

WAR PHOTOGRAPHERS IN THE GREAT WAR

Ernest Brooks was the first British Official War Photographer to be assigned to the Western Front in 1916. He was previously a Daily Mirror photographer and was given the honorary rank of Second Lieutenant. His remit was to take as many photographs as possible and using his inconspicuous hand-held camera was free to wander, sometimes capturing his subjects unawares.

Many of the images taken by him were used to fuel the propaganda machine at home and abroad. His technical ability being very aware of both composition and light produced some very artistic and thought-provoking images.

Born on 23 February 1878, he grew up near Windsor, Berkshire, where his father worked in the Great Park, and as a child frequently encountered members of the Royal Family. After leaving school in 1890, he worked as a boy on the estates, where one of his duties was to look after a mule given to Queen Victoria by Lord Kitchener. In 1892 he enlisted in the 3rd Dragoon Guards, and after leaving the army joined the Glamorganshire Yeomanry as a volunteer.

His first encounter with photography came after he took a position in the household of Lady Vivian, widow of Hussey Vivian, 3rd Baron Vivian; Lady Vivian's twin daughters each had a camera, and Brooks was entrusted with developing the films. He bought a camera himself, paying by weekly shilling instalments, which he used to take pictures of prominent people for publication; his first portrait was sold to several newspapers through an agency, earning him the sum of seven guineas.

Realising that he could support himself comfortably on this income, Brooks left Lady Vivian's employment, and returned to Windsor. Here, he worked as a freelance newspaper photographer, using his contacts within the royal household to arrange access to his subjects. After a short period, he became an official photographer to the Royal Family. By 1906 he was established enough to accompany Princess Ena to Spain for her marriage to King Alfonso XIII, where he took the first portrait of the couple before their wedding.

Brooks' photographs were published in a wide range of newspapers, including the *Daily Mirror* and the *Manchester Guardian*; his contract with the Royal Family prevented him from selling exclusive rights to any particular publication. Each photograph sold for around 10s 6d. In late 1910, he accompanied the Duke of Connaught to South Africa, and in 1911 accompanied King George V to India for the Delhi Durbar, where he had the opportunity to photograph the King on a tiger hunt as well as in more formal contexts.

After returning from India he left the royal household to open a studio on Buckingham Palace Road in central London, though he continued to describe himself as the Official Photographer to the King and Queen.

After the outbreak of the First World War he served in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, enlisting on 25 January 1915. When the Gallipoli landings were being prepared, Winston Churchill, who had himself been a war correspondent, arranged for there to be journalists and photographers accompanying the expeditionary force. Brooks, as a professional photographer already in uniform, was appointed as the Admiralty official photographer.



In March 1916, he was transferred from the Admiralty to the War Office, given the honorary rank of second lieutenant and appointed the official photographer for the Western Front. He was the only professional photographer to cover the Battle of the Somme, recording the attack on the first day from the front-line trenches near Beaumont Hamel.

In 1917 he was appointed a Chevalier of the Belgian Order of the Crown. In 1918, he covered the Italian campaign and naval activity. The same year, he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre. He later returned to royal service, accompanying the Prince of Wales on his tour of Canada and the United States in 1919, and Australia in 1920.

A soldier surrounded by icicles. He is wearing a cloth wrapped around his head under his helmet, a thick sheepskin waistcoat over his uniform sitting amongst the timbers of what appears the complex support structure. The icicles are thick and long illustrating the harsh realities at the Front.

The American tour posed some problems with people trying to capitalise on the Prince's appearance for publicity purposes; one prominent actress, Mildred Harris Chaplin, passed herself off as the niece of a local dignitary in order to be photographed, whilst another simply offered Brooks a bribe of a thousand dollars to arrange the picture.

He admitted that he "nearly gave in", but backed out at the last minute for fear of offending the Prince. He was less successful in avoiding offence with another photograph, this time of the Prince in his bath during the voyage; after it was published, George V strongly objected to it as inappropriate, and Brooks was reprimanded.

For reasons that were not publicly disclosed, his appointment as a royal photographer was cancelled in 1925. His appointment as Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and his British Empire Medal (BEM) were also "cancelled and annulled".

A newspaper story suggested that his downfall was linked to another indiscreet photograph of the Prince of Wales, widely published, showing the Prince dressed in a woman's kimono and wig after appearing in a play. However, he continued to work as a photographer; in 1928, he was convicted of disorderly behaviour outside a ball in Grosvenor Square, after claiming that he was acquainted with the hostess and had been invited there to take pictures.

He continued in photojournalism at least as late as 1936, when he is credited with taking two photographs of Jerome Brannigan being arrested, after Brannigan had attempted to assassinate King Edward VIII.



A wiring party making their way along a very wet and muddy road. Being a member of a wiring party was dangerous and not a popular task amongst the soldiers. The men had to set up entanglements using large rolls of wire and steel pickets, generally in areas where they could come under enemy fire.

Constructing a new telegraph line near Ancre on the Somme after the Battle. Telegraph poles have been raised on very hilly terrain although the rest of the landscape looks quite flat in the background. The wires coming from the left-hand side are taut whereas those leaving the poles are slack and collapsed.



A train loaded with both soldiers and munitions. The little engine is pulling six loaded wagons past Brooks camera. The snow is quite thick on the ground. Secure communication and supply lines were vital to an army's success.

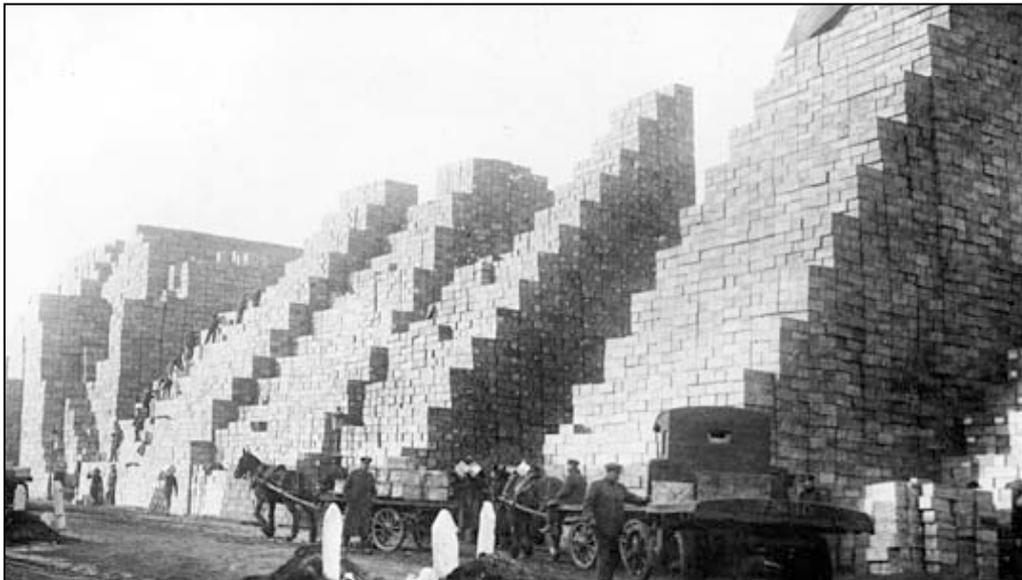
Soldiers sitting on a battered German railway engine. Written on the side is "Leave train" and "Any more for Blighty." Blighty was an informal name for England or Britain, used by soldiers fighting abroad. It originates for Urdu and was first used by soldiers in the Indian Army.

The destruction of this railway station would have been a small victory for the enemy as it is disrupting secure lines of transport and communication.



This trench, which is not very wide or deep has been roofed over to provide cover for the bell which is the gas alarm. The soldier who is ringing the bell is wearing a heavy coat and gloves.

The graffiti on the bell reads 'duck ye nut.' Gas releasing weapons were developed during WWI and eventually became commonly used in attacks. The results were painful and horrific.



Boxes of food supplies being piled up. The number of boxes is so vast that the men working there are dwarfed by the sheer size of the stores. Boxes are being unloaded from two horse-drawn carts and a truck.

In the foreground there are tracks, possibly for a light railway. With around two million men in the British army alone, it was a huge undertaking to feed them all.



A captured German aeroplane. It has been strapped onto a trailer. It was important for official photographers to record the looting of German trenches, the capturing of German military vehicles and planes and other equipment because of the propaganda impact at home.

Soldiers struggling to pull a big gun through mud. The gun has been placed on a track created for a light railway. The soldiers are pushing a device, attached to the gun, that possibly slots into the tracks. Some

of the men are in a ditch that runs alongside the track, the rest are on the track itself. A makeshift caterpillar tread has been fitted to the wheels of the gun, in an attempt to aid its movement through the mud. The surrounding landscape is bleak and desolate, with only a few trucks visible in the distance. The mud and flooding at the Front not only created mobility problems for the men, but it was also extremely hazardous, with men and animals often becoming trapped in the quagmire.



The sign reads, 'The wrong side. Those shells that you saw lying in the mud are on the wrong side. Pick them up. If you can't use them yourself- take them to salvage dump. They will see that they reach the right people who will put them in their proper place- THE OTHER SIDE.'

The caption on the back of the photograph previous to this one in the sequence reads, 'Let Fritz have it. It was made for him. So why let it lie in the mud take it to the SALVAGE DUMP.'



Soldiers silhouetted against the sky. They are preparing to fire an anti-aircraft gun. On the right of the photograph a soldier is being handed a large shell for the gun.



The Battle of Broodseinde (October 1917) was part of a larger offensive - the third Battle of Ypres - engineered by Sir Douglas Haig to capture the Passchendaele ridge.

Soldiers having fun in the sea. All of the men have changed into their swimming gear. There is a great deal of splashing and fooling around, particularly in the foreground.

The men all look very happy and relaxed. In the distance more men can be seen making their way into the water. It is a pleasant and positive scene - in marked contrast to the horror of life in the trenches.



JOHN WARWICK BROOKE DCM. OBE. MBE.

John Warwick Brooke was born on 30 May 1886 in St. Saviour London.

He firstly served as a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) in King Edward Horse. He won the DCM, Commissioned. Wounded, and became a photographer.

In September 1901 he Joined the Royal Navy but seems to have had a chequered naval career. Noted as having "run" i.e. deserted/gone awol (absent without leave) more than once, and spent several periods in the cells and got 70 days hard labour. He is noted as having joined from school. On the 1911 census He is a "disengaged qualified signalman" visiting 58 Cresswell Road Twickenham.

John Warwick Brooke, of the Topical Press Agency, was one of two British official war photographers, the first being Ernest Brooks, to be sent to the Western Front in 1916. The demands placed on both men were heavy. The Topical Press Agency was a British photo agency active in the first half of the twentieth century. Founded in 1903, it employed almost 1,500 representatives worldwide by its peak in 1929, selling the work of a team of photographers based in London. They had to take as many photographs as possible, with as much variety as possible; a difficult task for two men covering an army of over two million. Despite this, Warwick Brooke managed to take what would become some of the most memorable images of World War I.

On 5 May 5 Arrived in France. Now a sergeant in King Edwards Horse - based in Chelsea, the regiment was strictly a unit of the Special Reserve. It was mobilised on declaration of war and temporarily attached to 4th Cavalry Brigade. B Squadron moved to France on 22 April 1915 and joined 48th (South Midland) Division, but moved to join IV Corps in June 1916. He had married Rose L. Thomas before embarkation.

On 14 January awarded the. DCM with the citation reading "*606 Sergeant J. W. Brooke, 2nd Regiment, King Edward's Horse. For conspicuous bravery and resource. Our communications were repeatedly cut by the heavy shell fire, and most of the linesmen were killed or wounded. Sergeant Brooke continued to repair the wires regardless of personal danger and it was owing to his courageous action that communication was maintained at a most critical time.*"

His work in repairing wires as a linesman ties in with him being listed in 1911 census as "disengaged qualified signalman." On 2 July, the under mentioned to be temp. Honorary Second Lieutenants: J. W. Brooke, whilst employed on special service. His medal card shows this was with Intelligence Corps

Basil Clarke wrote "*Lieutenant Brooks' colleague on the British front in France is Lieutenant Brooke. The names are often confused, and it is one of the little jokes in the war zone to name each of the two official photographers "Brooks-or-Brooke." Brooke is quite a different type of man from Brooks. There is less of the bubbling merriment of boyhood about him, less wealth of joke and cheery anecdote, but he is a clever photographer and a sterling man.*"

At the outbreak of the war Lieutenant Brooke gave up his work as a Press photographer and joined King Edward's Horse as a trooper. He won quick promotion, and was decorated with the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry in the field. Brooke was "invalided out" before he accepted an offer to take up photographic work again as official Army photographer. His work now is no less risky than before.

On 7 January Temp. Hon. 2nd Lt. J. W. Brooke to be temp. Hon. Lieutenant.

The first official war photographers appeared on the Western Front in March 1916. Approximately a dozen official photographers were eventually commissioned to shoot on the Western Front; the major

allied dominions involved also ensured that their own troops were documented. Official photographers were made lieutenants and were subject to military discipline. Importantly, however, censorship of their work only affected what photos could be published, not taken, thereby leaving these photographers generally free to choose their subject matter.

Because of a scarcity of resources official photographers did not focus extensively on the horrors of trench warfare. Instead, in 1916 their work appeared to confirm a relatively successful battle, that the British government wished their citizens to see.

While wounded and dead troops were not ignored as subject matter, photographers tended to focus on the less badly injured, photos of whom could be published without causing perceived public distress, as well as on aid efforts to care for troops' needs. The Propaganda Office demanded a wide variety of photographic subjects, including leisure activities, visiting dignitaries and troop fraternization with locals on top of the more expected battle, preparation and equipment shots. Thus, while official faking of photos was relatively rare, 'orchestrated' images were harder to avoid, given the practical difficulties that photographers faced.

On 2 November 1920. OBE Gazetted *John Warwick Brooke, Esq. Official Photographer to the War Office*. He then went to Dublin and worked for the army there. Whist many of his WW1 photos exist in archives. On 4 May 1921 he joined auxiliary Division of The Royal Irish Constabulary (ADRIC) with service no 1939 and posted to a Depot Company. On 26 November 1922 he appears to be back with Topical Press Agency, as that is the address listed for his medal correspondence.



The background is composed of sparse woodland and flat enclosures. The field gives way to what appears to be a deep river. There is a half sunken home-made boat suitably crewed, and he is surrounded by four 'bobbing head' soldiers as well as one preparing to swim.

This is one of John Warwick Brooke's photographs recording an afternoon of fun, sport and relaxation with immense propaganda value.



This picture focuses on a valiant struggle by two soldiers to save their home-made boat from sinking. The prow of the dinghy is sitting proud of the water and the stern being held up by one of the men.



A pillow fight is taking place at a sports day, organised by the Black watch Regiment. The two men taking part are balancing on a narrow wooden bar.

In fact, one is in the process of falling off. Both men are laughing and providing entertainment for those on the sidelines. This provided a positive view of life at the Front and therefore reassured those at home.

Two soldiers standing over a supply of drinking water. There is a metal water tank next to the men, with a sign states, 'Drinking Water Only.'

There is a pipe coming from the tank with a number of taps along its length. Meaning to imply how well the men were catered for.



A Machine-gun post on the Somme during the battle. The two machine gunners are preparing to target an enemy aeroplane.

The gunner is aligning the Vickers machine gun, whilst his partner is using a telescope to spot the plane. The gun emplacement made of earth and revetted with brushwood.



This railway engine carrying the registration R.E.B.K. 27 / Peronne has been derailed and suffered extensive damage. This was part of a German supply train transporting large quantities of wood. French trains were commandeered by both sides during the war.



British soldiers walking past an observation balloon that had been shot down.

During the course of the war, balloons became increasingly vulnerable to attack from aircraft carrying explosives and incendiary devices and crews had little chance of survival unless they could bring the balloon down quickly.

With the increasing length of range of heavy artillery, the gunners needed to rely on observers in balloons and aircraft, to help locate their targets.



A road alongside the river at Peronne. The road has been blocked by felling the trees across it and a party of British soldiers are beginning clearing operations. One soldier is using an axe whilst others are roping the stubs to try and pull the trees aside.



A working party of British Soldiers constructing a narrow-gauge railway. In theory Light railways were quickly built in order to keep up with the advance so as to supply troops with everything they would need.

After the advance had been secured, a full-size railway could then be built. Ironically, however, few real advances were made on the Western Front. Compared with the Germans and the French, the British Army was rather slow in its adoption of Light railway and tramway systems. Initially, the War Office was keen to move supplies by lorry. Early lorries were not dependable,

and it soon became clear that a more reliable mode of transport was needed if the war effort were not to suffer.



Soldiers are washing themselves with the water from a shell-hole. This water-filled hole has probably provided the men with a rare opportunity to clean up.

This is a bleak and depressing image. It shows the shattered remains of a row of trees. The trunks have been denuded of all their branches and form a stark silhouette against the sky. The ground is a chaotic jumble of broken branches and railings. Whilst the damage to French towns and villages is perhaps more apparent in many of the photographs, the destruction of the French countryside during the War was also significant. It is estimated that around 8,000 square miles of French farmland was devastated. An observation platform is just visible at the top of the picture.



Signal station using a daylight lamp to send messages, during World War I. The signal station shown in this photograph would probably have used an encrypted form of Morse code to transmit messages. The soldier on the right-hand side of the image would look through the telescope to receive messages. Military codes were often changed to reduce the risk of interception, and many specially trained people were employed solely to try and decipher the enemy's messages.

Two nuns standing by a graveside, Locre, Belgium, during World War I standing at the graveside of Major William Redmond M.P. The grave has been adorned with flowers,

including potted geraniums. The Major was mortally wounded during the Battle of Messines (June 1917) and taken to a hospice at nearby Locre, but sadly died soon after.

It was William Redmond's wish that his grave be located outside the walls of the British military cemetery at Locre - his wish was granted. The request was a direct response to the execution of the leaders of the Easter Rising (1916). As a staunch Nationalist - he was a Member of Parliament prior to leaving for the Western Front - he abhorred the British reaction to the Rising.

DAVID McLELLAN

Formerly a photographer with the 'Daily Mirror' which at the time led the field in pictorial journalism. He was appointed as an official war photographer in December 1917 along with Tom Aitken whose work also featured in the archived collections.



He is particularly noted for his work in capturing the huge scale of operations and was one of five official photographers working on the Western Front for the photographic department in the last two years of the war. The photographers were often driven to the site the authorities wanted them to cover, which meant that most of their work was also largely censored. This did not, however, mean the photographer did not get to know the people in the pictures. His work also features in the National Library of Scotland Haig Papers.

Two soldiers in an observation balloon's basket in France during the war. The men in this photograph, however, do not appear to be very happy.

Whether this is due to being photographed, the situation they are going into or for more personal reasons will never be known.



This photograph by David McLellan shows King George V (1865-1936) and Field Marshal (Earl) Haig (1861-1928), with a number of other officers, watching loggers unloading timber from a cart. Much of the timber used in the war effort was cut by the Canadian Forestry Corps who worked in England and France.

Preaching from a rather unusual form of Pulpit. McLellan's photograph shows an army Chaplain giving a service from the front seat of an aeroplane.

The troops are gathered round to listen to the sermon, with the officers prominent, and separate, in the middle of the congregation. The two-man aeroplane is called a 'pusher' being the term given to planes in which the propeller and engine were located behind the pilot and co-pilot.

Due to the static and exposed position of balloon crews, they made excellent sitting targets. As a result, crews were the only airmen issued with parachutes during this period.



R.A.F. kite balloons are the eyes of our guns in France. The observers are highly trained and when their balloons are shelled or attacked by enemy aircraft, they are forced to make rapid descents in parachutes.



Stacks of solid tyres in France. The soldiers working on the stacks, overseen by the controller, seem to be having a hard time of the height and weight of the tyres.

Solid rubber tyres were invented by an English rubber manufacturer, Thomas Hancock in 1846, to replace the more bone-shaking iron rims which had been used. These were then replaced by pneumatic tyres on smaller wheel diameters.

This image shows a diver climbing down a ladder into the canal. A soldier with the shoulder marks 'RE' of the Royal Engineers and shirt collar is marked 'Kit no. 4.' helps with controlling his air supply.

When the Germans retreated from an area, they commonly destroyed communications links such as bridges and it was the job of the Royal Engineers to keep roads and bridges open.

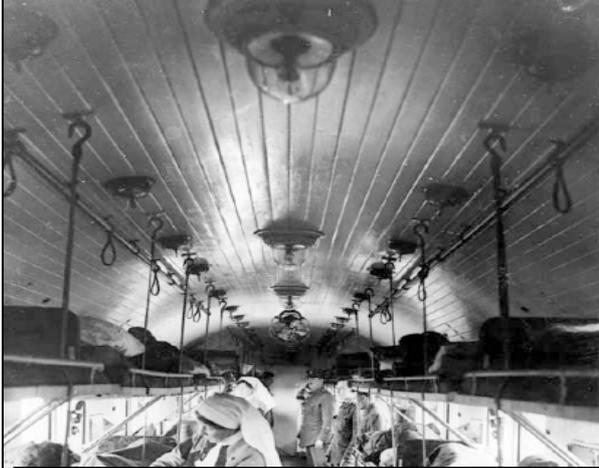


R.A.F. planes being loaded with munitions in France during WW1.

The size and power of these early aircraft is conveyed by the scale of the soldiers attending.

Two types of bomb in the main were dropped from planes. Finned Mortar Bombs, called 'aerial torpedoes' were used for destroying targets and 'flechettes' for anti-personnel darts were used for more specific damage.

Soldiers receiving attention on an ambulance train in France. As the numbers of casualties began to increase, the need for an organised and effective medical service became clear. Many hospitals were



built behind the lines but due to the continually changing territorial areas they were not easily reached.

Wounded soldiers being unloaded off an ambulance train in France.

The interior of an ambulance-train ward in France. The striking image due to the lighting and tunnel effect of the train carriage, emphasised by the parallel lines of the wooden panelling on the roof.

Ambulance trains were used in the main to transport large groups of soldiers to the French coast so that they could return to England for rest and recuperation.



'Stop-Go' Soldier at a crossroads in France. It is difficult to tell whether it was 'tongue in cheek' or really quite serious at the time.



Five horse-drawn mobile pigeon lofts are parked around the perimeter of a small field. They are rather like small caravans. The loft in the foreground is numbered 13 with a soldier feeding the pigeons of the roof. Pigeons were even carried on warships during the war and many birds of prey were culled to stop them killing pigeons.



Just like a team of operators working at a busy telephone switchboard, this image shows the network of communications at company HQ that was required to co-ordinate an army's activities. The object immediately in front of the signaller on the right looks like a mouthpiece, which suggests that they are using wireless sets or field telephones to communicate. The Royal Engineer Signals Service was formed in 1908, and provided communications during World War I. It was at this time that motorcycle despatch riders, wireless sets and field telephones came into prominence on the Western Front.



Frontline pig farm, France, during World War I. They have been caged in with a high wire fencing which has internal subdivisions of flimsy wooden barriers. The uniforms amongst the pigsty do seem a little incongruous. This perhaps was one of the better jobs amongst the quartermaster duties, although finding enough resources to raise the pigs may have proved vexing. Fresh, nutritious and tasty food was incredibly rare at the Front.

Mobile telephone exchange during an observation exercise, France, during World War I. This is one of a series which were taken during an observation balloon exercise.



So many were taken that a visual record of the proceedings has been left, and so the activities can be pieced together. This image of the telephone exchange records the communication network which went hand-in-hand with observation.

TOM AITKEN

Thomas Keith Aitken born in 1879 Tom Aitken was a newspaper photographer from Glasgow who was assigned in December 1917 as a war photographer along with David McLellan and Armando Console. All appointed war photographers held a 'hybrid' position being part of but not yet ultimately responsible to the military.



This picture by Aitken shows mechanics on the left wing of the Handley-Page Bomber being serviced. The wings of a Handley-Page bomber can be folded back when not in service, but shown extended here.



British soldiers with rescued canaries in France during the war. Well known for their fondness of animals and this image shows soldiers checking up on the health of some canaries found in residential areas that had suffered heavy shelling.

Given the manner in which front line soldiers often 'adopted' domestic pets that had been abandoned as regimental mascots, perhaps it is not surprising some canaries survived the fighting. There were also some human 'canaries' during WW1. These were the munitions workers whose skins turned yellow and orange due to the chemicals they were exposed to daily – hence the 'nickname.' The chemical that caused this discolouring is Tetryl which was a synthetic chemical used to make explosives.

British reconnaissance plane flying over enemy lines during WW1. This innovative photograph of a two-man biplane was taken by Aitken. Both planes would have been travelling at around 100 mph and at an altitude of several thousand feet. R.A.F. markings can be clearly seen on the fuselage, wings and tail of the biplane which looks like a Bristol F-2.

In addition to carrying out reconnaissance duties and participating in 'dog-fights.' Air raids against ground targets increased as the war dragged on. These bombing raids were mostly aimed at supply dumps, camps and railway stations, though the front-line trenches were also an obvious target. As aircraft

technology advanced, the greater range allowed planes to engage civilian targets with both London and Paris suffering bombing raids.



A funeral procession for a Red Cross Nurse who died during a German air raid on hospital.

The procession, with the coffin on a wheeled cart pulled by two soldiers. Nurses follow behind with the kilted soldier at the front being the bugler. There is still an element of shock at the death of a woman, especially a nurse.



Tom Aitken here shows different processes in the construction of a new railway bridge by Royal Engineers.

The men are sawing huge baulks of timber to length for vertical piles of the bridge driven in by the steam driven piling rig. There is no doubt also that many of these men working on this and similar projects would have been 'time-served' engineers in civilian life.

A lone soldier surrounded by a mountain of empty shell cases, a striking impression of the destruction that took place on the Western Front.

This picture only tells half the story, with the other part being the damage that the shells from these cases inflicted on the enemy.



British Intelligence Corps Officer checking the identity details of a French man in Bethune Picardie.

The 'IC' letters clearly identifies him as belonging to the Intelligence Corps. Although the Intelligence

Corps achieved many successes during the war, they were disbanded after the Armistice as it was believed their services were only required during wartime.

British Officers with a captured German Anti-Tank gun in Bapaume. This is evidence of how quickly military technology evolved during WWI. The first tanks were introduced by Britain at the Somme in September 1916. One of the most examples was the 13mm Mauser Tank-Gewehr M1918 Anti-Tank rifle.



The bullet on the left is from a Lee-Enfield rifle, while the bullet on the right is from the German Anti-Tank rifle.

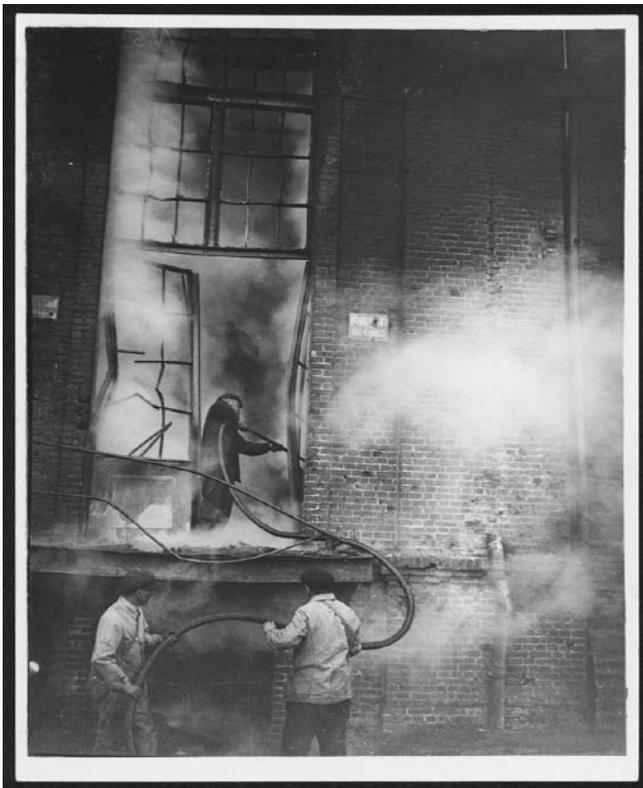
To combat this threat posed by the armour piercing bullets, the British gave their Mark IV tanks ever thicker armour.



Fighter pilot and Commanding Officer checking a map, in France, during World War I. Standing in front of his two-seater biplane, this pilot refers to a map reference with the Commanding Officer of his company. Inside the plane, his co-pilot checks over the instrument panel with a member of the ground staff who is taking notes. A machine-gun, complete with a swivelling accessory, is attached to the rear cockpit. At the start of the war, fighter planes had two seats, with the pilot sitting in the front and a gunner occupying the rear cockpit.



Amiens under shell-fire, France, during World War I. This photograph appears to have been taken just moments after a large shell has exploded. Smoke and dust are billowing out from buildings further up the street. A hose-pipe lies in the road, probably left after tackling an earlier fire. The Germans used a huge gun mounted in a railway wagon, to shell Amiens from their lines some 16 miles (25 kilometres) away.



Fire-fighters enter a burning building after an incendiary bombing in France, during World War I. In the photograph a man stands silhouetted in the window of a burning building as he attempts to douse the flames with a hose.

Two other men stand beneath the window feeding the hose to their colleague. Incendiary shells, packed with flammable chemicals which would spread fire when detonated, were among the most destructive weapons of World War I.

It is not clear from this close-up photograph whether the men pictured are actually trained fire-fighters or merely desperate civilians using fire-fighting equipment.

Basildon Borough Heritage Society - December 2024.