

*Dulce et Decorum Est* -- by Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
 Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
 Till on the haunted flares we turned our backs,  
 And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,  
 But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
 Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
 Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! -- An ecstasy of fumbling,  
 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,  
 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling  
 And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.  
 Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,  
 As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight  
 He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace  
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,  
 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs  
 Bitten as the cud  
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, --  
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
 The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*  
*Pro patria mori.* \*

*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* means, "It is sweet and becoming to die for one's country."

Wilfred Owen died at the front during the last days of World War One.

**Psychological Causes of Violence**  
**(from Rachel MacNair, *The Psychology of Peace*)**

*Disconnects from Personal Responsibility*

Moral Disengagement – removal of inhibitions

Moral justifications

Blame for worse conduct

Euphemisms

Scapegoating and deferring to authority – both displace or diffuse the responsibility for conduct

Discounting effects of violence on others

Dehumanizing or blaming the victims

*Dehumanization*

Linguistic warfare – seeing people as non-human, parasites, animals, disease, etc.

Demonizing the opposition

Distancing – creating a mental barrier from the horror (such as airplane bombing); using gas chambers rather than Nazi killing squads

Doubling – creating two identities: one that kills and one that is a good family person

Compartmentalizing

Intellectualizing – rationalizing the violence

*Conditioning and Desensitization - How do you get people to kill*

Violent media

Beliefs

Just War Argument

People are to blame for their own victimization (Also protection that one can become a victim)

For example, rape victims were “asking for it.” Poor people are poor because they are lazy.

Realpolitik – the belief that politics deals entirely with the goal of maximizing power.

Machismo – connecting manliness with violence

The belief that violence is human nature; we have a killer instinct

Retaliation and Revenge

Violence as “a last resort.” Once this argument is used, violence is not only justified, but not using violence is seen as immoral.

*Power of the Situation*

Obedience to authority – Stanley Milgram’s experiment

The authority defines the situation and the participants become agents of that authority

Small steps – Step B is only relatively worse than Step A, and if you went along with Step B, it is easier to take Step C.

Desire to help, go along

Relief from anxiety (someone else is deciding)

Euphemism

Groupthink (an illusion of group’s invulnerability; unquestioned belief in the group’s inherent morality; collective efforts to rationalize; an enemy image; self-censorship of deviation from

group consensus; shared illusion of unanimity; pressure against dissent; emergence of self-appointed mind guards; insulation of the group from outside influences; lack of diversity)  
Powerful technology of destruction

### *Personality*

Authoritarian Personality

Machiavellian Personality

Narcissistic and Antisocial Personalities

### *Appeal of War*

Pride in oneself by belonging to a greater group

Giving meaning and purpose to an otherwise boring life

Projection of self-doubts and self-hatred onto someone else

Displacing aggression onto a third party

Unity created by a common enemy

Virtues of discipline, courage, self-sacrifice for the greater good

Anxiety of uncertainty vanishes when war hysteria arrives

Emotions of hatred and overcoming frustrations

### *Wartime Perceptions of Reality (What would be peacetime perceptions of reality?)*

Good and evil are reduced to us and them; right and wrong

Whoever wins now, wins forever

History is on our side

When the war is over, everything will be different

They act from a wish for power; we act from self-defense and benevolence

The problem started with an act of will on the part of the enemy; we need to make the enemy helpless.

The enemy is evil. Interaction and compromise are not possible. Only force can settle matters.

We and they are qualitatively different. The same actions are good when we do them and evil when they do them.

The enemy country is a monolithic nation.

Heroes kill the villains.

## Was it one particular class in all nations?

ACCUSATION

DEFENSE

### 7 CAPITALISTS

Those who profit from armaments and from exploiting overseas possessions naturally welcome war, and encourage warlike policies.

Those with most money and property have most to lose. Industry and trade will be disrupted. Few capitalists welcome war.

### 8 IMPERIALISTS

Rivalry between the great powers over overseas possessions, trade, railways, naval power, etc. caused tension and conflict in many areas and prepared everyone for war.

There have always been clashes over colonies. But the war began in Europe, not overseas, and the first countries concerned had no colonies.

### 9 MILITARISTS

Armies and navies were growing ever larger, more highly skilled and expensively equipped. Chiefs of Staff like Conrad von Hötendorff in Austria, von Moltke in Germany and Fisher in Britain hoped to use these powerful weapons at the best possible moment from their own point of view. This tight planning and emphasis on striking quickly prevented statesmen from taking time to seek a peaceful solution.

Armaments, mass armies and careful planning of possible campaigns showed fear of others, not aggressiveness. It was the politicians who used the weapons, not the military.

### 10 THE PEOPLE

The half-educated prejudices of the common man influenced policies in democratic states, and even the most autocratic ruler had to respect public opinion, which had no time for the subtleties of diplomacy and demanded clean, forceful solutions.

Popular attitudes were the product of government leadership and propaganda, and of the media controlled by capitalists and warmongers.

ACCUSATION

DEFENSE

### 11 THE PRESS

Most people now could read, but were not well enough educated to be critical. Journalists and novelists made money by providing sensations, stirring up national pride and hatred of foreigners.

Writers only provide what the public wants.

### 12 DIPLOMATS

The system of secret alliances and understandings brought about war before anyone realised the danger.

The war was an outcome of many different causes, not one alone.



The next-of-kin of British soldiers and sailors killed in the Great War were given bronze plaques like this, 12 cm (5 in.) across and suitable for setting into a memorial stone. As on the 'Land of Hope and Glory' picture (page 7) Britannia and the lion are the most prominent part of the design, but the mood has changed.

# Who started the Great War?

## Was it one particular nation state?

- \* (Accusations in the left-hand column;
- \* Defence arguments in the right.)

ACCUSATION	DEFENCE
<b>1 SERBIA</b>	
A Serbia encouraged fellow Slavs to revolt against Austrian rule because she hoped to break up the empire and enlarge her own territory.	A It was only natural that Bosnians and other Slavs wanted freedom from Austrian rule.
B Serbia knew of, and did not prevent, the plot to murder Francis Ferdinand.	B Some Serbians may have encouraged the plotters, but the government was not involved.
C Serbia provoked war by rejecting the most important terms of Austria's ultimatum.	C Austria's demands would have destroyed Serbia's independence.
<b>2 AUSTRIA - HUNGARY</b>	
A Austria seized the opportunity to force war on Serbia in order to crush what she had long regarded as a threat to the empire.	A The assassination threatened both Austrian and European stability. Austria had to take firm steps to get at the root of the trouble and check Serb nationalism.
B Austrian demands were encouraged by the army; Conrad von Hötendorff, Chief of Staff, was particularly keen on decisive action.	B The soldiers saw this as a purely local problem, with no reason for other powers to step in.
<b>3 RUSSIA</b>	
A Russia wanted to preserve her power in the Balkans, and her influence in Serbia, particularly after her failure in 1908.	A Russia could not let down her ally and allow Austria to bully a small Slav nation, as she had been forced to in 1908.
B Russia's mobilisation to support Serbia against Austria forced Germany to stand by her ally, thus widening a local conflict.	B Russia was concerned only to check Austria, which was already bombarding Belgrade. There was no need for German alarm.

ACCUSATION	DEFENCE
<b>4 GERMANY</b>	
A Germany had sought to dominate Europe by military strength since 1871, and especially under Kaiser William II.	A Germany sought only her rightful place in the centre of European politics. Since she was dangerously encircled she needed strong forces.
B Germany also sought naval dominance, upsetting Britain and creating tension.	B Germany needed colonies and naval strength just as much as Britain.
C Germany's Triple Alliance started the division of Europe into armed camps, which only needed an incident to cause widespread conflict.	C Germany's alliances were defensive only.
D Germany's Schlieffen Plan for war meant involving France and other neutral countries in an east European conflict.	D In her weak, encircled position, Germany must end the danger of war on two fronts by destroying one enemy as speedily as possible.
E Germany encouraged the Austrians to solve their problems by crushing Serbia, promising German support if Russia came to Serbia's aid.	E It was Germany's duty to help preserve the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the face of Serbian and Russian threats, which could lead to its break-up.
<b>5 FRANCE</b>	
A France encouraged and financed Russia because she sought <i>revanche</i> and the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine.	A Alsace-Lorraine was part of France, and she could not abandon the people there.
B The French-inspired Entente encircled and threatened Germany.	B France and Russia created the Entente in response to Germany's aggressiveness and alliances.
<b>6 BRITAIN</b>	
A British commercial, colonial and naval interests resented Germany's growing industrial strength and naval building programme.	A Germany's rapid naval build-up and the Kaiser's determination to interfere in areas where Britain had traditional rights alarmed Britain.
B Britain joined France and Russia in 1914 in a quarrel that was none of her business, helping to prevent a quick victory for Germany.	B Britain had promised naval help to France, and British public opinion was horrified by the attack on Belgium. Germany's war plans were devised without taking account of Britain anyway.

“The first war seemed, perhaps was, more of a break in historical continuity, both as an end and a beginning. It came after a generation of European peace. Men did not know what to expect or, at any rate, the war turned out very differently from what they had expected. Their bewilderment had deeper causes. Many wars make sense, if the word can be used of such a senseless procedure. The Great War which began at Valmy and ended at Waterloo (1792-1815) was predominantly a conflict between the traditional order and the revolution. The Second World War of the twentieth century was predominantly a war against National Socialism. But what was the First World War about? In essence it was a war against war, rather than a conflict of creeds. If victory had gone to the other side, the territorial arrangements would have been different. But would the character of the ensuing civilization have been much altered?” – A. J. P. Taylor, *From Sarajevo to Potsdam*

### **A Collage of Impressions about World War One -- From Voices from the Great War by Peter Vansittart**

#### **1914**

“War might drive a man till he dropped; it could be a dangerous and bloody business; we believed, however, that it still offered movement, color, adventure, and drama.” -- J. B. Priestley

“My own attitude towards the conflict was simple and clear. In my eyes, it was not Austria fighting to get a little satisfaction out of Serbia, but Germany fighting for her life, the German nation for its 'to be or not to be,' its freedom and its future...I think with pride and sorrow of those days and back to the weeks of the beginning of our nation's heroic fight, in which kind fortune allowed me to partake.” -- Adolf Hitler

“All my Libido is for Austria-Hungary.” -- Sigmund Freud

“It is not good when people no longer believe in war. Pretty soon they no longer believe in many other things which they absolutely must believe in if they are to be decent men.” -- Thomas Mann

“I adore the war. It's like a picnic without the objectlessness of a picnic. I've never been so well or happy. No one grumbles at one for being dirty.” -- Julian Grenfell, killed May 26, 1915

“Julian's love of war he himself explained in terms of his being allowed to be dirty; he meant this physically, but psychologically it was relevant too. For the first time a generation brought up to be clean and bright and obedient could, without guilt, be fierce and babyish and vile...War was a freedom both from society and from social fantasies; it was the one area in which there were standards of excellence other than those of snobbishness, bitchiness and money.” -- Nicholas Mosley

#### **1915**

*In 1914, the Russians averaged 300,000 loses per month. In 1915, The Russians lose one million men on the Eastern Front. The Turks deport 1,750,000 Armenians to Mesopotamian deserts, 600,000 die, another 600,000 vanish. The British, Australians and New Zealanders lose 252,000 at the Dardanelles between April and December.*

“The trenches wound in meandering lines and white faces peered from dark dug-outs--a lot of men were still preparing their positions, and everywhere among them there were graves. Where

they sat, beside their dug-outs, even between the sandbags, corpses stuck out. Corpses jammed in among them. It sounds like fiction -- one man was frying potatoes on a grave next to his dug-out." -- Max Beckmann (German painter)

*By the end of 1915, the French army had already suffered 1,961,687 casualties, of which 1,001,271 were killed or missing. In 1916, 1 Frenchman in every 25 became a casualty.*

## 1916

*Battle of Verdun -- lasting 10 months. -- 300,000 German and 315,000 French casualties. The Germans gain a few square miles of territory.*

*203 German U-Boats sank 5,408 ships*

"To the women of France, the war had brought an emancipatory revolution. Never had they been so great a power in the country. At the outbreak of war, to a woman they had rushed off to become nurses, fill the administrative gaps left by the men, work in the munitions factories." -- Alistair Horne

*The first signs of mutiny appear in the French Army.*

*Karl Liebknecht, German socialist politician, is sentenced to 2 1/2 years hard labor for anti-war agitation. 55,000 Munition Workers go on a sympathy strike.*

*The Battle of the Somme claims 57,470 British casualties on the first day.*

Send for the boys of the old Brigade  
To keep old England free!  
Send for me father, me mother and me brother,  
But for Gawd's sake, don't send me! -- Anonymous

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Does it matter? -- losing your leg? ...  
For people will always be kind,  
And you need not show that you mind  
When the others come in after hunting  
To gobble their muffins and eggs.

Does it matter? -- losing your sight? ...  
There's such splendid work for the blind;  
And people will always be kind,  
As you sit on the terrace remembering  
And turning your face to the light.

Do they matter? -- those dreams from the pit? ...  
You can drink and forget and be glad,  
And people won't say that you're mad;  
For they'll know that you've fought for your country,  
And no one will worry a bit.

-- Siegfried Sassoon

### The Scene of War: Fear

Fear is a wave  
beating through the air  
And on taut nerves impinging  
Till there it wins



Vibrating chords.

All goes well  
So long as you tune the instrument  
To simulate composure.

(So you will become  
A gallant gentleman.)

But when the strings are broken...  
Then you will grovel on earth  
And your rabbit eyes  
Will fill with the fragments of your shattered soul. -- Herbert Read

*In Russia, by 1916, more than one third of all men of working age had been recruited into the army of 15 million troops. A third of these had already been killed or wounded. Arms were in short supply. At one point, there was only one rifle to every ten soldiers and artillery guns were rationed to two or three shells a day. -- From John Robottom, Modern Russia*

## 1917

The War that will end War--H. G. Wells

### Recruited-Popular (March 1917)

They say --They say  
(And that's the bugles going all the day  
Past Cooper's Arms and round by Stepney way  
Till you'll be mad for hearing of them play)  
They say --They say  
You were the finest stuff men ever had  
To make into a soldier. And they say  
They put the needed strength and spirit in you.  
Straightened your shoulders, made you clean and true.  
And fit for England's service -- I can say  
They clothed you warm, and fed and worked you fair  
The first time in your life, on Derby Day;  
Maybe that did a little--Anyway  
They made a man out of you this year, the sort  
That England's rich and proud to own, they say  
They say --They say  
And so they went and killed you. That's their way. -- Margaret Postgate

*Russian Revolution -- Czar Overthrown -- Provisional Government in Power  
Germany resumes unconditional submarine warfare.  
United States enters the war  
300,000 workers strike in Berlin  
Germany Transports Lenin to Russia*

“I couldn't forget my crew, my friends going down out there, drowned like rats in a trap, with some perhaps left to die of slow suffocation. I could imagine how some might even now be alive

in the strong, torpedo compartments, lying in the darkness, hopeless, waiting for the air to thicken and finally smother them.” -- Kapitanleutnant Baron von und ze Peckelshaim

*Canadian Troops Storm Vimy Ridge -- 1 1/2 miles taken; 158,000 British and Canadian casualties*

*250,000 Engineers strike throughout Britain*

*French mutinies begin. -- 22,385 found guilty of mutiny. 55 officially shot*

*American Espionage Act Passed -- used against pacifists, socialists, and anarchists*

*Lenin and the Bolsheviks Gain Power in Russia -- Pull Russia out of the War*

## 1918

*There had been 10 million European and Asiatic deaths, 30 million missing or wounded; another 10 million died of influenza in 1918-1919; 150,000 Serbs dead of typhus, seven times that number of Armenians massacred. America lost 800,000 and had 74,779 gas victims.*

*Britain continues the blockade of Germany after the Armistice is signed.*

“The continuation of the blockade after the armistice was rapidly fulfilling the wish [of the French Prime Minister who said "There are twenty million Germans too many."]; within six months from the armistice it had achieved a casualty list of 700,000 children, old people and women...The German people, starved and dying by the hundred thousand, were reeling deliriously between blank despair, frenzied revelry, and revolution.” -- Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge*

“You see this child here...it consumed an incredible amount of bread, and yet it did not get any stronger. I found out that it hid all the bread it received underneath its straw mattress. The fear of hunger was so deeply rooted in the child that it collected the stores instead of eating the food: a misguided animal instinct made the dread of hunger worse than the actual pangs.’ -- a story told by John Maynard Keynes, a member of Herbert Hoover's relief team in German after the war.” -- Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge*

'Peace upon earth!' was said. We sing it.

And pay a million priests to bring it.

After two thousand years of mass

We've got as far as poison gas.

Thomas Hardy, "Christmas, 1924"

As a small boy in Southsea, I saw streets disfigured by ragged, unwanted ex-soldiers, medalled, but ill, blind, maimed, selling matches, bootlaces, notepaper, trundling barrel-organs or standing with a melancholy dog or monkey beside a decrepit hurdy-gurdy. Whether they were pleading or abusive, resigned or menacing, they appalled me. Their wretchedness suggested that, in overthrowing Germany, they had earned some monstrous penalty now being inexorably exacted.

Peter Vansittart, recalling his youth in the 1920s.