

# THOSE WHO MARCHED AWAY

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An Anthology of the  
World's Greatest War Diarists

EDITED BY  
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## *Introduction*

WAR blights everything it touches, laying waste to whatever happens to fall into its path. It is pervasive in its destructiveness, indiscriminate in its cruelty, random in its brutality. When a country goes to war every one of its citizens is enlisted, whether they take an active part in it or not. It is always there, insidious, polluting, inextinguishable, degrading. Not all wars are inevitable but there comes a point when the momentum to go to war has gathered such force and speed that it seems unstoppable. It is as if there is an invisible power propelling us forward into a fathomless pit. The sand runs ever faster through the hour-glass. The wind gets up and the temperature drops. Moods swing. Voices lower. Clouds gather though the skies are cloudless. The future is put on hold. Soon options, like rations, run out.

‘I don’t quite know in what year I first knew for certain that the present war was coming,’ wrote George Orwell in the autumn of 1940, a year after the start of the Second World War. ‘After 1936, of course, the thing was obvious to anyone except an idiot. For several years the coming war was a nightmare to me, and at times I even made speeches and wrote pamphlets against it. But the night before the Russo–German pact was announced [on 22 August, 1939] I dreamed that the war had started.’

For some, war is a galvanising phenomenon. It is as if until the moment of declaration they had only been half alive. With such an obvious and real threat to their existence, they suddenly realise how precious and fragile life is. This is the irony of war, the harbinger of death. No longer can we take life for granted. Indeed, nothing may be taken for granted. War sweeps away the old verities and undermines received wisdom. Society is turned upside down. War and peace; peace and war. Like oil and water, they are incompatible. ‘Why did millions of people kill one another,’ asked Tolstoy in a postscript to his epic novel, ‘when it had been known since the world began that it is physically and morally bad to do so? Because it was such an inevitable necessity that in doing it men fulfilled the elemental zoological law

which bees fulfil when they kill one another in autumn, and which causes male animals to destroy one another. One can give no other reply to that terrible question.'

If Tolstoy could give no coherent reason why human beings wage war it would be presumptuous of us even to try. Thankfully, that is not the *raison d'être* of this book. Rather it is an attempt to describe how war infiltrates every aspect of life, embracing those who 'marched away' and those who remained at home, those in positions of high command who never fired a shot in earnest and those who chose to be 'conscientious objectors'. Their witness is borne through their published diaries, almost 200 of which are represented in the pages that follow, a record that is at once immediate and impressionistic.

Wars have always been a tremendous growth period for diaries. This should come as no surprise since it is human instinct to record extraordinary experience. In wartime, that experience is shared by the whole population but everyone reacts individually to it. For some, it is so disturbing it drives them demented or to suicide. Others seem to be able to sail through it almost carefree.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in war diaries, the keeping of which can be traced back several centuries. Sailors in particular, used to keeping ships' logs, often kept personal records. In the seventeenth century, during the English Civil War, many diaries were kept by combatants on both sides of the divide, desperately trying to justify their actions in the eyes of God. The same sense of guilt is evident in many of the diaries produced during the American War of Independence. Many of these diaries amounted to little more than bald statements of fact but others delved deeper, giving not only details of a day but articulating feelings and fears and opinions.

Throughout history the keeping of journals has sometimes been banned by military authorities worried lest they should fall into enemy hands. More often than not, however, soldiers tended to pay lip service to such orders, even during World War I when diaries were forbidden. By then, though, the nature of war diaries had begun to change significantly. From the Crimean War, for example, there emerged diaries by doctors and nurses cataloguing the horrors they saw. It was during the Crimean War, too, that Sir William Russell, the first war correspondent, kept a journal, a practice he continued at the Battle of Bull Run in the American Civil War and later in the Zulu War.

Why did diary keeping become so common in the nineteenth

century? One factor surely was the publication in the early decades of that century of two of the most popular and enduring diarists, namely Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, who were near contemporaries, friends and prominent figures in seventeenth-century London. Their diaries record whatever took their fancy, from the mundane to the momentous. Nothing, it seems, was unworthy of memorial. But neither did they shrink from describing the great events of their day, such as the execution of Charles I, the Great Fire of London and the Plague. War was never far off and it is interesting to compare how both diarists reacted to it. Here, for example, are their entries for 11 June, 1667, a humiliating day in English history, in the midst of a prolonged war with Holland.

‘To London,’ writes Evelyn, who at the time had been appointed to prepare a report on the condition of St Paul’s Cathedral, ‘alarmed by the Dutch, who were fallen on our fleet at Chatham by a most audacious enterprise. They entered the very river with part of their fleet, and did us not only disgrace but incredible mischief in burning several of our best men-of-war lying at anchor and moored there – and all this through our unaccountable negligence in failing to set out our fleet in time. Fearing lest the enemy might adventure up the Thames even to London – which they might have done with ease, and fired all the vessels in the river too – this alarm caused me to send away my best goods, plate, etc, from my house to another place. The alarm was so great that it put both county and city in panic, fear, and consternation such as I hope I shall never see more. Everyone was flying, none knew why or whither. Now were land forces dispatched, with the Duke of Albemarle, Prince Rupert, and the Duke of York, to hinder the Dutch coming to Chatham. They fortified Upnor Castle, and laid chains and booms. But the resolute enemy broke through all, set fire to our ships, and retreated in spite, stopping up the Thames, with the rest of their fleet lying before the mouth of it.’

Pepys, like Evelyn, never saw action. He was, however, first secretary to the Admiralty, a key role in a country whose national security depended heavily on the strength of its navy. His account of 11 June is therefore that of an insider with much personally to lose:

‘Up, and more letters still from Sir W. Coventry about more fire-ships, and so Sir W. Batten and I to the office, where Bruncker come to us, who is just now going to Chatham upon a desire of Commissioner Pett’s, who is in a very fearful stink for fear of the Dutch, and desires

help from God and the King and kingdom's sake. So Bruncker goes down and Sir J. Minnes also, from Gravesend. This morning Pett writes us that Sheerness is lost last night, after two or three hours' dispute. The enemy hath possessed himself of that place, which is very sad, and puts us in great fear of Chatham. Sir W. Batten and I go down by the water to Deptford, and there Sir W. Pen and we did consider of several matters relating to the dispatch of the fire-ships, and so W. Batten and I home again. To business hiring some fire-ships and receiving every hour almost letters from Sir W. Coventry calling for more fire-ships, and an order from Council to enable us to take any man's ships; and Sir W. Coventry in his letter to us says he do not doubt but at this time under an invasion, as he owns it to be, the King may by law take any man's goods. At this business late, and then home, where a great deal of serious talk with my wife about the sad state we are in, and especially from the beating up of drums this night for the trainbands upon pain of death to appear in arms tomorrow morning with bullet and powder, and money to supply themselves with victuals for a fortnight.'

Pepys' initial concern when he learned a day later that the Dutch had actually broken the chain across the Medway and taken the *Royal Charles* was to preserve his personal savings. His second thought, as his biographer, Claire Tomalin notes, was that the Navy Board would be held responsible for the débâcle and that he would be made a scapegoat, with execution a real possibility. Luckily for him, the Dutch withdrew.

What Pepys gives, says Tomalin, is a 'backstage' view of war. 'There is confusion, jealousy, backbiting and greed; blame is laid, loyalties are divided; there is rejoicing – sometimes premature – as well as panic and despondency. The sound of guns is heard in the distance several times, and more immediate turmoil is produced by rioting, unpaid soldiers and the weeping of wives of pressed men. His job throughout was to supply and maintain the fighting force.'

For Pepys, then, war was witnessed at a remove, his sentiments those of an educated, cultured man who had no desire, or necessity, to place himself in danger. War in the seventeenth century, as it was until the twentieth century, was largely waged by those who had little alternative but to join up. Conscription – the forced recruitment of men into the military – has long been established as a means of supplying troops, whether by statute or force. Conscripts though were often unwilling soldiers and some countries preferred to rely on recruitment. Britain, for example, did not maintain a large conscript army in the years leading

up to World War I. The poster featuring the face and pointed finger of Lord Kitchener with the words 'Your country needs you' remains one of the most potent images of that conflict. So successful was the recruitment campaign that Britain did not need to introduce conscription until 1916, by when many millions were already dead.

World War I has been described by Ronald Blythe, author of *Each Returning Day: The Pleasure of Diaries* as 'the most diarised event in history'. Over fifty diaries for the years 1914–18 are listed in William Matthews' *Annotated Bibliography of British Diaries*, which first appeared in 1945, and many more have come to light since. Almost every aspect of the war is represented. In August 1914, Beatrice Webb reports that there is no enthusiasm about the war. It is, she writes, 'a passionless war, a terrible nightmare sweeping over all classes, no one able to realise how the disaster came about'. Arnold Bennett's reaction is to stockpile petrol while W.N.P. Barbellion feels physically sick at the thought of the carnage to come.

None of them has any chance of seeing action. They will sit out the war at home. That is not the case with Private Horace Bruckshaw, who rushed to join up, driven by patriotism and eager to leave behind his humdrum life. In his Gallipoli diary, Bruckshaw relates with deadpan humour the reality of war. He goes out hunting for snipers as if they are wild boar. A comrade is wounded in the chest. 'It made us a wee bit nervous as he was sitting next to me,' he writes. A day later we learn that nearly all the officers have been killed by snipers. It pours with rain but he sleeps soundly nonetheless. A shell drops just after they have completed their ablutions. Shrapnel is served up for breakfast. He helps make a new road and bury a dead officer. What is remarkable about Bruckshaw's record is its laconic good humour and lack of self-pity. The facts are left to speak for themselves. A conservative estimate puts the number of dead at Gallipoli at over a quarter of a million, of whom 26,000 were British. Bruckshaw survived only to be killed two years later at the Battle of Gavrelle. His body was never found.

It is a familiar story. In diary after diary, the misery of the 'war to end all wars' is graphically depicted, in contrast to the life the soldiers have left behind. But what is also remarkable is the way hope gives way to despair. In 1914, wrote the historian Lyn Macdonald, 'the spirit and the attitude of the men who were actually doing the fighting was strikingly different from the attitudes of the civilians and those who were flocking to the colours at home and around the Empire. Their

war, their blooding and their disillusionment was yet to come. Brooke, Grenfell, Owen, Sassoon, Hodgson, made no secret of their idealism (and how soon it changed with the experience of war!) and it is difficult for succeeding generations to identify with their extraordinary view of war as a purification, their strange resignation to dying, their passive embracement of fate, their unquestioning acceptance. The questioning and the bitterness were born later, in the stultifying horrors of trench warfare.'

There is no better illustration of how that bitterness developed than Siegfried Sassoon's diary. When war broke out, Sassoon enjoyed the empty life of an English country gentleman, hunting in particular. He joined up in 1914 and saw no action until 1916. In France, in December 1915, he writes as if he is still back in rural England. His pony tries to jump a ditch and fails. He sees a heron 'which sailed slowly across the misty flats of ploughed land'. Robert Graves gives him some of his poems to read. 'I am happy, happy,' he writes on 17 December. 'I've escaped and found peace unbelievable in this extraordinary existence I thought I should loathe. The actual life is mechanical; and my dreams are mine, more lonely than ever. We're safe for another year of war, too, so next summer ought to do something for me. Anything but a "cushy" wound. That would be an awful disaster. I must endure, or else die.'

But it is not long before Sassoon's humour turns sour. In the summer of 1916 at the Battle of the Somme, at which every infantry regiment in the British army fought, Sassoon kept a daily, at times hour-by-hour, record. By end of the opening day of the battle – 1 July – the British had lost 57,470 officers and men – 19,240 of them killed, 2,152 missing, the rest wounded. The British army had never suffered losses like it. But it was not alone. Over the course of the 142-day battle, it is estimated there were also 650,000 German casualties.

'Since 6.30 there has been hell let loose,' wrote Sassoon. 'I could see one man moving his left arm up and down as he lay on his side: his head was a crimson patch.'

As the months pass, he becomes almost anaesthetised to the horror. Where once there was respect now there is cynicism. Near the end of the war, on 16 June, 1918, all innocence lost, Sassoon wrote: "What's the weight of *your* pig?" asked a witty Colonial. Coming up a communication-trench, he squeezed himself against the chalky side of the trench to make room for two men who were coming down; they were carrying a dead body slung on a pole. This is how

the Canadians take their corpses away from the front-line. They tie the hands together at the wrists; feet ditto. Then sling the body on a pole. What splendid common-sense! And how jolly the War is! But I wished they'd put a sandbag over his face.'

Sassoon's diary, unlike his poems, appeared long after World War I was finished but some diarists, such as Sarah Macnaughtan, published their diaries while the war was ongoing. Of independent means and unmarried, Macnaughtan had some training as a nurse and during the Boer War went to South Africa as a volunteer with the Red Cross. When World War I broke out, she joined Mrs St Clair Stobart's Red Cross women's unit as head orderly. When the unit was ordered to evacuate Antwerp, besieged by the Germans on their advance to France, she stayed on to continue her work independently.

Macnaughtan had to deal with the fallout of war. She makes soup and tea ceaselessly for frozen troops, treating Allied and German casualties as necessary. Helping her in the kitchen are ladies who have never peeled a spud in their lives. George V pays a visit and she remarks, 'God bless him! He always does the right thing.' On 12 December, 1914, she writes: 'Such a nice boy died to-night. We brought him to the hospital from the station, and learned that he had lain for eight days wounded and untended. Strangely enough he was naked, and had only a blanket over him on the stretcher. I do not know why he was alive . . . No one knew who he was. He had a woman's portrait tattooed on his breast.' Macnaughtan herself died in 1916, a year after the publication of *A Woman's Diary of the War*.

But while the war rumbled on in Europe, its reverberations could be felt all over the globe. In England, in particular, with only the Channel as a buffer, news from abroad was awaited with trepidation. On 27 April, 1915, Lady Cynthia Asquith learns of the death of Rupert Brooke, who had died four days earlier, not on the battlefield but of septicaemia en route to the Dardanelles. 'It does stab one to think of his beautiful poet's face with the cornfield head,' she writes. 'I am told he was absolutely convinced he would be killed in this war and he wrote lovely poems bidding farewell to things he loved – the "touch of fur" was one I thought original. It is rather sad it that it should have been an illness.'

Meanwhile Virginia Woolf tries to maintain some semblance of normality – attending a concert, writing a novel, doing odd jobs – only to find herself repelled by London crowds and the faces of people



on the tube. 'Really,' she writes, 'raw red beef and silver herrings give me more pleasure to look upon.' Another home-front perspective comes from Mrs Henry Dudeney, a bestselling novelist of the day. Based in Lewes in Sussex on the south coast, she veers between depression ('No good attempting to keep a diary. War news awful, the whole of life grim') and dealing with domestic traumas and trivia ('At lunch, I was so tired and when poor Ernest asked me to sew a button on his breeks I flew into a rage').

These differing perspectives are a reminder that war affects us all in varying ways depending upon our situation. What is universal, however, is the sense that this is an event which cannot be ignored. For good or ill, it is transformative, whether a war is just or unjust, justified or unjustified. But it is worth bearing in mind the words of A.J.P. Taylor: 'Bismarck fought "necessary" wars and killed thousands, the idealists of the twentieth century fight "just" wars and kill millions.'

War in the twentieth century certainly became industrial in its capacity to kill human beings, largely through technological 'advances'. 'The First World War,' wrote Phillip Knightley in *The First Casualty*, 'was like no other war before or since. It began with the promise of splendour, honour and glory. It ended as a genocidal conflict on an unparalleled scale, a meaningless act of slaughter that continued until a state of exhaustion set in because no one knew how to stop it.' According to H.G. Wells, it would be 'the last war'.

It was one of his more ludicrous predictions. There was never any prospect that war in the twentieth century would become redundant. When one war ended another sprang up. It was like trying to put out bush fires. And when nations weren't fighting one another they were at war with themselves. In Spain, in 1936, Nationalists faced Republicans, in a bloody conflict in which approximately 300,000 died. George Orwell was one of the fortunate ones. Fighting on the Republican side, he was wounded by a stray bullet and invalided out. 'The pain,' he wrote, 'was diabolical, making me swear and then try not to swear, because every time I breathed too hard the blood bubbled out of my mouth.'

By then, though, a much bigger and even more brutal war was looming. Whether Hitler actually set out to cause the Second World War as part of an evil master plan or blundered into it partly by accident with more than a little help from his incompetent and ignorant cohorts has much exercised historians. But what is beyond doubt is that long before Austria was annexed to the Nazi Reich in March 1938

or Germany marched into Czech Sudetenland in the autumn of the same year, war was unavoidable whatever the most optimistic appeasers believed.

As early as 1933, Victor Klemperer, a Dresden Jew who had fought for Germany during World War I, recognised the danger of Hitler. On 30 March, two months after Hitler became Chancellor, and a month after the burning of the Reichstag, he writes: 'Mood as before a pogrom in the depths of the Middle Ages or in deepest Czarist Russia . . . The dominant feeling . . . is that this reign of terror can hardly last long, but that its fall will bury us. Fantastic Middle Ages: "We" – threatened Jewry. In fact I feel shame more than fear, shame for Germany. I have always imagined: The twentieth century and Mitteleuropa were different from the fourteenth century and Romania. Mistake – Dember [a friend] describes the effects on business: Stock Exchange, setbacks for Christian industry – and then "we" would pay for all of it with our blood. Frau Dember related the case of the ill-treatment of a Communist prisoner which leaked out: torture with castor oil, beatings, fear – attempted suicide . . . Our parting (after abundant good food) was like a leave-taking at the front. Yesterday a wretched statement in the *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten* – "on our own account". They are 92.5 per cent founded on Aryan capital, Herr Wollf, owner of the remaining 7.5 per cent has resigned as chief editor, one Jewish editor has been given leave of absence . . . , the other ten are Aryans. Terrible! – In a toy shop a children's ball with the Swastika.'

But you did not need to be a Jew in Germany to sense the coming catastrophe. When finally war was declared there was a clamour of foreboding. 'Even as when someone dies,' wrote Harold Nicolson, a Member of Parliament, 'one is amazed that the poplars should still be standing quite unaware of one's own disaster, so when I walked down to the lake to bathe, I could scarcely believe that the swans were being sincere in their indifference to the Second German War.' 'It's the gnats and flies that settles on non-combatants,' noted Virginia Woolf. 'This war has begun in cold blood. One merely feels that the killing machine has to be set in action.' Edward Robb Ellis, a journalist and an inveterate diarist, wrote: 'I realise I am but one of millions of worried Americans living our daily lives amidst a rumbling, as though of an oncoming earthquake.'

The Second World War surely eclipsed its predecessor in the number of diaries it produced. The diarists came from every walk of life, every

nation involved in the war, and every theatre of war. Many were written by soldiers, sailors and airmen, by generals, despots and pacifists. Count Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law, kept a diary, as did Goebbels, Hitler's right-hand man, and Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke and John Colville, both of whom had Churchill's ear. Among the writers who kept diaries during the war were Jean-Paul Sartre, Evelyn Waugh, Naomi Mitchison and Norman Lewis. William L. Shirer, an American journalist, described what life was like in Berlin, as did Marie 'Missie' Vassiltchikov, a White Russian *émigrée*, who managed to maintain an idyllic lifestyle until as late as 1941.

Everyone's war was unique. James Lees-Milne worried about the devastation to country houses. Walter Musto, a sixty-year-old eccentric civil servant was interrupted by air-raid sirens while sunbathing nude in his garden. Iris Origo, in Tuscany, housed evacuated children and hid escaped POWs. Joan Wyndham, meanwhile, fell for a diminutive Yugoslav painter who insisted on making love to the accompaniment of Beethoven's C Minor Quartet, and Joyce Grenfell and Noël Coward entertained the troops.

'This is the war of the unknown warriors,' said Winston Churchill in 1940, contrasting World War II with World War I. 'The whole of the warring nations are engaged, not only soldiers, but the entire population, men, women and children. The fronts are everywhere. The trenches are dug in the towns and streets. Every village is fortified. Every road is barred. The front lines run through the factories. The workmen are soldiers with different weapons but the same courage.'

On the continent of Europe, of course, Hitler's killing machine was working round the clock in an insane attempt to wipe out Jews. There are countless diaries by victims and survivors of the Holocaust, some even written in concentration camps, others chronicles of life in the ghetto. They are a record of what it is like to live through hell, the scale of the tragedy hard to comprehend. Yet through many of these diaries, burdened as they are with despair, hope persists. The oppressed wanted in their hearts to believe the best of their tormentors. They couldn't have been more misguided. 'The Germans want to drain the marrow from our bones,' wrote Avraham Tory, a survivor of the Kovno Ghetto in Lithuania, on 8 April, 1943, 'they want to use us until the last moment of our lives, when they will take us to the Ninth Fort, or to a forest, to exterminate us.'

There is no more poignant diary, and none more famous, than that

of Anne Frank. ‘How can we explain the continuing influence of her diaries on both Jewish and non-Jewish readers alike?’ asked Elie Wiesel. ‘Is it the age of the author that so affects us? Her innocence perhaps? Other young people, her contemporaries, have described what they saw and experienced in the ghettos of Poland and Czechoslovakia. Hers is the only account to have captured and conquered the hearts and imagination of the wider public.’

Frank’s age – she started her diary on 12 June 1942, her thirteenth birthday, and died while imprisoned at Bergen-Belsen, three months short of her sixteenth birthday – and her innocence are undoubtedly part of the diary’s appeal, but a large part of it must also be because of the peculiarity of the situation in which she and her family found themselves. Fearful of arrest and deportation to a concentration camp, the Franks – Anne and her sister Margot, her mother, Edith, and her father, Otto, went into hiding on 6 July 1942 and remained there until they were betrayed and discovered by Nazi collaborators on 4 August 1944. Only Otto Frank survived the war.

Anne’s diary, addressed to an imaginary friend called Kitty, was found by a friend of the family after they were arrested and returned to Otto Frank after the war. For a while he could not bear to read it but when he did he was overcome. ‘What I’m reading in her book is so indescribably exciting,’ he wrote to members of his family, ‘and I read on and on. I cannot explain it to you! I’ve not finished reading it yet, and I want to read it right through before I make some excerpts or translations for you. She writes about her growing up with incredible self-criticism. Even if it hadn’t been written by her, it would have interested me. What a great pity that this life had to go . . . We are all changed, only the core of our being remains.’

The diary was first published in Holland in 1947 with the title, *Het Achterhuis*, a literal translation of which is ‘The Back House’. It was immediately hailed as a classic but foreign publishers were slow to pick it up. After initial reluctance, it appeared in Germany in 1950 but sales were slow. English and American publishers were even more reluctant and it was rejected by many of them. In England it was published in May 1952 by Vallentine Mitchell, a small Jewish publisher, and a month later in the United States. There was considerable controversy over the title. Among the suggestions were *Beauty Out of the Night*, *Families in Hiding*, *Behind the Hidden Door*, *The Hidden Annex* and *The Secret Annex*, which was the title of a novel Anne hoped to write using her diaries

as source material. 'The title alone,' she wrote, 'would make people think it was a detective story.' Ultimately, it was agreed to call it *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. By 1971, sales in paperback in English alone had reached a million.

For Elie Wiesel, himself a survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald and a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Frank's diary was not so much a book as 'a wound'. Whether it was one that could ever heal he did not say. What is not in doubt is that more than fifty years since it was first published this very special document still has the capacity to speak directly to us and render us speechless at the knowledge of what human beings are capable of doing to one another. Frank's diary was her testimony to future generations, her way of bearing witness. 'I look upon our life in hiding as an interesting adventure, full of danger and romance, and every privation as an amusing addition to my diary,' she wrote on 3 May, 1944. She would rather give herself up than surrender her diary. When, on Easter Sunday 1944, police almost discovered the inhabitants of the secret annexe, they became even more paranoid and one of them – 'the most terrified member of the group' – suggested she burn it. But that was unconscionable. 'Oh, not my diary; if my diary goes, I go too!'

Anne Frank was one victim among millions in a war that contaminated every continent and almost every country. WWII ought to have been the war that ended all wars but there was little likelihood of that. 'The danger,' wrote the poet and painter Keith Vaughan in his diary in September 1945, 'is that it will be only too easy to slip back into taking everything for granted, and everything we have learned in these years will be forgotten. It will be so easy to go on again just as if nothing had happened.' How prophetic Vaughan's words proved to be. The second half of the twentieth century may not have been as bloody as the first but there were still wars aplenty, still too many instances of man's inhumanity to man. Korea. Vietnam. Nigeria. Bosnia. The Middle East. The Falklands. India and Pakistan. Chechnya. Iraq. Haiti. The list goes on and on and we seem to learn nothing from the experience other than to acknowledge that when it comes to killing one another human beings have an appetite for it like no other species. War, it seems, like the poor, will always be with us.

This anthology, *Those Who Marched Away*, includes extracts from around 200 diarists published in English, dating from the seventeenth century to the present day. Many of the wars which happened during that period

are included, though not all. A short account of each war mentioned is provided at the end of the book together with biographical details of the diarists. Inevitably, given their scale, there are more entries devoted to the First and Second World Wars than any other. Entries are arranged day by day throughout the year, which sometimes means that the strict chronology is disrupted and for which we beg the reader's indulgence. Original spellings and idiosyncratic syntax have been retained though we have undertaken some silent editing for the sake of clarity. Our aim was not to attempt comprehensiveness. Rather, we hoped to provide a portrait of war drawn from as many points of view and from as many perspectives as possible. War is tragic, but not exclusively so. The gloom is relieved with humour, comradeship and moments of epic grandeur. There is courage and cowardice, fear and loathing, love and hatred, selfishness and generosity. War is full of such contradictions. As Anne Frank, the doyenne of war diarists, said, 'We still love life, we haven't yet forgotten the voice of nature, and we keep hoping, hoping for . . . everything.'

## JANUARY

What did you do in the Great War, daddy?

*Recruiting placard, 1914-18*

## 1 January

1826 [Abbotsford]

A year has passed – another has commenced. These solemn divisions of time influence our feelings as they recur. Yet there is nothing in it; for every day in the year closes a twelvemonth as well as the 31st December.

The latter is only a solemn pause, as when a guide, showing a wild and mountainous road, calls on a party to pause and look back at the scenes they have just passed. To me this new year opens sadly. There are these troublesome pecuniary difficulties,<sup>1</sup> which however, I think, this week should end. There is the absence of all my children, Anne excepted, from our little family festival. There is, besides, that ugly report of the 15th Hussars going to India. Walter<sup>2</sup> I suppose, will have some step in view, and will go, and I fear Jane [his wife] will not dissuade him.

*Sir Walter Scott*

1916 [Lewes, England]

At midday, horrid shock. Letter from Lock Hospital,<sup>3</sup> saying Bessie G [former servant] going to have a baby. I must 'remove' her. Poor Bessie, the 150 soldiers at the Grammar School<sup>4</sup> were her undoing.

*Mrs Henry Dudeney*

1940 [Yorkshire]

I look out of the window into the fog and gloom of a New Year's morning. So much as I can see of the garden gleams fully of congealed

<sup>1</sup> Scott had debts of £130,000 following the collapse of the printer and the publisher of his books.

<sup>2</sup> His elder son who rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Hussars.

<sup>3</sup> Women suffering from VD were forced, due to a late nineteenth-century Act of Parliament, to remain in 'lock' hospitals until they were cured.

<sup>4</sup> Soldiers were billeted in the Grammar School situated next door to the author's house.



snow. No sound of bird nor any sign save a confusion of claw prints about the terraces of the rockery where yesterday the birds were fed. A bitter cold and still silence prevails without having the rumourless indifference to life of a maiming cartwheel, unpersonal as the earthquake in Turkey, as relentless as warring man's inhumanity to man these troubled days.

A very different story is this from my entry of a year ago when first I started this diary; nor could one then see the calamities upon us. Sitting by the comfortable fireside of my cosy room this night it is not easy to realize the horrors of present-day political and military events, or the truth of the fantastic stories of the organized mutilation of thousands of Jews by sterilization, of the urination by their guards into the mouths of prisoners in concentration camps, of awful floggings and suicides by compulsion and all the rest of the sadistic stuff going on behind the scenes in the name of war for political domination. In the twentieth century, in spite of the better distribution of wealth, spreading education, improved social amenities, general material advancement and wider culture, we are back to the bestially crude indignities and violences of the Dark Ages.

*Walter Musto*

1940 [Silesia]

Olga Pückler,<sup>1</sup> Tatiana<sup>2</sup> and I spent the New Year quietly at Schloss Friedland. We lit the Christmas tree and tried to read the future by dropping melted wax and lead into a bowl of water. We expect Mamma and Georgie [her brother] to appear any minute from Lithuania. They have announced their arrival repeatedly. At midnight all the village bells began to ring. We hung out of the windows listening – the first New Year of this new World War.

*Marie 'Missie' Vassiltchikov*

1940 [Wiltshire]

As midnight struck, Ralph [her husband] and I went out into the garden to see if we could hear the bells from the village church. But only total silence met our ears, and 1940 crept its way in, in a dense cold mist. We gathered up the prophecies for the New year,

<sup>1</sup> Olga and her husband were hosts to the Vassiltchikovs and had loaned them money.

<sup>2</sup> Her sister who later became Princess Metternich.

made that afternoon with Faith and Nicko Henderson and R. sealed them and put them away in an envelope. How wrong will they be? Then he brought us tiny glasses of neat whiskey to drink to the future.

*Frances Partridge*

1941 [USA]

I really must try to keep this journal more regularly. It will be invaluable to me if I do. Because this year is going to be one of the decisive periods of the twentieth century – and even the doings and thoughts of the most remote and obscure people will reflect the image of events.

That's a hell of a paragraph to start with. Why are we all so pompous on New Year's Day. Come off it – you're not Hitler or Churchill. Nobody called on you to make a statement. As a matter of fact what did you actually do?

*Christopher Isherwood*

## 2 January

1777 [Allentown, New Jersey]

This morning we were called up at 2 o'clock under a pretended alarm that we were to be attacked by the enemy but by daylight we were ordered to march for Trenton, and when we reached Crosswicks found that the brigade had gone. We reached Trenton about 11 o'clock and found all the troops from our different posts in Jersey, collected there under Gen. Washington himself; and the regular troops were already properly disposed to receive the enemy, whose main body was then within a few miles and determined to dispossess us.

Trenton stands upon the River Delaware, with a creek called the Assanpink passing through the town across which there is a bridge.

The enemy came down on the upper side of the creek, through the town, and a number of our troops were posted with Riflemen and artillery to oppose their approach.

The main body of our army was drawn up on a plain below, or on the lower side of the Assanpink, near the bridge, and the main force of our Artillery was posted on the banks and high ground along the creek in front of them.

Gen. Mercers brigade was posted about 2 miles up the creek, and

the troops under Gen. Cadwalader were stationed in a field on the right about a mile from the town, on the main road, to prevent the enemy from flanking. We had five pieces of Artillery with our division about 20 more in the field, near, and at the town. Our numbers were about five thousand and the enemy's about seven Thousand.

The attack began about 2 o'clock and a heavy fire upon both sides, chiefly from the artillery continued until dark.

At this time the enemy were left in possession of the upper part of the town, but we kept possession of the bridge, altho' the enemy attempted several times to carry it but were repulsed each time with great slaughter.

After sunset this afternoon the enemy came down in a very heavy column to force the bridge. The fire was very heavy and the Light troops were ordered to fly to the support of that important post, and as we drew near, I stepped out of the front to order my men to close up; at this time Martinas Sipple was about 10 steps behind the man next in front of him; I at once drew my sword and threatened to cut his head off if he did not keep close, he then sprang forward and returned to the front. The enemy were soon defeated and retired and the American army also retired to the woods, where they encamped and built up fires.

I then had the roll called to see if any of our men were missing and Martinas was not to be found, but Lieut. Mark McCall informed me, that immediately on my returning to the head of the column, after making him close up, he fled out of the field.<sup>1</sup>

We lost but few men; the enemy considerably more. It is thought Gen. Washington did not intend to hold the upper part of the town.

*Thomas Rodney*

1781 [Pennsylvanian Line, New Jersey]

Yesterday being the last time we (the officers of the regiment), expected to be together, as the arrangements was to take place this day, we had an elegant Regimental Dinner and entertainment, at which all the Field and other officers were present, with a few from the German Regiment, who had arrived with the men of their regiment that belong to the Pennsylvanian Line. We spent the day very pleasantly

<sup>1</sup> The author later noted: 'In justice to Martinas I must add that he afterwards joined the Delaware Regiment under Col. David Hall and became a brave and faithful soldier.'

and the evening 'till about ten o'clock as cheerfully as we could wish, when we were disturbed by the huzzas of the soldiers upon the Right Division, answered by those on the Left. I went on the Parade and found numbers of small groups whispering and busily running up and down the Line. In a short time a gun was fired upon the Right and answered by one on the right of the Second Brigade, and a skyrocket was thrown, and accompanied by a general huzza throughout the Line, and the soldiers running out with their arms, accoutrements and knapsacks. I immediately found it was a mutiny, and that the guns and skyrocket were the signals. The officers in general exerted themselves to keep the men quiet, and keep them from turning out. We each applied himself to his own company, endeavoured to keep them in their huts and lay by their arms, which they would do while we were present, but the moment we left one hut to go to another, they would be out again. Their excuse was they thought it was an alarm and the enemy coming.

Next they began to move in crowds to the Parade. Lieut. White of our regiments, in endeavouring to stop one of these crowds, was shot through the thigh, and Capt. Samuel Tolbert in opposing another party was shot through the body, of which he is very ill. They continued huzzaing and firing in a riotous manner, so that it soon became dangerous for an officer to oppose them by force. We then left them to go their own way.

This day Col. Stewart and Richard Bulter joined Gen. Wayne in hopes they could turn them when they grew cooler, being much agitated with liquor, when they went off, it being New Years day they had drawn half a pint per man. The men have continued going off in small parties all day. About one o'clock one hundred head of cattle came in from the Eastward, which they drove off to their main body, which lay in a wood near Vealtown, leaving a few behind for use of the officers.

When we came to draw provisions and State stores this day, we found that near half of the men of our regiment had remained.

The men went off very civilly last night to what might have been expected from such a mob. They did not attempt to plunder our officers' huts or insult them in the least, except those who were obstinate in opposing them. They did not attempt to take with them any part of the State stores, which appears to me a little extraordinary, for men when they get but little want more.

The militia are called out, they are to assemble at Chatham, in order to oppose the enemy if they come out, or the mutineers if they attempt going to them.

*Eno Reeves*

1916 [Russian Front]

Our doctors went to visit an invalid soldier in a remote corner of the village and to their horror found lodged in one small hut no fewer than 17 soldiers. There was no room even to move, they said, and the air was so foul and thick one could have cut it with a knife. The soldiers pointed out that they preferred to be huddled together and warm under a roof to being frozen outside under a tree. We knew that accommodation was very scarce; we knew, too, that there were refugees who at night would crowd twenty or thirty into one dug-out. The District Commandant was approached, but seemed powerless to help. 'It is only for a time,' he repeated, 'only while the soldiers are in reserve. In a few days' time, they will be back with their regiments and there will be room enough and to spare.' Some of the poor peasants' huts were in a disgraceful condition; hygiene was totally lacking; pigs and hens, taken under cover for the winter, lived with the family and spread dirt and discomfort on every side. Rightly or wrongly, these terribly unhealthy conditions are being accepted as inevitable in wartime. No one can, or dare, raise a finger to change them.

*Florence Farmborough*

1973 [New York]

I am so anguished and angered by the American bombing of North Vietnam that I've written letters of protest to President Nixon and our New York Senators.

It's possible that some time in the future someone may ask what I did to try to stop such horrors, and I want to be able to say that I lifted my voice against them. In fact, I'm urging all my friends to write similar letters. If millions of Americans were to do this, and if a tally were kept in the basement of the White House, perhaps Nixon might get our message.

In my letter to Senator Jack Javits I said that for the first time in my life I am ashamed to be an American.

*Edward Robb Ellis*