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Why they enlisted, served and killed; the experience and motivation of Leicestershire servicemen during the Great War

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the experience and motivation of Leicestershire men who volunteered, served and fought in the Great War. It surveys the letters, diaries, memoirs and interviews of pre-war Edwardian residents who served in uniform, as well as contemporary newspapers and modern historical studies, to inform the historiography on three aspects of motivation and experience during the conflict. The first considers why men enlisted for military service in 1914-15. The second explores men's experience of active service and, in particular, what sustained and motivated individuals to endure and cope with the terror and trauma of war. The third discusses the control, scale and rationale for the use of violence by combatants. This paper argues that men were motivated by a multifaceted range of factors to sign-up, cope with daily life on frontline service and, ultimately, fight. These influences were often highly personal, contextual and rooted in the social and cultural norms of the soldiers' wider civilian lives within pre-war Edwardian society, such as notions of patriotism, duty and stoicism.

Key words

combat motivation; morale; Leicester; Leicestershire; Great War; First World War

‘What men will fight for seems to be worth knowing about.’
American journalist and scholar, H.L. Mencken.¹

Introduction

In 1930, Captain David Kelly published a Great War memoir of his service with the Leicestershire Regiment on the Western Front.² He believed that between the Armistice and the release of his book, a ‘remarkably confused picture of the British soldier’ had emerged in the wartime press and post-war publications with two distinct descriptive portraits of a typical combatant. On the one hand, wartime journalists painted him as the patriotic, cheerful... Tommy, alternately singing ‘Tipperary’ or ‘chasing the ... enemy with ... shouts of “Avenge the *Lusitania*!”’³ This fantasy was replaced by a post-conflict image of the British

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¹Cited in A. Kellett, *Combat Motivation, the Behaviour of Men in Battle* (Ottawa: Canadian Department of National Defence, 1982), p. xiii.

²D.V. Kelly, *Thirty Nine Months with the ‘Tigers’* (London: Ernest Benn, 1930).

³Tommy Atkins (often just Tommy) is slang for a common soldier in the British Army;

‘It’s a Long Way to Tipperary’ was a British music hall song written by Jack Judge in 1912. Commonly called ‘Tipperary’, it became popular among soldiers in the Great War;

The RMS *Lusitania* was a British ocean liner that was torpedoed by a German submarine off Ireland on 7 May 1915 with the loss of 1,198 passengers and crew.

soldier in the trenches as a man shattered by his experience of combat where his ideals were 'steeped in [his] comrades' blood' leading to a 'a tottering faith in God[,] ... a ... distrust of mankind'; he had only 'a hope of a "cushy" wound!' Kelly queried these descriptions with a series of rhetorical questions which included; did politicians delude men to enlist and did the experience of combat destroy soldiers' ideals to make them drunken and licentious?⁴ He believed that neither image bore the 'least resemblance' to his former comrades and answered his own questions in the negative.⁵ Kelly's observations show how the debate over the motivations and experience of the British soldier during the Great War became a subject of radically divergent interpretations only twelve years after the Armistice. Historians still propose very different views on the subject. Many have answered Kelly's rhetorical questions in the positive and adopted perspectives with which he would have disagreed. These views are reflected across three broad debates which have been conducted around the subject.

The first debate surrounds the role of individual agency in volunteering for military service in 1914-15. Many commentators contest that individuals joined because of singular issues. These included the lemming-like impulse of patriotism, being coerced into uniform by government propaganda. Additionally, they could have been institutionally brainwashed through attendance at public schools where pupils were indoctrinated into enlistment through a jingoistic education dominated by exhortations of duty, King and country.⁶ Others scholars reject this view and instead suggest the motivation of those joining up was shaped by influences, which were highly personal and situational and changed as the war progressed. These included social class, educational background, peer pressure and personal circumstances.⁷ The second topic of dialogue explores the experience of active service and what sustained and motivated individuals to endure and cope with the terror and trauma of war. In the 1970s, historians Paul Fussell and Eric Leed argued that soldiers volunteering in 1914-15 joined up with ideals of patriotism which were destroyed by the horror of industrial warfare and led to soldiers retreating into a self-isolating trench culture and actively rejecting nationalistic ideas.⁸ Soldiers' self-imposed segregation was further reinforced because civilians, including their friends and families at home, were subjected to censorship and jingoistic propaganda and, as a result, had romantic ideas of battle which were completely at odds with the combatants' frontline experience. Interestingly, in 1930 Kelly predicted that this perception of this disillusioned British soldier would 'pass into popular legend'.⁹ Other academics have rejected this notion of schism between home and frontline or that soldiers were disillusioned and lost their morale or ideals. Many argue soldier-morale remained largely solid and said this will to fight

⁴Kelly, pp. vii-viii.

⁵Kelly, pp. vii-viii.

⁶T. Royle, *The Kitchener Enigma* (Michael Joseph: London, 2016), p. 257; A. Gregory, *The Last Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 9; A. Marwick, *The Deluge* (London: Bodley Head, 1965), p. 309; N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1998), p. 201; D. Farr, *None That Go Return: Leighton, Britain and Friends, and the Lost Generation 1914-18* (Helion: Solihull, 2010), pp. 65-6; P. Methven, "'Children ardent for some desperate glory': Public Schools and First World War volunteering' (MPhil Diss., Cardiff University, 2013), pp. 170-9.

⁷P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2007), pp. 165-187; C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 156-62; Gregory, pp. 9-39; D. Sibley, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 2-3.

⁸See P. Fussell, *Modern Memory and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) and E. Leed, *No Mans' Land* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 193.

⁹Kelly, p. viii.

was underpinned by the influences of soldiers' civilian backgrounds, largely positive officer-men relations and strong small-group cohesion.¹⁰ The third issue of consideration is the control, scale and rationale for the use of violence by combatants. Historians have argued that soldiers had a surprising amount of discretion when using violence. Many men organised informal unofficial truces throughout the war and some historians argue the reason that some soldiers refrained from aggression was due to their naturally pacific inclinations.¹¹ In contrast, Joanna Bourke and Niall Ferguson presented the view that some soldiers enjoyed homicide and violence.¹²

This paper conducts a qualitative survey of the combatant diaries, letters, memoirs or interviews to gain a personal perspective of what motivated them to enlist, serve, and in some circumstances, use violence against their enemy during their military service in the First World War. The cohort selected for examination are those who were resident in Leicestershire before the Great War and, for whom records are available.

The rationale for examining the views and perspectives of a geographically defined population is twofold. Firstly, this paper presents a bottom-up perspective on the experience and motivations of combatants as they described them in their own words. This is an approach rarely taken in studies which explore why men enlisted, fought or killed in the Great War. For example, many inquiries which examine combatant morale during the Great War do so within the context of specific military units or examine constituent elements that underpin the will to fight.¹³ These formation-focused studies examine the topic from a top-down organisational perspective and often concentrate on how unit characteristics, such as disciplinary and command culture, shaped members' endurance and will to fight.¹⁴ Studies which have examined factors that underpin morale have dealt with a range of perspectives such as the role of leadership, discipline and psychological coping strategies.¹⁵ These studies are valuable but fail to give a view of motivation from the holistic perspective of the soldier. This article takes a different viewpoint on the subject by conducting a qualitative survey of the available evidence to explore the underlying reasons, opinions and motivations which men gave to explain their actions in enlisting, enduring, and possibly, homicide.

Secondly, this study examines the role of pre-war regional identity on men's decisions to sign up and serve. Edwardian Britain was administratively and culturally a decentralised country, where cities and counties had large amounts of political

¹⁰See H.B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); T. Thorpe, 'The extent, nature and impact of military group cohesion in London Regiment infantry battalions during the Great War' (PhD thesis, King's College London, 2017).

¹¹T. Ashworth, *Trench Warfare* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1981), pp. 76-77; J. Roberts, *Killer Butterflies* (Solihull: Helion, 2017), p. xi.

¹²J. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* (London: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 30-33; N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (Penguin: London, 1999), p. 363.

¹³J. Baynes, *Morale* (London: Cassell, 1967); J. Kitchen, *The British Imperial Army in the Middle East*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); H. B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Thorpe. P. Morris, 'Leeds and the amateur military tradition: the Leeds Rifles and their antecedents, 1859-1918' (PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1983).

¹⁴For example, see Baynes and McCartney, *Citizen*.

¹⁵Sheffield; McCartney, *Citizen*. A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); G. Oram, 'What alternative punishment is there?': military executions during World War I' (PhD thesis, Open University, 2000); T. Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

autonomy and many areas had distinct regional characteristics based on strong dialects and traditions.¹⁶ Helen McCartney claimed that area identity was very powerful in Lancashire, which created a local patriotism among men who joined units to defend their community.¹⁷ She argued that once in uniform, men in locally raised units maintained strong links with their home and this fulfilled an important cohesive and motivational function in the trenches.¹⁸ Keith Grieves has argued that a similar phenomenon happened in Sussex.¹⁹ However, another study on the motivation of London Territorials found no regional affinity between soldiers and their home region in the manner described by McCartney.²⁰ This study seeks to contribute to this debate by considering the role of regional patriotism and distinctiveness amongst Leicestershire men.

Leicestershire was selected as representing a typical British county with a mix of urban and rural settings, having a diverse range of industries, including mining, agriculture and garment manufacture, and being of a manageable size for a small study (its population in 1911 was 476,553).²¹ The archival records for the study are drawn from individuals who were both combatants and resident in Leicestershire before the war. The study draws on the substantive records of forty individuals held in archives, private collections and published online and provide a mixture of contemporary letters and diaries and retrospective memoirs and oral interviews. These are collected together and listed in the Appendix to give an overview of the nature of the sample in terms of military rank, service and residence in Leicestershire before the Great War. Though this cohort forms the central evidence base from which experience and motivation is examined, other sources are used. These include letters to newspapers, such as the *Coalville Times*, and the memoirs, such as Captain Kelly's, of those who served in units that comprised men drawn from Leicestershire.

The sample of the forty men is random to a degree in that it is based on records that have survived over the last century and could be accessed with reasonable ease. The sample has clear challenges in that it does not reflect the broad experience of war service as no records of post-1916 conscripts were found. All individuals in the cohort were pre-war regulars, territorials, special reservists or 1914-15 volunteers only, which limits the conclusions that can be drawn. However, the sample is generally representative in other ways. It probably reflects the broad pattern of enlistment and service of many Leicestershire men as the majority enlisted in the army and local formations and served on the Western Front. It is also dominated by other ranks with officers only accounting for 10 per cent of the sample total.

This paper is organised into three sections following the aforementioned historical debates. It starts with an examination of what persuaded Leicestershire men to volunteer for service in 1914-15. The article then considers their experience of active service,

¹⁶W. Marshall, 'The Creation of Yorkshiresness: Cultural Identities in Yorkshire, 1850 to 1918' (PhD thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2011); H. Townsley, 'The First World War and Voluntary Recruitment: A forum for regional identity?' (PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 2008).

¹⁷H.B. McCartney, 'North-West infantry battalions and local patriotism in the First World War', *Manchester Region History Review*, 24: *The Great War and the North West* (2014).

¹⁸McCartney, *Citizen*, pp. 78-88.

¹⁹K. Grieves, 'Lowther's Lambs: Rural Paternalism and Voluntary Recruitment in the First World War', *Rural History* 4 (1993), p. 69; K. Grieves, *Sussex in the First World War* (Sussex Record Society: Lewes, 2004).

²⁰Thorpe, pp. 206-7.

²¹Office for National Statistics (ONS), *200 years of the Census in ... Leicestershire* (London: ONS, 2001), p. 2.

their morale and what if anything supported and underpinned the soldiers' will to fight. The final section explores what combatants said about their control, scale and rationale for the use of violence. The article argues that the influences which shaped the decisions of men to volunteer, endure and use force, were multifaceted, often highly contextual, personal and deeply rooted in the wider values of Edwardian society.

Taking the King's shilling: why did they enlist?

During the first two years of the war, there appeared to be little motivation among Leicestershire men to enlist. By March 1915, only 2.6 per cent of Leicester's 1911 census figure of 37, 670 men of military age from 18 to 45, volunteered for service compared with 18.5 per cent in Nottingham and 5.2 per cent in Derby.²² Several months later, it was reported that 60,000 men eligible for service were still 'not with the colours' in the county, representing approximately a quarter of its entire pre-war population of men of 228,353 in 1911.²³ The recruiting and municipal authorities regarded this as a civic embarrassment.²⁴

While this section is concerned with the motivation of soldiers who joined up in 1914-15, it is pertinent to consider why such a large number did not volunteer before the introduction of conscription in 1916, compared with other areas of Britain. Historians have argued that the failure of Leicestershire men to enlist was an act of overt political resistance to the war, based on the county's deep-seated anti-establishment traditions.²⁵ In Edwardian Britain, Leicester was the 'Mecca of non-conformity and the home of cranks' and the county had seen a long tradition of radicalism in non-conformist churches, workers' organisations and labour agitation.²⁶ On the outbreak of war, there was a chorus of opposition to Britain's declaration of war from local churches, organised labour and trade-union leaders.²⁷

Men who had strong socialist or religious convictions refused to join up and many of them became conscientious objectors (COs) when conscription was introduced in March 1916. These men were brave individuals who endured considerable societal distain and suffered frequent imprisonments.²⁸ They demonstrated resistance by taking an active stand against a conflict they saw as unethical and accepted the consequences of their actions. However, the number of COs in Leicestershire was tiny at 250 and represented only 0.001 per cent of its 1911 male population.²⁹ While coming from a household with a strong religious or socialist tradition probably dissuaded many from joining up in the first two years of the war it did not stop all. Charles Monk came from a 'very good nonconformist home' but recalled that, 'in spite of all that atmosphere that I was brought up with ... I enlisted'.³⁰

²²1911 Census, County of Leicester, cited in M. Richardson, *Leicester in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2014), p. 44.

²³Gregory, p. 89; Office for National Statistics, p. 2.

²⁴F. P. Armitage, *Leicester during the War* (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1933), pp. 83-5.

²⁵Leicester Memories in Conflict Collective, *Uncovering Resistance Leicester and Leicestershire in World War One* (Leicester: Leicester CND, 2015), pp. 40, 23-37.

²⁶Armitage, p. 42; Leicester Memories, pp. 40, 23-37.

²⁷Leicester Memories, pp. 38-42; see also <<http://www.nednewitt.com/whoswho/>> [accessed 18 January 2018].

²⁸For example see C. Catchpool, *On Two Fronts* (London: Headley Bros., 1919) and Leicester Memories, pp. 62-5.

²⁹Leicester Memories, pp. 55-6, 57; 1911 Census, County of Leicestershire.

³⁰East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA), 694, LO/061/012, C. Monk.

The main reason so many men did not enlist had little to do with overt ethical objections to the war. This was demonstrated in a 2015 study of the South Highfields area of Leicester during the Great War. This project traced all 128 local men eligible for military enlistment and examined their service and found in 1914 that 11 had joined up followed by a further 8 in 1915. The remaining 109 men were ‘fetched’ when conscription was introduced and three became conscientious objectors. The study concluded that a key reason why men did not volunteer was that there was full employment in Leicester.³¹ In the pre-war period life for those from working-class backgrounds could mean destitution and the workhouse if they if they became unemployed. Even men in regular unionised employment could find themselves jobless very quickly: Nathaniel Corah & Sons, Leicester’s largest hosiery manufacturer, placed all hands on half time on the outbreak of war as the firm feared a collapse of trade.³²

Many men, especially those with family and dependents, were faced with the dilemma of serving their country or providing for their family.³³ This quandary is illustrated in a letter to the *Market Harborough Advertiser* in September 1914 from a man titled ‘Patriot’. He wrote that he ‘felt the call is so great’ he ‘ought to at once join the colours’, but, he questioned, ‘if I do, what is to become of my wife and children?’ He continued that his ‘employers will keep my position open, and the Government will ... pay my rent [but] ... who is going to pay the other 25 [shillings] ... every week I have spent in the cost of living?’³⁴ In Leicestershire, as in other parts of the UK, many men were put off enlisting as they feared this would bring financial ruin to their family.³⁵

Poverty and unemployment were drivers of recruitment in some parts of the UK but not for many parts of Leicestershire. For example, Leicester had a thriving industry of footwear and hosiery manufacture and was relatively wealthy.³⁶ War brought huge government contracts to factories to make clothes and boots for the expanding army. Nathaniel Corah & Sons, which had initially cut production in August 1914, were contracted to make millions of hosiery items for the government.³⁷ This virtually wiped out unemployment in some sectors; in late 1914, the Leicester Boot and Shoe Operatives’ Union reported no members were unemployed. Wages in the hosiery trade were 14 per cent higher during October 1914 than in September.³⁸ Men working at home could earn considerably more than by serving in the army; while privates earned 7s a week, a warehouseman could earn 40s per week.³⁹ It was observed in Leicester that the slogan ‘business as usual’ was more potent than ‘your country needs you’.⁴⁰

By the spring of 1915, volunteering in Leicester was at virtual standstill but this was not so in other parts of Leicestershire.⁴¹ By late August 1914, 6 per cent of the male

³¹How *Saxby Street Got its Name, World War One and the People of South Highfields* (Leicester: South Highfield Neighbours, 2015), pp. 7, 27.

³²Richardson, p. 19.

³³Gregory, pp. 94-5.

³⁴*Market Harborough Advertiser*, 8 September 1915.

³⁵McCartney, ‘North-West ...’.

³⁶Richardson, p. 10; B. Beazley, *Four Years Remembered, Leicester in the Great War* (Derby: Breedon Books, 1999), p. 7.

³⁷*Saxby Street*, p. 7.

³⁸Armitage, pp. 31-2.

³⁹Beazley, p. 71.

⁴⁰Armitage, p. 30.

⁴¹Beazley, p. 39.

population in the village of Clipston had volunteered.⁴² In January 1915, it was reported that in nearby Market Harborough, 42.7 per cent of the 1,470 men of military age were in uniform.⁴³ It is impossible to calculate the exact number of men who enlisted for military service in the county before the introduction of conscription, but even though it was probably comparatively lower than other parts of the UK, thousands of men joined the colours. For example, the Leicestershire Regiment raised eight battalions by Christmas 1915.⁴⁴ Also, the number of men who sought to join was considerably higher than those accepted for service as 27.5 per cent of recruits in Leicestershire were rejected as unfit.⁴⁵ The remainder of this section considers why these men volunteered in 1914-15, using evidence drawn exclusively from those enlisting in the army.

Many of those who joined in the late summer and autumn of 1914 cited patriotism and the threat they perceived from Germany as their reasons for enlistment. George Weston, a wheelwright from Blackfordby, volunteered for the 10th Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment in September as he could not believe that anybody 'in the possession of a spark of patriotism would [not] have leapt at striking a blow against ... our country's enemies'.⁴⁶ Dick Read joined up only when he perceived the country was facing danger when it was reported in the press that German Army commander 'Von Kluck ... had reached the outskirts of Paris'.⁴⁷

However, it was by no means the singular factor as suggested by some historians. As the war progressed into 1915, several Leicestershire men mentioned personal notions of duty as their motive to join-up. R.V. Walton joined the Machine Gun Corps under the Derby scheme, because he thought 'it's about time I went', even though he was exempt because he was doing war work making shell baskets.⁴⁸ Harry Halford, who was also in a reserved occupation working on khaki uniforms at Hart & Levy, enlisted as he 'felt as though I should go'.⁴⁹

Running parallel with this were societal notions of masculinity that linked military service with ideals of manhood.⁵⁰ Driver C.E. Cross, of the Leicester Howitzer Brigade, wrote a poem about men deemed not medically fit for service. He lamented how this class of individuals could not 'prove himself a man, But no, the doctor's verdict, puts him underneath a ban'.⁵¹ Weston wrote to his parents asking the rhetorical question why did men not join up when they 'read the papers which show what [the] brave sons of the Empire are doing to keep them (the slackers) from harm. Why don't they ... take their stand like men?'⁵²

A theme among many volunteers was the influence of friends and peers. For example, Jack Horner recalled that he was with his friends 'when one of us, I don't

⁴²Market Harborough Advertiser, 31 August 1914.

⁴³B. Summers, *The Harboro' Boys* (Market Harborough: Market Harborough Historical Society, 2015), p. 25.

⁴⁴E.A. James, *British Regiments 1914-1918* (London: Samson Books, 1978), Table B; see also <<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-british-infantry-regiments-of-1914-1918/leicestershire-regiment/>>.

⁴⁵Hansard, *House of Commons Debates*, 25 February 1915, Vol 70, CC.402-84.

⁴⁶Letter to parents, undated, mid-1915, Weston Papers, Vol 1: 1914-1919, George Adcock Weston: Letters and Diaries (Huddesfield: William Ralph Weston, 2001), p.57.

⁴⁷I. L. Read, *Of Those We Loved* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 1994), pp. 501-2.

⁴⁸EMOHA, LO/070/021, R.V. Walton.

⁴⁹H. Halford, interview in Richardson, p. 80.

⁵⁰See L. S. Bibbings, *Telling Tales About Men* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁵¹In Richardson, p. 57.

⁵²Weston, Letter to parents, undated, mid-1915, Weston, p.57.

recall who, suggested that we go and join the army. No sooner said than done!'⁵³ Some were motivated by the loss of friends at the front; Sam Smalley joined the Leicestershire Yeomanry in mid-1915 as 'his pal died at Ypres'.⁵⁴ Interestingly, the accounts of Read, Halford and Smalley, emphasise joining up with a group, which suggests that peer pressure and friendship also influenced decisions to join up.⁵⁵

One ongoing historical debate has focused on the impact of coercive government tactics and societal pressure to persuade men to enlist.⁵⁶ In Leicestershire, as with other places in 1914-15, women gave out white feathers to men in civilian dress as a symbol of cowardice.⁵⁷ Charles Wortley, a foundry worker, said 'you weren't safe to walk about ... the women were just mad over this, carrying baskets of feathers'.⁵⁸ Alice Hannah, a former Leicester resident, recalled that 'there used to be recruiting officers on different corners ... asking the men to join up, and as it went on they tried to force' men to enlist.⁵⁹ These bullying tactics worked in some cases; Charles Monk, believed it was 'propaganda' that made him enlist.⁶⁰

There is no doubt that these tactics could be oppressive. Weston wrote to his parents that he was surprised that Bill Dawson, a local resident in his village, had 'gone to Birmingham' to 'avoid going in the army'.⁶¹ However, to assume that men who enlisted in 1914-15 were largely the victims of patriotic propaganda and social pressure is to present a patronising image of the British working man as one who had no agency, intellect or willpower.⁶² The UK population in 1914 was almost universally literate and had access to mass-circulation media, public libraries and other information sources, such as trade union newsletters. As a result, people had daily contact with the world of politics, economics, culture and society, making them more able than any previous generation to evaluate their own status and Britain at war.⁶³ The low level of recruitment in Leicester in the first eighteen months of the war demonstrates that many men resisted attempts by the government, army and local authorities to persuade them to enlist.

In the trenches: experience and motivation on active service

In many soldiers' accounts of the early days of the war, their initial mood was one of enthusiasm for the adventure of army life. In September 1914, Arthur Cave only found the 'miserable conditions' bearable during his training because 'the novelty of it all compensated for it to some extent ... [and] we were ready to put up with anything if it would get us ... to France'.⁶⁴ However, once in khaki, soldiers' initial enthusiasm faded

⁵³J. Horner in Richardson, p. 43.

⁵⁴EMOHA, Mrs Souter, interview.

⁵⁵H. Halford, interview in Richardson, p. 80.

⁵⁶Gregory, p. 9; Marwick, p. 309; Ferguson, p. 201; Sibley, pp. 15-37.

⁵⁷T. Redfern, interview EMOHA, LO/065/016; A. Hannah, interview, EMOHA, 768, LO/132/083.

⁵⁸C.W. Wortley, interview, <<http://worldwar1veterans.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/240102-lsgt-charles-wilfred-wortley-5th.html>>.

⁵⁹Hannah, interview.

⁶⁰EMOHA, 694, LO/061/012, interview C. Monk

⁶¹Weston, Letter to parents, 19 May 1915, Weston, p. 54.

⁶²See for example S. Mackrell, *Radical Leicester in the First World War - Resistance, Opposition and Non-Co-operation* (Leicester: 2016), p. 13.

⁶³Sibley, pp. 49-51.

⁶⁴A.C. Cave, Diary, 5 September, 1914, Liddle Collection, Leeds (LC).

and their morale was frequently tested by the tough circumstances of active service. The conditions men faced depended on their role and where they were deployed. In this study, the majority fought on the Western Front in the trenches where the environment was frequently cold, damp and muddy and men faced the constant danger of possible death or injury from enemy action. Living and existing in these surroundings was mentally and physically challenging; Read recalled trench-holding in an active sector at Croisilles, southeast of Arras, in early 1917 which strained him and his men. He wrote that the:

sheer exhaustion was slowly gaining the upper hand with us. Continual shelling, the constant necessity of removing debris, and deepening our miserable defences, coupled with the lack of sleep – all these things were beginning to tell, and the almost total lack of a hot meal or drink for over a week contributed to our sorry state.⁶⁵

However, despite the trials of life in the line, the men in this study retained their motivation to serve throughout the war; this section examines what helped them endure and cope.

When faced with tough physical conditions many turned to alcohol. Tim Cook has shown that the daily issuing of rum to soldiers in the trenches raised morale and helped men cope with the strain of war.⁶⁶ They were issued with Special Red Demerara, a drink which was welcomed by the troops. L. J. Hewitt recalled that ‘one swallow and wow down it went, and your hair started curling straight away’.⁶⁷ Aubrey Moore believed it got his company through a hard time in the trenches in the Vimy sector in early 1916. He took over command of a company that:

had one of the worse weeks possible. I kept losing men either from bombing, shelling or the appalling conditions, severe cold and wet. By a stroke of luck my correct strength never reached the quartermaster as I continued to receive the ration of rum based on our strength when we went in ... We gave a rum ration every six hours and I am sure it saved us the day for most of us.⁶⁸

Positive interpersonal relationships and comradeship, or small group cohesion, was also important to maintain morale and help men endure together.⁶⁹ In 1915, Read had close social bonds with the four members of his Lewis gun team. They were ‘inseparable’ and ‘however obnoxious some fatigues or working parties happened to be, they didn’t appear half so bad if the four of us were on the same job’, when they were together and ‘good fellowship reigned and our cares for the moment were forgotten’.⁷⁰ Mates enabled many to cope but losing them could have a devastating impact; on 27 August 1916, Frederick Green, serving in the 9th Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, wrote in his diary that he’d heard about the death of his ‘dear friend and chum Tom’. He added ‘this is a sad blow and a sad day for me’. The next day he wrote, ‘today I don’t feel very grand, I cannot forget ... Tom’.⁷¹

⁶⁵Read, p. 259.

⁶⁶T. Cook, ‘“More a Medicine than a Beverage”: ‘Demon Rum’ and the Canadian Trench Soldier of the First World War’, *Canadian Military History*, 9.1, Article 2 (2000), <<http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol9/iss1/2>>. Accessed 19 February 2019.

⁶⁷Memoir, p. 13; L. J. Hewitt, Imperial War Museum (IWM) 73/146/1.

⁶⁸A. Moore, *A Son of the Rectory* 1st edn. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1982), p. 135.

⁶⁹Thorpe, PhD.

⁷⁰Read, pp. 57, 97.

⁷¹F. G. Green, Diary, 27-28 August 1916, IWM 87/45/1.

The ability of leaders, both NCOs and officers, and the example they set were also essential to keep up men's morale, as Gary Sheffield has shown.⁷² Enlisted men frequently developed close positive relationships with their officers and this encouraged them to put in additional effort to support their leadership. Read described the power his battalion commander Colonel Mignon (8th Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment) had over his men. They were on a route march and:

after marching for four or five hours ... we began to feel the strain ... Colonel Mignon rode to and fro along the ranks continually, joking with us and exhorting us to stick it out for the honour of the regiment. Heartened by him, we determined grimly to keep going ... We would have dropped in our tracks that day rather than have straggled. It would have been letting him down.⁷³

Read also described his company commander, Captain White, under whose 'tactful but firm' leadership he was a subaltern in 1918. White had all the hallmarks of what 'first attached and then endeared him' to the men. He was a proven leader in battle having being awarded the Military Cross and two bars. Moreover he possessed:

that precious quality which many otherwise good officers lacked, a real sense of humour, having the happy knack of being able to move a crowd of grouching men ... to gales of laughter by a sally at the grouchers expense ... then the whole spirit of the men would seem changed in an instant.⁷⁴

The accounts of individuals in the cohort generally revealed similar positive perceptions of leaders. However, there were exceptions; George Thorpe recalled that a Subaltern Flintoff was 'useless in the line' and overheard the colonel say Flintoff was not 'fit to have a box of tin soldiers'.⁷⁵

Contact with friends and family back home through letters and parcels was another crucial factor in maintaining their will to fight and surviving emotionally.⁷⁶ Servicemen's lives across the class spectrum were centred on their pre-war domestic experiences at home. Lieutenant George Buckle Pickett, serving with the 110th Trench Mortar Battery, wrote many letters to his wife in Leicester which documented how he missed his family and wanted to come home. Receiving news from home was important in maintaining his morale; on 22 October 1917, he wrote to his wife saying he was 'feeling like a bear with a sore head not hearing any news of you for a week'.⁷⁷ The value of news from home is also shown by Weston's correspondence. He told his parents that he was 'keenly interested in home life' and 'to get ... some local news makes fine reading when a chap is away'.⁷⁸ He had concerns about his family farm and in mid-1915 wrote that he was 'jolly ... thankful the hay is safe. It's been worrying me a lot ...'⁷⁹ This correspondence played a vital role in lifting his spirit and taking him 'home for

⁷²See Sheffield, *Leadership*.

⁷³Read, p. 133.

⁷⁴Read, p. 409.

⁷⁵George Thorpe interview, recorded by M. Richardson, 12 January 1993, private collection.

⁷⁶McCartney, *Citizen*, p.117. M. Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 71–2.

⁷⁷G. Buckle Pickett, Letter to wife, 22 October 1917, IWM 01/5/1.

⁷⁸Weston, Letter to parents, 31 December 1914 and 2 July 1915 Weston, pp. 3, 57.

⁷⁹Weston, Letter to parents, undated, probably mid-1915 Weston, p. 61.

a short time'.⁸⁰ Much treasured correspondence also came from the local community. Private J. Walker, 9th Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, thanked the members of the Coalville and District Soldiers' Comforts Guild 'very much for the welcome parcel received yesterday. It cheers us up very much when we know that those at home are doing their best to help us'.⁸¹

In addition, many men developed their own coping strategies to endure in an environment which could bring arbitrary and random death or injury from enemy action. Many combatants sought support from the supernatural, as Alexander Watson has shown.[CHECKING WITH PREVIOUS STYLE]⁸² Moore acquired a carved ivory monkey from a hotel barmaid in Luton and this hung around his neck as a lucky talisman. He wrote after the war that it

remained there throughout the war and it became an obsession. Only once did I go up the line without it so I sent my servant back ... to fetch it. This may sound daft now but it was deadly serious at the time.⁸³

Others sought strength from their Christian faith.⁸⁴ Moore believed that men prayed to God for help in getting through their daily life rather than to come out alive; he thought doing the latter could be seen as blasphemous.⁸⁵ No men detailed what they prayed about but prayer was clearly significant to some men.⁸⁶ Weston had an active faith as a Wesleyan, being a teetotaller and non-gambler. He wrote to his parents in April 1915 that he had given himself 'to God'. He hoped that 'with Gods help ... I am going to run straight. Please keep praying for me. It's a terrible job up here'.⁸⁷

Harsh physical conditions and constant danger had an impact on men who felt 'strain in an increasing degree' the longer they served.⁸⁸ It was the clinical opinion of Charles Wilson, a medical officer who served on the Western Front, that all men under the constant strain of frontline service had their breaking point, the question was when men would collapse - not if; he believed 'men in war w[ore] ... out like clothes'.⁸⁹ Moore appeared to be close to the point of collapse; he recalled how, after being gassed and evacuated to Britain in April 1918, his two years' service as a company commander had made him 'completely exhausted both mentally and physically ... all the time in the line and it had taken its toll'.⁹⁰

However, there is no evidence to indicate that any one of the cohort had a psychological breakdown or collapse, or became dislocated from their wider society as suggested by 1970's Eric Leed.⁹¹ Many were wearied by military service, like Jack

⁸⁰Weston, Letter to parents, 20 August 1915, Weston, p. 64.

⁸¹Thorpe, PhD, pp. 219-220; *Coalville Times*, 9 February, 1915.

⁸²Watson, pp. 85-108.

⁸³Moore, p. 142.

⁸⁴M. Snape, *God and the British Soldier* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁸⁵Moore, p. 154.

⁸⁶P. Harrison, *A Leicestershire Boy Goes to War* (Privately published), p. 83. F.A. Harrison, LC.

⁸⁷Weston, Letter to parents, 8 April 1915, Weston, p.50.

⁸⁸Kelly, p. 65.

⁸⁹C. Wilson, *The Anatomy of Courage* (London: Constable & Co., 1945), pp. 67-72.

⁹⁰Moore, p. 150.

⁹¹Leed, pp. 193, 68.

Belton, but all continued to serve.⁹² Peter Hodgkinson has argued that the ability of the vast majority of men to cope with the life on active service was rooted in their experience of pre-war civilian life and the prevailing social and culture norms accepted by the majority of the population, such as patriotism and deference to authority. For example, he argues that many people, especially in the working classes, had a stoical attitude towards life. They accepted their situation and station in life and the daily drudgery of long hours doing often dangerous, hard and tedious work in factories, mines and agriculture. However, while they accepted 'their lot', this was not a passive resignation as many people tackled their situation through a tradition of active self-reliance, individual resourcefulness and community mutualism.⁹³ People bettered themselves through attending working-class educational institutions like the Adult Schools in Leicester.⁹⁴ Communities, through collective action and support, sought to tackle the adversities they faced through mutual societies and co-operative movements, as well as through trade unions and labour politics.⁹⁵

In the trenches, this stoic attitude of Leicestershire men was noted by officers. Kelly observed that among his Leicestershire soldiers 'very few dwelt or complained about the increasing casualties' and 'the average man continued to the end to tackle his work in hand at the moment in the traditional half-ironic, wholly philosophic, spirit of the British Army'.⁹⁶ He believed that this 'lack of inquisitiveness – and habit of taciturnity – certainly helped our army ... to maintain its moral[e]'.⁹⁷ Moore made a similar observation that men got on with their tasks as 'there was a job to be done, no alternatives, so we had to make the best of it ... [the] troops were never morbid or miserable'.⁹⁸ These observations are supported by an examination of enlisted men's letters and memoirs. In August 1916, Bert Hall wrote to his mother complaining about the heat in France and how his mother knew he could not stand 'the heat much, but I am able to stand almost anything now that is possible to stand'.⁹⁹ In his memoir, Belton complained that his battalion, the London Scottish, was forced to make an attack on 10 May 1917 at Arras and were tired and 'in no condition' to make the assault 'however[,] it had to be done, so it was just as well to do it as cheerfully as possible'.¹⁰⁰

The Edwardian notion of duty was linked to stoicism. Duty was a constant theme in letters as shown in correspondence to the *The Coalville Times* from local men serving in uniform.¹⁰¹ In 1915, letters from regular or special reserve soldiers were published in three consecutive months. In February, Private Horace Briers, 1st Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, wrote to the paper that he was 'only doing my duty for my country and one cannot do more'. The following month, Joe Kelly, from Whitwick, serving in the 3rd Battalion, put pen to paper stating that 'if I live to come home I shall

⁹²Memoir, J. Belton, p. 20, 22, 23, 24. Private collection.

⁹³See P. Hodgkinson, *Glum Heroes* (Solihull: Helion, 2016) and *Mentioned in Dispatches* podcast interview on 12 June 2017 <<http://www.kensingtons.org.uk/?podcast=psychological-survival-in-the-trenches-peter-hodgkinson>> [accessed 1 October, 2018].

⁹⁴EMOHA, C. Monk.

⁹⁵See Hodgkinson, *Glum*.

⁹⁶Kelly, p. 66.

⁹⁷Kelly, p. 57.

⁹⁸Moore, pp. 145-6.

⁹⁹B. Hall, Letter to mother, 11 August 1916, LC.

¹⁰⁰Memoir, p. 17, Belton.

¹⁰¹See letter from Private Fingay, *Coalville Times*, 5 February 1915.

have nothing to be ashamed of, as I have done my duty'. In April, Private Howe penned that he would 'keep on doing my duty and if I should go under ... I can't grumble'.¹⁰² When examining the publication of these letters, it is pertinent to consider why these declarations of duty were placed in the newspaper. Clearly these letters fitted the broad agenda that *The Coalville Times* was pushing, namely to support the war effort. No letters were published with counterviews, either questioning or opposing the war. It is quite probable that many families published letters of their serving sons, husbands or fathers in local papers as a show of pride and as a public declaration that they were doing their 'bit'. It appears that some journalists actively sought stories from relatives. Weston wrote to his parents complaining he had seen letters and photos of his colleagues in the local papers being shown off 'as if we were prize fowls'. He asked 'if any fool of a reporter comes round to our house ... don't give him any abstracts from my letters. I really hate to see anything like that in the papers'.¹⁰³ Weston had a clear sense of obligation; in another letter to his parents, he protested at the action of his local vicar in his home village who put up a roll in the church of those serving in the forces. He wrote that the vicar did not need to do this as 'we are doing no more than we ought, & a chap does not want his name read out every so often just because he is doing his duty. It's only natural that we should want to keep the flag afloat'.¹⁰⁴ Officers also keenly felt this sense of responsibility. Buckle Pickett wrote to his wife in November 1917 that he did not want to leave his family at home but had to come back to service in France 'not because I like it but because it has to be done'.¹⁰⁵

Allied with duty was a strong sense of patriotism which men articulated in different ways. Private Ray Marriott in the 4th Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, wrote in the letter to his parents in the event of his death that that he did not 'begrudge' making the 'greatest sacrifice' to 'free the world of...German militarism'. He was killed in July 1915.¹⁰⁶ Private Newby believed the struggle was worth it because he had spoken to a peasant in whose village the Germans had 'shoved ... bayonets through' children and he wanted to 'keep these rebels from our happy little country'.¹⁰⁷ Mrs E. Howe, of Talbot Street, Whitwick received the news that her husband Private E. Howe had died of wounds on 16 February 1915, but he had written to her after he was wounded stating that he hoped soon to be better, and to be able to do a bit more for 'Good old England'. He also wrote the following lines: 'I am the man that's always ready/Always game and always steady/To shoot and fight and hammer in/In action always mean to win'.¹⁰⁸ The affinity with cause and country was a strong stimulus for many men throughout the war. For example, Weston, who had enlisted on patriotic grounds, still believed in the cause in August 1916 after being wounded in the arm. He wrote to his parents: 'my arm will be carrying a rifle again before Xmas. I'm going to be in the final dust up ... when I take up arms again it will be with a far greater enthusiasm that I had before' [sic].¹⁰⁹ Weston's commitment was still strong on 31 December 1917 when he complained in

¹⁰²*Coalville Times*, 19 February, 26 March 1915, 23 April 1915.

¹⁰³Weston, Letter to parents, 4 August 1916, Weston, p. 94.

¹⁰⁴Weston, Letter to parents, 25 October 1915, Weston, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵Buckle Pickett, Letter to wife, 24 November 1917, IWM 01/5/1.

¹⁰⁶Armitage, p. 62.

¹⁰⁷Armitage, pp. 78-9.

¹⁰⁸*Coalville Times*, 10 March 1916.

¹⁰⁹Weston, Letter to parents, 4 August 1916, Weston, p. 93.

his diary that he saw a 'different spirit in folks' when on leave. He noted they were 'grumbling. The Price is too high they say. If they realised what ... could happen in Eng[land] ... if we didn't stop him [the German]'.¹¹⁰ In addition to affinity with Britain and the war, a few Leicestershire men were motivated by local notions of patriotism, as McCartney observed in Lancashire servicemen. Seven Coalville men wrote to the editor of the *Coalville Times* from their service in Egypt that:

we assure you, Mr Editor, when the heat is unbearable, the flies ... obnoxious ... we are ... of settled purpose that ... whatever hardships we have to undergo, we will not disgrace the district to which we belong, and from which we have gone forth to fight for our homes, our land, and our honour.¹¹¹

However, this was the only example found in the research for this article suggesting that it may have been a relatively limited phenomenon amongst Leicestershire men. Read said that affinity with king and country was deeply embedded throughout society. He recalled that he and all his mates were patriotic. He wrote:

we all learned it at school. Great Britain was Great. Her Navy was invincible, and were going to show the Kaiser that our Army was too! That was the underlying spirit of the New Armies who went overseas in 1915.¹¹²

Acts of patriotism were celebrated in the papers; the *Coalville Times* reported in 1915 that Mr Grigg, of Jarrom Street, Leicester, had received a letter from the King congratulating him on his 'spirit of patriotism' by having eight sons in uniform.¹¹³

Coercion and discipline in keeping men serving and fighting was another influence on behaviour. The British Army had a harsh penal code which could mete out tough penalties. During the Great War, 346 people were executed for a range of military crimes, mostly desertion.¹¹⁴ Fear of punishment shaped men's behaviour while on duty. Taking over a trench one night, L. J. Hewitt had to remain awake and alert all night; their platoon sergeant had warned them that 'anybody caught asleep would be court-martialled, and that meant the death penalty'. This appears to have kept him awake but his mate fell asleep and Hewitt had to wake him. Afterwards, he told his mate 'if I hadn't woke you, you would now ... face a court martial'.¹¹⁵ Early in Read's military career, he saw two men during a route march get Field Punishment No.1 for filling their water bottles from unauthorised sources and this made him and his mates 'think twice before letting ourselves in for a similar fate'.¹¹⁶ In the cohort of men, there is no evidence of any major disciplinary problems during their service. They may have followed the advice of Hewitt's corporal who said to Hewitt and his mates on joining his unit that 'you're in the army now, you may like it, you may not ... it's your life from now on, do as you're told, try your best and it won't be so bad, do otherwise ... it can be hell'.¹¹⁷ However, it is probable that many also adopted the approach of Belton to 'play the system'. Belton recalled how he became an 'old soldier and

¹¹⁰Weston, Diary, 31 December 1917, Weston, p. 126.

¹¹¹*Coalville Times*, 24 March 1916.

¹¹²Read, p. 56.

¹¹³*Coalville Times*, 29 January 1915.

¹¹⁴See G. Oram, *Death Sentences Passed By Military Court of the British Army 1914-1924* (London: Francis Boutle, 1998).

¹¹⁵Memoir, p. 18, Hewitt.

¹¹⁶Read, p. 15.

¹¹⁷Memoir, p. 5, Hewitt.

determined to look after my own interests a little more, my speciality ... [was] being to dodge all parades possible and ... I soon became fairly efficient at this.¹¹⁸

To kill or not: motivation for violence

This final section examines the motivation of soldiers in combat and their decisions to use violence against their enemies. Soldiers often had a surprising amount of control over the violence they could use against their enemy; they could often choose not to fight. Many participated in unofficial informal truces as described by Tony Ashworth in 1980.¹¹⁹ The most famous example is the Christmas Truce of 1914. Private Harold Startin, serving in the 1st Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, recalled the events; ‘suddenly a voice was heard calling from the German trenches, “Hello There ... we are Saxons, you are Anglo Saxons, if you don’t fire we won’t”’. Both sides met in no man’s land and ‘everything was spontaneous and sincere.’¹²⁰ This was not the only truce that Leicestershire men were involved in. Read recalled several informal cease-fires with the Germans. There was a clear utilitarian rationale for their passivity:

we argued, if we shot the ... Germans ... we invited annihilating retaliation from rum jars [*minnenwerfers* – large German trench mortars], to which we had no adequate reply. Subsequent events justified our attitude at the time ... a well-intentioned but newly joined subaltern ordered a Lewis gun section to fire at a German wiring party. The Germans were no fools ... and overcame half a dozen of those horrors [trench mortars] which cost us three good men we could ill afford to lose.¹²¹

Although men refrained from violence at times this state of affairs was never permanent. The men in this study were not, as several scholars have said of the British soldier during the Great War, ‘essentially pacifistic and desirous of living in harmony with his fellow Man’.¹²² This study sides with the findings of Bourke that some men enjoyed using violence. Six of the 40 accounts used in this study describe killing Germans; for example, Belton mentions ‘bagging’ Germans on three different occasions and Weston talks with glee about two incidents where he bayoneted and shot Germans.¹²³ However, the motivation for killing was highly contextual. In some situations, soldiers killed their opposition because circumstances dictated ‘it were me or the other bugger’.¹²⁴ Read recalled storming a machine gun post where he ‘shot the gunner through the head at point-blank range ... in retrospect ... I have never ceased to regret it. On the other hand, had they spotted us ... we wouldn’t have stood an earthly chance’.¹²⁵ Belton said that he was in a sort of rage which accounted for the reason to kill his third German. He believed he experienced a condition where a ‘fellow temporarily loses control of himself, goes mad and sees red when in battle. I am sure I was not myself that night. I very much doubt if I could kill another man if in my right senses.’¹²⁶

¹¹⁸Memoir, p. 22, Belton.

¹¹⁹Ashworth, *Trench Warfare*.

¹²⁰Memoir, p. 1, H. Startin, LC.

¹²¹Read, pp. 91, 246, 216.

¹²²Roberts, p. xi.

¹²³Memoir, pp. 8, 12, 18, Belton. Private collection; Weston, Diary, 15 June 1916 and Letter to parents, 22 November 1917 Weston, pp. 87, 120.

¹²⁴C. Moore, *Trench Fever* (London: Hachette Digital, 1998), p. 12.

¹²⁵Read, p. 36.

¹²⁶Memoir, Jack Belton, p. 18, private collection.

Some people were motivated to kill for revenge. In November 1917, during the Battle of Cambrai, Weston got an 'hour or so of real good shooting ... I got my own back alright' for being wounded by the Germans in 1916.¹²⁷ Read recalled killing several Germans during an action in 1918 at Beigneux Wood after the Germans had ignited a corn field in which wounded British soldiers were burned to death. He said 'the sight of ... blackened bodies ... embittered us' and he and his men derived 'a kind of fierce satisfaction at the thought of having caught ... a few [of the Germans]'.¹²⁸ Many took pride in their violence in the way Joanna Bourke has suggested.¹²⁹ Private Ernest Hutchin's wife published his letter in *The Coalville Times* stating that he had 'killed 3 Germans' during the Battle of Neuve Chappelle.¹³⁰ Bert Hall boasted to his mother that when he had been on a trench raid he shot a 'rather old and unarmed German'. He justified the killing as he had 'no choice' since he could not take the prisoner back with him. He closed his letter with the brag that he was becoming a 'blood thirsty old warrior ... and [if] ... Annie wants any more cats killing when I come home, I'm just the kid, Nuff said' [sic].¹³¹

In many situations, the hatred of the enemy was contextual. Kelly said the only time he had 'intense hatred' was when he was strafed by a German airman; 'I had a vivid impression of a round-faced aviator with a dark moustache leaning over the side [of the plane] and taking aim at me'. His loathing of the enemy was that 'one has a peculiar impotence when attacked by an aeroplane'.¹³² Actual enmity of the enemy was rare; George Thorpe was the only one of the cohort who expressly disliked the Germans because of an unlikely act of animal cruelty. He regarded them as 'a lousy bunch of buggers' because they 'starved Belgian dogs so that they would attack British soldiers when the British advanced' into areas evacuated by the Germans.¹³³

Some found that meeting their enemy had a humanising effect. Read, serving in Egypt in 1917 fighting against the Ottoman Empire, liked 'Johnny Turk' who, 'apart from his alleged homosexual practices[,] ... was a simple chap by and large'.¹³⁴ Hewitt said on 'my first sight of a German soldier, they were nervous ... I looked them down, and my immediate reaction was, well if that's all were facing, I'm not frightened of any Jerry'.¹³⁵ Men were able to respect their enemy but also fight them; they viewed their role as soldiers as a trade and killing an occupational necessity. Herbert Orton recalled the Germans were on 'their side, we were on ours. It was a peculiar sort of arrangement. We were doing a job. We did not have any hatred of the Germans. It was not a bitter fight ... [but] it was a fight to win'.¹³⁶ Startin, who donated his 'used' trench club to the Imperial War Museum, which it displays to this day, said there was 'no bitterness at all. There's many a German that helped our wounded people ... There was no hatred between the forces. Although, we were shooting at one another'.¹³⁷

¹²⁷Weston, Letter to parents, 22 November 1917 Weston, p. 120.

¹²⁸Read, pp. 372-6.

¹²⁹Bourke, *Intimate*.

¹³⁰*Coalville Times*, 26 March 1915.

¹³¹B. Hall, Letter to Mother, 16 May 1917, LC.

¹³²Kelly, p. 105.

¹³³Interview with George Thorpe.

¹³⁴Read, p. 316.

¹³⁵Memoir, p. 16, Hewitt.

¹³⁶Interview with Herbert Orton, recorded by Matthew Richardson, 5 August 1993, private collection.

¹³⁷H. Startin cited in J. Levine, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Somme* (Reading: Ebury Press, 2008), p. 258.

Conclusions

This article provides a regional viewpoint of the motivation and experience of British servicemen during the Great War by considering the perspective of combatants who were pre-war Leicestershire residents. It considers their testimony in letters, interviews and memoirs with reference to three historical debates; why men enlisted in 1914-15, their experiences and motivations on active service and rationale for violence against their enemies. This study has obvious limitations given that it draws on limited evidence and does not, for example, feature the perspectives of post-1916 conscripts. Also, there was insufficient evidence to consider how individuals' perceptions of their experience and their motivations changed over time. However, accepting these challenges, some broad conclusions can be made on the motivations and experience of Leicestershire men during the Great War.

The men who joined up in the first eighteen months of the conflict did so largely of their own free will, for reasons of peer pressure, notions of duty and patriotism. There was no evidence of institutional indoctrination driving enlistment decisions but some were influenced by government propaganda. No accounts attributed enlistment to local patriotism. The evidence presented here supports the arguments put forward by historians like Peter Simkins, Adrian Gregory and Catriona Pennell.

The second aspect under consideration was the nature of combatant experience, morale and motivation on active service. The evidence in this article supports the views of scholars who contest that soldier morale remained largely solid through the war. It found that morale was underpinned by a broad range of factors such as positive officers-men relations, comradeship, the daily issue of rum and regular communication between serviceman and family. The role of discipline and punishment appears to have had minimal influence on the will to fight. Similarly, there was little evidence that regional patriotism was a motivational force, with only one instance noted. This suggests that local identity did not stimulate men in the same way McCartney described as happening in Lancashire. Lastly, no soldiers appeared to demonstrate disenchantment or disillusionment with the war in the way that Leed and Fussell suggested; some soldiers were tired and Moore close to a nervous breakdown, but none rejected the political or moral justice of the war.

The final issue under deliberation was the control, scale and rationale for the use of violence by combatants during the war. As Tony Ashworth has pointed out, men had agency over their use of violence and participated in truces. However, there is little evidence for Ashworth's and James Roberts' contention that men were naturally peaceful in the trenches. Many Leicestershire men recalled being willing and able to use violence: their rationale was often tempered by complex situational and personal factors. Some men appeared to enjoy homicide and boasted about it, supporting the perspective of Bourke and Ferguson.

The nature of experience during the Great War was highly individual and the factors which motivated and influenced people to sign up, serve, and even kill, were complex and contextual. An examination of the testimony of George Weston and Dick Read illustrates this well. The reasons Read gave for enlisting were peer pressure and the perception of threat from German forces that were nearing Paris. Weston, on the other hand, felt a sense of 'patriotism' and considered it the manly thing to do. Once on active service the

influences which helped each man endure active service in France were also different. Weston drew on his notion of duty, Wesleyan faith, letters and news from home and his a bloodthirsty and enthusiastic patriotism. Read, on the other hand, drew strength and stimulus from his comradeship with his friends and inspiration from his leaders but mentions nothing about the importance of home or religion. Finally, when it came to what motivated them to use violence and kill, their rationales had similarities and differences. Both Weston and Read killed on two occasions. For the first incident Weston does not describe his motives; Read, on the other hand killed for reasons of personal survival. For the second incident where both men killed, their motivation was revenge; Weston wanted reprisal for previously being wounded by the Germans and Read wanted vengeance for German soldiers' arson of a cornfield in which his wounded comrades burnt to death. Underpinning individual motivations and decisions were the deeply held social and cultural norms of Edwardian society which help to explain why men joined the colours, endured service and fought. Widely held societal notions of duty, masculinity, and patriotism were motivators for men to enlist and serve. Ideas of stoicism and fatalism also helped men to cope, accept their circumstances and make the best of it.

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Notes on contributor

Tom Thorpe is a historian focusing on combat motivation, morale and military group cohesion with a particular interest in the Great War. He read his BA in History and MA in War Studies at King's College London (KCL). He spent twenty years as a public affairs, public policy analyst, media specialist and speech writer and is a member of the Chartered Institute for Public Relations. Tom returned to academia as a doctoral candidate at KCL where his PhD examined the extent, nature and impact of military group cohesion in London regiment infantry battalions during the Great War; it was awarded in May 2017. He is a Trustee of the Western Front Association (WFA).

Appendix – Source material for the study

1. Table of sources

The table below gives background details of the 40 men whose letters, records and memoirs were identified for the article. Not all are referenced in the study.

Name	Initial	Rank	Archive/source	Type of record	Service	Unit of service	Pre-war residence
Alcock	T.	Sergeant	Private collection	Diary	Army	Artillery	Market Harborough
Angrave	A.	Private	<i>Loughborough Echo</i> , 13/10/2015 < http://www.loughboroughecho.net/news/local-news/war-diary-alfred-angrave-full-10250947 >	Diary	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Loughborough ¹³⁸¹³⁸ 1911 Census.
Ashby	D.	Private	EMOHA, LO/059/010	Interview	Army	Army Supply Office (home service)	Leicester
Belton	Jack	Corporal	Private collection	Memoir	Army	London Scottish	Market Harborough
Buckle Pickett	G.	Lieutenant	IWM, 8611	Letters	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Leicester
Cave	A. C.	Private	LC	Diary	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Leicester
Coleman	S.	Private	EMOHA, LO/062/013	Interview	Airforce	N/A	Leicester
Crawshay-Williams	E.	Second Lieutenant		<i>Leaves from an</i>		<i>Officer's Notebook</i> (London, 1918)	Memoir
Army	RHA	Leicester					
Drager	G.	Seamen	EMOHA, LO/078/030	Interview	Navy	HMS Tiger	Leicester
Fear	W. H.	Colour Sgt	LC	Letters	Army	West Yorkshire Regiment	Leicester
Green	F. G.	Private	IWM, 1588	Diary	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Leicester
Hack	H. T.	Sergeant	< http://worldwar1veterans.blogspot.co.uk/2009/06/1756-cpl-henry-thirlby-hack-mm.html >	Interview	Army	Leicestershire Yeomanry	Loughborough ¹³⁹¹³⁹ 1911 Census.
Halford	H.	Gunner	Mathew Richardson archive	Interview	Airforce	N/A	Leicestershire
Harrison	F. A.	Corporal	<i>A Leicestershire Boy Goes to War. A Look into his Diary with the West Yorks</i> (privately published, 2010), LC	Diary, letters	Army	West Yorkshire Regiment	Frolesworth

(Continued)

(Continued).

Name	Initial	Rank	Archive/source	Type of record	Service	Unit of service	Pre-war residence
Harriss	R. C.	Lance	Corporal	IWM, 10681	Letter	Army	Leicestershire Regiment
Interview	Army		Loughborough Leicestershire Regiment	Hewitt	E. J.	Private Leicester	IWMsA, 41 Hewitt
L. J.		Private	IWM, 21604	Memoir	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Leicester
Horner	J. W.	Private	IWM, 14156	Memoir	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Leicester
Hoyes	F. E.	Private	EMOHA, LO/147/098 Harby ¹⁴⁰¹⁴⁰ 1911 Census.	Interview	Army	North	Staffordshire Regiment
Monk	C.	Sergeant	EMOHA, LO/061/012	Interview	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Leicester
Moore	A.	Second	Lieutenant			A. Moore, <i>A Son of the Rectory: from</i>	<i>Leicestershire to the Somme</i> (Gloucester, Pub? 1982)
Memoir	Army		Leicestershire Regiment			Appleby	Nichols
F. E.		Corporal	IWM, 14942	Letters	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Market Harborough
Orton	H. A.	Private	Mathew Richardson archive	Interview	Army	RAMC	Leicester
Read	I. L.	Lieutenant	I.L. Read, <i>Of Those we Loved</i> (Place? Pentland Press, 1994)	Memoir	Army	Sussex Regiment	Leicester
Redfern	T.	Private	EMOHA, LO/065/016	Interview	Airforce	N/A	Leicester
Sawbridge, A.		Private	EMOHA, 65, MA200/066/066		Army	N/A	Leicester
Shepherd	H.	Private	< http://worldwar1veterans.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/2630111-pte-harold-shephard-5th.html >	Interview	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Loughborough
Soden	H. S.	Private	LC	Memoir	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Leicester
Souter, Mr. Souter, Mrs.		Private	EMOHA, LO/110/061/A	Interview	Army	Hussars	Leicester
Startin	H.	Private	IWMsA, 16453	Interview	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Leicester
Thorpe	G.	Lance	Corporal	Mathew		Richardson archive	Interview
Army		Durham Light Infantry	Leicester				
Tuffs	F.	Private	Private collection	Memoir	Army	Machine Gun Corps	Market Harborough
Walton	R. V.	Private	EMOHA, LO/070/021	Interview	Army	N/A	Leicester
Weston	G. A.	Lance	Corporal Leicestershire Regiment	LC	Diary,	letters Blackfordby	Army White

(Continued)

(Continued).

Name	Initial	Rank	Archive/source	Type of record	Service	Unit of service	Pre-war residence
G.		Private	Oral recording	EMOHA, LO/156/107	Army	N/A	Leicester
Wignall	E.	QMS	IWM, 17683	Diary	Army	RAMC	Leicester
Willis	A.	Private	Mathew Richardson archive	Interview	Airforce	N/A	Leicester
Wilson	A. G.	Lieutenant	LC	Diaries	Army	West Yorkshire Regiment	Leicester
Worth	E.	Private	IWMSA, 7033	Interview	Army	Royal Engineers	Leicester
Wortley	C. W.	Sergeant	http://worldwar1veterans.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/240102-lsgt-charles-wilfred-wortley-5th.html	Interview	Army	Leicestershire Regiment	Loughborough

Legend:

EMOHA - East Midlands Oral History Archive

LC – Liddle Collection, Leeds

IWM – Imperial War Museum, London

IWMSA – IWM Sound Archive

2. Rank

The table below gives the rank for the 40 men in the cohort.

Rank	Number
Officer	4
NCO	12
Other ranks	24
Total	40

3. Service

The table below gives branch and unit for military service of the 40 men in the cohort.

Branch	Number	Unit	Number
Navy	1	HMS Tiger	1
Airforce (RAF)	4	n/a	4
Army	35	Army supply office	1
		Artillery	1
		Durham Light Infantry	1
		Hussars	1
		Leicestershire Regiment	16
		Leicestershire Yeomanry	1
		London Scottish	1
		Machine Gun Corps	1
		North Staffs Regt	1
		RAMC	3
		Royal Horse Artillery	1
		Royal Engineers	1
		West Yorkshire Regiment	3
		Unknown	3
Total	40	Total	40

4. Residence

The table below gives the pre-war residence for the 40 men in the cohort.

Place	Number
Appleby	1
Blackfordby	1
Frolesworth	1
Harby	1
Leicester	26
Leicestershire	1
Loughborough	5
Market Harborough	4
Total	40