fearfully at every corner, nerve-shaken and absolutely afraid."¹⁴ This one incident put fear in the minds of those who survived it.

With sniper fire, there was no period of uncertainty like there was just before an artillery shell arrived. Death or wounding happened without warning. Soldiers were concerned about being shot by a sniper, but it never created the same sort of focused immediate fear that artillery did. The emotional strain came after someone else was shot. The victim's comrades were forced to deal with the suddenness of the attack. In some cases they had to stand by and watch as he died.

Ernst Jünger wrote of one such incident involving his personal servant. Jünger was a German Lieutenant who joined the army at the age of nineteen and served on the Western Front from 1915 until the end of the war. On December 28, 1915, Jünger's personal servant, August Kettler, was wounded in the neck while retrieving rations. Jünger rushed to his side and found him unable to speak. In his memoirs he remembered; "what I found particularly painful was that the wounded man could not say a word and only stared with helpless eyes like a tortured beast at those who tried to help him. It always made one feel more than usually powerless in face of

¹¹ Ibid., 164

¹² Siegfried Sassoon, Siegfried Sassoon Diaries, 1915-1918 ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London, 1983), 48.

¹³ Simpson, Hot Blood and Cold Steel, 78.

¹⁴ Quoted in: Ibid., 78

another's troubles." Kettler was taken to a hospital behind the lines where he suffered for several months before dying.¹⁵

Andy Andrews was a young British soldier during the war. He remembered in his old age that he never got used to one of his friends being killed by a bullet or shell. Those who were not killed instantly usually went into shock and became very still and quiet. Andrews recalled that this made the situation a little easier to cope with.¹⁶ Regardless, it was still unnerving to see a soldier who had been fine one minute, lying on the ground dead or wounded the next.

The repeated stress of sudden death and anxiety from shelling, caused increasing war neurosis in veteran soldiers. Generally, the longer one was in the trenches and the more combat one had seen, the worse emotional condition one was in.

Early in his service at the Front, Robert Graves had a memorable experience concerning a distraught veteran. One morning just before dawn, Graves was making his rounds to wake the men for the day. One soldier was lying face down with one boot and sock pulled off. When Graves tried to rouse the man, a nearby soldier said, "No good talking to him, Sir." Graves replied, "What's wrong? Why has he taken his boot and sock off?" The soldier responded, "See for yourself, Sir." When Graves rolled him over, he discovered the man had shot himself through the head by sticking his rifle in his mouth and pulling the trigger with his toe. Graves asked the nearby soldier if he knew why the man had killed himself. The answer the soldier gave was, "He went through the last push, Sir, and that sent him a bit queer; on top of that he got bad news from Limerick about his girl and another chap." Graves later found out there had been several suicides in the Battalion, but they had been officially reported as combat deaths to save families from embarrassment.¹⁷

Suicide was one way soldiers escaped the torment of war neurosis, another was mental collapse. Patients officially diagnosed with shell-shock were extreme cases of war neurosis that had advanced to that stage. By that point, their fear was incapacitating and they had to be hospitalized. These were the type of cases that received treatment by psychoanalysis and electro-shock.

Corporal Henry Gregory of the 119th Machine Gun company observed one case of shell-shock in a front line hospital as the patient was waiting for transfer home. The man calmly laid on a stretcher all day until around dinner time. At that hour, the Germans began shelling a nearby rail station. As soon as he heard the first shell, he became hysterical. He was screaming continuously and had to be restrained by eight hospital workers. Every time another shell came over, the man became hysterical again, and he was eventually strapped down. Gregory observed: "It is heartbreaking to watch a shell-shock case. Their terror is indescribable. The flesh on their faces shakes in fear, and their teeth continually chatter." Gregory blamed shell-shock on constant shelling, filthy conditions in the trenches, and fear of sudden death.¹⁸

Doctors studying shell-shock cases began to notice that symptoms followed class lines. Officers often exhibited less physical symptoms than enlisted men. They tended to suffer mental difficulties such as insomnia, dizziness, heart palpitations, and depression rather than extreme

¹⁵ Ernst Jünger, The Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Storm-Troop Officer on the Western Front trans. Basil Creighton (London, 1929), 54.

¹⁶ Tom Quinn, Tales of the Old Soldiers (Dover, NH, 1993), 115.

¹⁷ Robert Graves, Good-Bye to All That (New York, 1929), 103.

¹⁸ Quoted in: Simpson, Hot Blood and Cold Steel, 90-91.

physical outbursts, such as the man Corporal Gregory described. In addition to hysteria, enlisted men suffered from blindness, deafness, limping, or paralysis.¹⁹

The difference in the roles that officers and men were expected to play accounted for the difference in shell-shock symptoms. Officers were leaders and expected to be examples of courage to their men. In reality, they were just as scared as those under their command. So, they experienced shell-shock in the same proportions as enlisted men, but had different symptoms. They were forced to put aside their fear in order to portray an image of calmness and control. The internal conflict that resulted caused some officers to experience shell-shock.

Stephen Foot was a British engineering officer that wrestled with this dilemma. One day, he was in the front line trenches examining the opposing lines through a trench periscope.²⁰ Suddenly, a sniper's bullet penetrated the sandbag next to him, missing his head by two inches. Later he wrote of the incident: "If nobody else had been there I feel sure that I should have collapsed at the bottom of the trench overcome with fear; but another officer was with me. Instinctively I acted my part: 'that is what one might almost call an 'inner,'" I remarked, as I wiped the mud from my face."²¹ For officers such as Foot, the need to control fear meant when their nerves reached the breaking point, the symptoms of shell-shock took on less overt forms than those of enlisted men.

Robert Graves noticed that the officers of his battalion spent twice as long in the trenches as enlisted men and consequently suffered twice as many neurasthenic cases. Since these cases often did not involve breakdowns, they were not usually diagnosed as shell-shock. The result was officers, that should have been in psychiatric hospitals, led troops into battle. Their judgment was impaired, and Graves noticed they became extremely apathetic. He knew one company commander that drank two bottles of whiskey a day to deal with his mental torment.²²

The same conditions of trench warfare that produced war neurosis on the Western Front, also produced it at Petersburg. Soldiers dealt with the same impersonal forces of death such as shelling, sniping, and mining. They felt terror when an artillery shell descended on them. They experienced fear and anxiety from seeing one of their comrades suddenly killed by a sniper. They lived in filth. The emotional strain on soldiers at Petersburg was the same as it was for soldiers on the Western Front.

Most soldiers experienced emotional stress that effected their mood and behavior, but did not keep them from serving adequately. They endured the strain of trench warfare without breaking down, but it still impacted their emotional state. There were times during Grant's campaign when soldiers refused to charge earthworks. Some Federal soldiers had to be encouraged to advance by a line of soldiers marching behind them with bayonets fixed.²³

Wilbur Fisk of the 2nd Vermont vented his frustration in a letter to his hometown paper on December 15, 1864. He remarked; "There is nothing desirable about this place. It is all fighting and no fun. We neither whip nor get whipped here. It is regular cold blooded dueling, day after day with no decisive result on either side, and fellows no braver than I am, get tired of it after a

¹⁹ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 174.

²⁰ A trench periscope was a box with a system of mirrors in it that allowed for an observer to look over the parapet of a trench while remaining safely hidden.

²¹ Quoted in: Simpson, *Hot Blood and Cold Steel*, 85.

²² Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 172.

²³ Eric T. Dean Jr., "'We Will All be Lost and Destroyed': Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Civil War," *Civil War History* XXXVII, (1991), 147.

while.”²⁴ The fighting referred to was the constant impersonal combat that made up trench warfare. The fact that he linked being brave to being tired indicated that what he meant is mentally exhausted.

Henry Mervine also experienced exhaustion from the rigors of the trenches. On July 24, 1864, he wrote to his wife complaining that the sound of mortars and sniper fire kept him awake at night. The constant firing put him on edge and his senses were so attuned to the danger that he could not bring himself to sleep. Mervine realized that at night the sniper fire was “aimless and at random,” meaning it could hit a sleeping man as well as anyone else. Mervine’s physical exhaustion must have put him even more on edge. That any soldiers were able to sleep is incredible.

Soldiers at Petersburg also knew the trauma of sudden violence from sniper fire. As on the Western Front, snipers were often as unsettling to those who watched someone become a victim as those who were actually shot. One example involved two men from the 10th Connecticut on picket duty in rifle pits. Generally, pickets changed shifts in the evenings under cover of darkness. Because of snipers, they had to remain in their rifle pits all night and the next day until they were relieved by the next shift. In the morning, one of the Connecticut men was shot in the head. He was badly wounded, but could not be treated until evening when it was safe for him to be taken to a field hospital. As a result, the wounded soldier’s friend was forced to watch him slowly die, unable to help.²⁵

Some soldiers noticeably experienced emotional problems without requiring hospitalization. Soldiers who suffered from symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares were not considered ill, but their condition might make them unfit for duty. These men were sometimes placed in the Veteran Reserve Corps with disabled soldiers and recovering wounded soldiers. The Veteran Reserve Corps performed basic camp functions, such as guard duty, that did not require physical exertion.²⁶ Some were also sent to convalescent camps to rest until they felt able to return to duty.²⁷

At Petersburg there were also soldiers suffering from severe emotional stress that should have been in hospitals. The reason they didn’t receive treatment had to do with the state of psychiatry. During the 19th Century, it was still in its infancy. Most mental disorders at the time of the Civil War were considered together as insanity. It was only in the early part of the 19th Century that specific asylums were established to care for the insane. Prior to that, they were treated as misfits in society, receiving the same treatment as the poor, widows and orphans. It was mainly due to the work of Dorothea Dix that insanity was viewed as a sickness and treated separately. Terms like “mania,” “melancholia,” and “dementia” were used to describe the insane. Doctors considered insanity incurable and without a specific cause.²⁸

During the War insanity was reason for discharge from the Union army, but being diagnosed that way was difficult. A patient had to show manifest symptoms in order to be classified as insane. Total hysteria consistent with what was thought of as insanity was required. Even then, soldiers had to first be sent to the Military Hospital for the Insane in Washington D.C.

²⁴ Wilbur Fisk, Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865 ed. Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt (Lawrence, Kans., 1993), 287.

²⁵ Noah Andre Trudeau, The Last Citadel, (Baton Rouge, La., 1991), 290.

²⁶ Eric T. Dean. “We Will All be Lost and Destroyed,” 140-143.

²⁷ Trudeau, The Last Citadel, 291.

²⁸ Eric T. Dean Jr., “We Will All be Lost and Destroyed’,” 139-140.

Since there was no cure, the army discharged these patients because it was easier than taking care of them.

During the last year of the war, Confederate doctors noticed a dramatic increase in cases of “mania” and insanity. On June 16, 1864, at the same time the opening battles for Petersburg were taking place, a new hospital for mentally ill patients was ordered to be constructed in North Carolina. The chief of Confederate medical services, Medical Director Carrington, intended the new hospital to handle cases of “lunacy and dementia.” By September 5, it was clear that a new hospital could not be constructed at that time, but arrangements for mental patients needed to be made soon. The Confederate government decided to alleviate the problem by placing soldiers in civilian asylums. Any soldier suffering from insanity or dementia, was taken before a local Justice of the Peace who had him declared insane and placed in an asylum. This solution proved to be only temporary. Soldiers flooded civilian asylums and it was soon realized that a military hospital was still needed. After considering Danville, Virginia, and Lynchburg, Virginia, Confederate authorities chose Richmond as the new site. On February 2, 1865, the Louisiana Hospital opened for soldiers suffering from mental disorders. It was specifically for soldiers serving in the Eastern theater of the war. No hospital was ever established for the Western theater.²⁹

The need for a hospital specifically for mentally ill patients was partly the result of events at Petersburg. During this period, the majority of the Confederate army in the east was entrenched around Petersburg, so most of the soldiers suffering from insanity were likely to have been involved in trench warfare. Also, the call for a solution to the problem of mentally ill soldiers, coincided closely with the time that of the siege of Petersburg. Since the Confederate Medical Service found the funds and manpower to establish a hospital at this stage in the war, the problem of insanity must have been severe. In the West, where the war was more fluid, a hospital for mentally ill patients was apparently not needed bad enough to justify its’ expense.

In his memoirs, Gen. John B. Gordon recalled a conversation that he had with Gen. Lee concerning the state of the army. At two o’clock in the morning on March 3, 1865, Gordon was summoned to Lee’s headquarters on Edge Hill in Petersburg. Lee questioned Gordon about the fitness of the army, and the two of them discussed the poor condition of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lack of proper rations and clothing had led to widespread sickness and desertion. The army was reduced to 35,000 men fit for duty, against 150,000 Federal troops. Gordon commented to Lee about the mental state of the men in the trenches: “Cases were given, and not a few, where good men, faithful, tried and devoted, gave evidence of temporary insanity and indifference to orders or to the consequences of disobedience - the natural and inevitable effect of their bodily sufferings.”³⁰ Given the stigma attached to insanity in the 19th century, his use of that term indicates how serious some cases were.

Aside from being declared insane, many cases of severe war neurosis could have been misdiagnosed as a number of different ailments. During the Civil War, the Union Army classified illnesses into several broad classes. Each class contained a number of different orders, and each order was broken down into individual medical problems. For example, insanity was in Order I, of Class IV. Order I was “Diseases of the Nervous System” and Class IV was “Local Diseases.” This system simplified the process of diagnosing a patient. All disease fell into a neat category. Since shell-shock or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder were not recognized, its sufferers were

²⁹ H.H. Cunningham, Doctors in Gray: The Confederate Medical Service, (Baton Rouge, La., 1958), 214.

³⁰ John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York, 1918), 387.

diagnosed with other ailments having similar symptoms. Medical troubles in the “Diseases of the Nervous System” order that severe war neurosis could have been mistaken for include apoplexy, epilepsy, headache, insanity, inflammation of brain, inflammation of membranes of brain, inflammation of spinal cord, nostalgia, neuralgia, paralysis, and sunstroke. Although all of these share some of the symptoms of severe war neurosis, the ones that most closely resemble it are sunstroke, nostalgia, and inflammation of the spinal cord.

Sunstroke was very common among Civil War armies. Physical exertion in the hot and humid climate of the South caused many soldiers to suffer sunstroke. Initially, victims went into convulsions and became insensible. They could not answer any questions other than name and regiment. This was followed by unconsciousness, more convulsions, nausea, headaches, and faintness. In some cases, patients suffered a period of paralysis during recovery.

Since paralysis, insensibility, and spasms were also symptoms of shell-shock, it could easily be mistaken as sunstroke. In the summer months, doctors were used to treating many cases of sunstroke, and it was likely to be diagnosed before any other cause was explored. Without examining soldiers diagnosed with sunstroke at Petersburg, it is impossible to tell how many of them actually suffered from severe war neurosis or shell-shock. Statistics show that for August 1864, the Army of the Potomac was only 9.9 percent of the total United States forces, but it suffered 33.4 percent of the total sunstroke cases. In contrast, the armies in the department of the Cumberland and Tennessee, made up 39.1 percent of the total United States forces, but only 11.6 percent of sunstroke cases. The numbers are similar for the rest of the summer. The climate was basically the same for all the areas where Federal armies operated, and although medical authorities noticed the disparity, no explanation was found.³¹ It is possible that a large number of the sunstroke cases in the Army of the Potomac suffered severe war neurosis from the experience of trench warfare. The war was more fluid in areas where other armies were operating, so they did not experience the same number of victims of war neurosis.

Nostalgia was another recognized ailment of the nervous system that had symptoms similar to those of severe war neurosis. As a diagnosed disease, nostalgia originated in the Napoleonic wars to describe acute short term homesickness due to combat.³² Surgeons in the Civil War described it as, “a temporary feeling of depression frequently pervad[ing] our camps on account of discomfort, hardships and exposures, especially when these were recognized or assumed by our volunteer soldiers to be of preventable or uncalled for nature.”³³ Soldiers suffering from nostalgia expressed strong feelings of war weariness, and a desire to return home. Cases that were severe enough to warrant hospitalization were rare, but doctors were aware that the disease was sometimes prevalent in camp. They noticed that it was more of a problem when the army was stationary rather than when it was on the march or in battle. They believed this was because activity gave soldiers something to occupy their minds, and keep them from thinking of home. For this reason, the increase in depression at Petersburg could have been attributed to nostalgia. Depression and anti-war feelings, like those described as symptoms of nostalgia, were a common sentiment among sufferers of mild war neurosis on the Western Front. They are also symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

³¹ Surgeon-General Joseph K. Barnes, ed., Medical and Surgical History of the Civil War vol. VI (Wilmington, NC, 1990), 854-857.

³² Dean, “We Will All be Lost and Destroyed,” 141.

³³ Barnes, ed., Medical and Surgical History of the Civil War, vol. VI., 885.

The few cases of nostalgia that were considered severe enough to require medical treatment resemble instances of shell-shock. Surgeon John Taylor of the 3rd Missouri Cavalry reported treating cases of nostalgia that were characterized by, “disordered digestion; increased sensibility; palpitations; illusions; a succession of morbid feelings which appear to simulate the greater part of disease; panics; exaggerated uneasiness of various kinds, chiefly in what regards the health.” These symptoms clearly suggest a mental illness closer to shell-shock than homesickness. Doctors also noticed a high number of nostalgia victims engaging in substance abuse whenever possible. This is also a symptom of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Civil War doctors treated nostalgia with the same methods some doctors used to treat shell-shock on the Western Front. They viewed nostalgia as a psychosomatic way of shirking duty. They cured patients by treating them with contempt in an effort to shame them back to health. Although physical torture, such as electro-shock, was not used, they did make a point of verbally harassing nostalgia patients whenever possible.³⁴

Inflammation of the spinal cord shared some of the physical symptoms of shell-shock, such as paralysis and muscle spasms. The disease was thought to be caused by exposure to wet and cold weather; and from shells passing too close to the body. Doctors believed that the sudden muscle reaction to a nearby shell could tear organs and fracture bones. They attributed paralysis and spasms to spinal cord damage caused by this reaction.

In linking physical symptoms, such as paralysis and spasms, to artillery fire, Civil War doctors made the same connection that doctors on the Western Front made concerning shell-shock. Instead of looking for a psychological connection between shelling and the medical problems that resulted, they sought a physical one. Since cases of inflammation of the spinal cord increased in Winter, 1864, it is possible that the disease was caused by exposure to cold and wet weather.³⁵ It is also possible that some of these cases resulted from the trauma of enduring constant shelling.

Another disease common to soldiers in the Civil War, and sharing the symptoms of war neurosis was irritable heart. This sickness, also known as Cardiac Muscular Exhaustion, was thought to be caused by excessive stress on the heart due to anxiety in battle or overexertion. Its symptoms included shortness of breath, dimmed vision, and body pains. In extreme cases patients became “insensible,” or experienced trouble sleeping. Doctors noticed that irritable heart was more common in soldiers who had experienced combat than in garrison or support troops. Like early treatment for shell-shock, soldiers were placed in convalescent camps until they recovered.³⁶

The issue of war neurosis at Petersburg is further complicated by the strong presence of fevers like malaria and typhoid. Malaria was prevalent among soldiers throughout the war, accounting for one fourth of all disease. Petersburg was no exception. Symptoms of fevers included delirium, insomnia, and mutism, symptoms of shell-shock patients on the Western Front. Of soldiers who died of fever during the Civil War, 45.5 percent of them had no visible evidence of disease when they were autopsied. There is no way of telling how many of those actually had severe war neurosis.³⁷

Many sufferers of nervous disorders from the Petersburg campaign were sent to Turner’s Lane Hospital in Philadelphia. This hospital was established in August, 1863, mainly to care for

³⁴ Ibid., 885-886; Barnes’ cites Surgeon Taylor’s observations as typical for Nostalgia patients.

³⁵ Ibid., 845-846.

³⁶ Ibid., 863.

³⁷ Ibid., 479.

nervous disorder disease and related ailments such as irritable heart. Turner's Lane had a 400 bed capacity and replaced the United States Army Hospital for Diseases of the Nervous System which had become overcrowded. The first hospital was opened on May 5, 1863, with a 275 bed capacity, but by August it had reached its maximum occupancy.

Weir S. Mitchell was the director of Turner's Lane, and one the most influential neurologists of the 19th century. He did extensive studies of soldiers with nerve damage and mental disorders, and wrote several books on his findings. The first was published in 1864 under the title Gunshot Wounds and other Injuries. Mitchell was widely praised for this book, and it was viewed as an authoritative book on neurology.³⁸ His next book was published in 1871, entitled Wear and Tear: Hints for the Overworked.

In this book, Mitchell applied his observations of mental stress in soldiers to the civilian world. From studies made at Turner's Lane in the last year of the war, Mitchell concluded that stress caused by overwork could lead to mental breakdowns. His book tied nervous disorders to a psychological cause rather than a physical one. He linked stress to the, "incessant cares of overwork, of business anxiety and the like."³⁹ Since Mitchell based his book on case histories from soldiers, many of them from Petersburg, he must have viewed in them a pattern of similar anxiety resulting from the "incessant" emotional strain of combat. Among these soldiers, Mitchell undoubtedly treated severe cases of war neurosis.

From soldiers experiencing the emotional torment of trench warfare, Weir Mitchell was able to detect the symptoms of a trauma that would be known as shell-shock on the Western Front. Soldiers at Petersburg were not treated as victims of war neurosis, but many suffered as them. Similar conditions of anxiety and mental terror caused war neurosis of various extremes in soldiers of both conflicts. The constant strain of combat in the trenches, with its fear of sudden death, and utter feeling of defenselessness, put an emotional demand on men that many were not able to meet.

Some faired the pressure better than others. They suffered war neurosis, but were able to remain emotionally intact, although damaged. On the Western Front and at Petersburg, countless numbers of soldiers experienced depression, nightmares, and a feeling of general helplessness. These soldiers endured their fears and apprehensions without breaking down. They would never be the same again, but they overcame their inner conflict.

Some did not have the emotional strength to face their hardships and mentally collapsed under the weight of their emotional demons. These soldiers suffered severe war neurosis. On the Western Front, there were thousands of shell-shock victims that suffered paralysis, mutism, and other physical manifestations of their internal maelstrom. They were treated by the newest methods of psychoanalysis, or the most cruel means of electro-shock. At Petersburg, they were not treated as victims of war neurosis at all. Their symptoms were mistaken for symptoms of sunstroke, nostalgia, inflammation of the spinal cord, or irritable heart. Their emotional struggle went largely unnoticed.

³⁸ Weir S. Mitchell, Injuries of Nerves and their Consequences, Introduction by Lawrence C. McHenry (reprint, New York, 1965), xii.

³⁹ Weir S. Mitchell, Wear and Tear: Hints for the Overworked, (Philadelphia, 1887), 67.

Soldiers in all wars have endured the psychological pains of combat, but those of Petersburg and the Western front experienced trench warfare with its' uncertainties and anxieties. They did their best to survive with their minds intact.

Conclusion

In 1961 celebrated author Robert Penn Warren wrote a book entitled The Legacy of the Civil War. It was meant to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of the war, and discussed the causes of the war, its political implications, and the impact that it had on the conscience of the nation. Warren only briefly touched on the impact that the war had on the lives of the individual soldiers who fought in it. What he did write was eloquent but melodramatic: “The crusaders, back from the wars, seemed to feel that they had finished the work of virtue. Their efforts had, indeed, been almost superhuman, but they themselves were, after all, human.”¹ Warren’s comment alludes to soldiers called upon to accomplish “superhuman” feats and endure unendurable hardship. In the case of trench warfare, this was certainly true. Men in trenches lived for months among squalor and death. Instead of feeling like “crusaders” fighting for “virtue,” they felt like helpless fodder trapped by the trenches, fighting against an unseen enemy that seemed to bring death at random. In this environment, survival became a superhuman effort.

For the soldiers of the Western Front, survival also seemed an impossible task. They faced the same threat of sudden death from an invisible enemy, and the same type of horrendous conditions that the men at Petersburg faced. They did not fight for ideals, they fought to live.

In August 1916, Siegfried Sassoon wrote a poem entitled “The One-Legged Man.” It described the joy of a disabled veteran back home. The last stanza of the poem reads:

Splendid to eat and sleep and choose a wife,
Safe with his wound, a citizen of life.
He hobbled blithely through the garden gate,
And thought: “Thank God they had to amputate!”²

Sassoon expressed the common desire of soldiers to leave the war behind, even if it meant losing one’s leg. The conditions of trench warfare caused these feelings of desperation and helplessness on the Western Front and at Petersburg.

Soldiers experienced a different sort of trauma during these two conflicts than previous ones, because the state of trench warfare was different. In 1864, Fortifications were not new to warfare. They had been around since the 15th century in the form of bastions and forts. In the eighteenth century, they began to be used in efficient siege tactics such as those designed by Vauban. It wasn’t until the development of the rifled musket in the middle part of the 19th century that field fortifications began to be seen as a major factor in battlefield tactics. With the new technology of rifled weapons, the defensive nature of trench warfare gradually phased out the older more aggressive tactics of frontal assault. The siege of Petersburg in 1864, was a recognition by generals in America that the frontal assault was no longer practical. In Europe, it was not until the deadlock of the Western Front that generals realized the futility and wastefulness

¹ Robert Penn Warren, The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial (New York, 1961), 64.

² Siegfried Sassoon, “The One-legged Man” in The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London, 1983), 48.

of attacking an entrenched position head on. The development of trench warfare as a defensive tactical response to technologically advanced weapons set the stage for the nightmarish conditions that soldiers had to endure at Petersburg and the Western Front.

The conditions of the trenches were repulsive to most men, and difficult for them to live with. They were plagued by natural and man-made forces. Soldiers in both places experienced mud, vermin, and weather that made life a constant living hell, for months. They suffered from exposure, lived with rotting corpses, and were pestered by rats, among other things. In addition to the forces of nature, soldiers had to fight a war. They were harassed by the impersonal tactics and weapons of trench warfare. Mining, artillery, and sniping were constant threats to their safety and always occupied a place in their minds.

Soldiers at Petersburg and on the Western Front psychologically reacted to their environment in two different ways. First they developed a rapport with their enemy in order to ease the stress. They found they shared the same hardships and feelings about the war. Some soldiers fraternized directly by meeting with the enemy, while others fraternized indirectly through arranged truces. The disparity between the perception of war from the homefront and its reality, caused soldiers to relate better to their enemy than they did to their loved ones. This also led to fraternization and even more animosity toward home. Overall, soldiers fraternized to ease their suffering and help insure their survival.

The other reaction of soldiers to trench warfare was war neurosis. It could range from manic depression to complete mental collapse in the form of shell-shock or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. At both Petersburg and on the Western Front, a majority of soldiers suffered from some form of war neurosis. The most common version of it was depression or nervousness. On the Western Front severe cases of war neurosis were also common. Doctors realized over time that shell-shock was directly related to the conditions of trench warfare. At Petersburg, finding cases of severe war neurosis is a difficult task. Since there was no specific diagnosis for it at that time, it was often diagnosed as something else with similar symptoms. The same conditions of trench warfare existed at Petersburg as they did on the Western Front and there were several diseases that had similar symptoms, therefore there must have been cases that were misdiagnosed.

Certainly Petersburg and the Western Front were not exactly alike. One took place fifty years after the other, over a greater distance and for a much longer period of time. Even so, there is enough similarity between the type of experience of soldiers in both conflicts to make a valid comparison. The circumstances of Petersburg and the Western Front have common origins and provoked similar reactions among their participants. The comparison is beneficial to understanding the trauma caused by trench warfare. It helps to understand Petersburg as a different type of experience than other battles in the Civil War, and to put the European experience of the First World War in perspective with other conflicts, so that it does not seem an isolated anomaly of human experience.

It is important to study the emotional experience of soldiers in trench warfare because of its implications in the post-war world. Fighting men of World War I and the Civil War were citizen soldiers. After the war, they went back to being civilian members of society, and they took their wartime attitudes and experiences with them. In Europe, the experience of the Western Front spawned an anti-war culture that flourished in the 1920s. Art, music, and literature all took

on a note of cynicism spawned by the trenches.³ Politically, the experience of the war in France helped to shape the way the Treaty ending it would be written, and pave the way for the next war.

Militarily, trench warfare on the Western Front led to the development of tanks and the doctrine of mobile warfare. Tanks first began to make their appearance during the last stage of the war and helped restore fluidity to the battlefield. Tacticians began to realize that sheer numbers of weapons and men were not enough to overcome one's enemy. A new way of conducting war was needed that relied on lightning quick attacks and concentrated firepower. The Germans learned this lesson well, and developed the blitzkrieg tactics that helped them to achieve victory in the early part of the Second World War.⁴

Compared to four years of trench warfare on the Western Front, Petersburg lasted only ten months of a four year Civil War. Its relative place in the war meant that it did not have the impact on American culture and politics that the Western Front did on Europe. Aside from the advancements made by Weir S. Mitchell in the field of neurology, America learned very little from the experience of trench warfare at Petersburg. Still, veterans of Petersburg did assimilate their experiences along with themselves into American society. The effect of that remains to be studied.

Today, the trenches of Petersburg are no more than depressions in the ground, diligently maintained by the National Park Service. The area has been replanted with trees and it requires an active imagination to picture it as it was during the siege. In such a serene environment, located in the midst of urban sprawl, it is easy to forget the chaos that took place at the close of the Civil War.

The trenches of the Western Front are also grown over. Immediately after the war, French farmers began to reclaim their fields and landscapes that had once been covered with mud and the debris of war, were now used to plant crops. Only the occasional unearthed shell or other remnant of soldier life acts as a reminder of the events of the Western Front.

In the physical sense, the experience of trench warfare has faded and for those of us who did not know it, it has become difficult to imagine. For the soldiers who were there, the experience always remained sharp. They could never forget an experience that encouraged them to bond with their enemy, and drove them close to insanity. Through them, the experience of trench warfare, has made an impression on our collective memory.

³ For a more complete discussion of post-war culture see: Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age (New York, 1989); Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (New York, 1975); Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History (Cambridge, 1995)

⁴ Russel F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of the United States Military Strategy and Policy (Bloomington, IA, 1973), 217.

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