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REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH OF A FIELD MARSHAL

by Henry Williamson

I WENT to see *Oh, What a Lovely War*! because I had served as a young volunteer with the infantry in Flanders in the autumn of 1914, and had taken part in the Christmas truce. Later, I served in Artois; on the Somme; and in the Ypres Salient. By the early summer of 1918 I had done with the Western Front and was ~~having a mile~~ on the East Coast until Armistice, when I was posted to a Dispersals Unit at Folkestone. In September, 1919 I returned to the 1st Battalion of my Regiment, then at Cannock Chase, to be demobilised.

The 1914 Christmas Truce in Flanders lasted for five days and nights. Not a shell fell, no bullet cracked overhead. I learned, to my surprise — then being still under-aged — that the Germans in *feld grau* believed the same things that we British believed. While helping to bury their dead lying in Noman's Land, their *Gott mit uns* — in indelible ink on the crosses made of ration-box wood — was the same God on our side. *Für Vaterland und Freiheit* — For God and Freedom! But we British were fighting for freedom, too! Thus my young mind . . .

Our Christmas presents included a brass box from Princess Mary. It held cigarettes and pipe tobacco — the equivalent of the German meerschaum pipe with the Kronprinz on the bowl.

It was amazing to discover we were the same sort of people!

'Englische Prinzessin Mary, her gift to us. Deutscher, Kronprinz Wilhelm! Cousins you see. Your Kaiser — grandson of Queen Victoria, she — very fond of him!'

'Prinzessin! Schön!' replied my opposite number, puffing his Meerschaum pipe. 'Kronprinz ~~Prachtiger~~ Kerl!'

I didn't like to say that Little Willie was a joke with us (from cartoons in the newspapers) for these German words meant 'decent chap'.

Happily we exchanged gifts — a tin of bully beef for a little packet of tobacco. There were many unopened boxes of bully beef chucked away in the wood behind our lines, with boxes of pipe tobacco and cigarettes; the daily ration was said to be 5,000 cigarettes per man, or two pounds of tobacco — all Duty Free Gifts from England, organised by newspapers. As for Fray Bentos bully beef, many trench bottoms were paved by unopened blue tins for hundreds of yards.

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The truce lasted until New Year's Eve. The ground was frozen, but no snow had fallen by then. Nor any shells.

The Brighton Rubbish Dump Xmas Day battlefield was all white. Certainly the producer of *Oh, What a Lovely War*! had to do something to hide the old perambulators, tins, pianos, with plastic and cardboard rubbish of the Brighton Corporation . . . but why the black smoke of a shell or two? (Germans, of course, with black smoke). Our 18-pounder shrapnel burst with white smoke; and the lyddite smoke of British 60-pounders was yellowish. There was not one shell falling on Xmas Day in Flanders.

On New Year's Eve a message came over to our lines. We were asked to keep our heads down at midnight, when *automatische pistolen* would fire our way, as the German Regimental (Brigade) staff went round their lines. And at 11 p.m. — Berlin midnight — the machine guns opened up, but the flashes went high.

All through the war on the Western Front few of us had any feeling of hate for the Germans. To hate was the privilege of the Home Front, which harboured revengeful feelings and made the Treaty of Versailles. This was signed by the 'the old men' on July 19, 1919, while I was serving with the Dispersals Unit on the Kent coast. I climbed up to Caesar's Camp on the Downs behind Folkestone, and saw the speckles of fire which (one knew) were covering Britain from all along the south coast to Caithness. Beacons glowed on all the hills, the war to end war was over! Sadness — and an indefinable dread — possessed me. Soon I should be back in a lost world of Civvy Street.

The next day I read in one of the papers that, at Versailles Palace, Marshal Foch, late Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces on the Western Front, had pointed on the map of Europe at the German port of Danzig on the Baltic, and remarked, 'That is where the next war will begin in twenty years' time!' For much German territory was to be handed over to Poles, Slovaks, Czechs, etc.

Foch was not altogether accurate. September, 1939 was twenty years *and two months* after Versailles. And for some time after the signing, the blockade of Germany continued, while children died of starvation, bread being still half-sawdust. And the French used black colonial troops, who did not behave well. Child harlots were used, or abused. And so Civil war, almost of a private nature began and continued during the 'twenties with scores of thousands of dead.

Oh, What a Lovely War! began well. The preliminaries moved me. I re-entered the life I had known when at school. Here was the feeling we had (from newspapers, deriding everything German) in the years before August, 1914. For the film truly reflects the period of great wealth and splendour when, through our colonies and shipping, we were the Golden Grocers of the world.

But the film says nothing of the lives of two million near-destitute Britons living with no roofs over their heads in Edwardian England's Green and Pleasant Land.

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Among the landed families, schooled by inheritance and education *to serve*, were miniature welfare states: schools, churches, village halls, visiting the sick, and pensions for those who had worked all their lives on the estate. But among the aspiring middle-classes of those days ('the Forsytes') the 'lower orders' were considered almost to be a sub-species of that Britain which ruled both the world and its waves.

The film shows us a hint of this as the war darkens into 1917 on the Home Front. We see a Suffragette, Sylvia Pankhurst, pleading for peace from a plinth in Trafalgar Square. I was there, I saw her, I was home on leave from the front. She was jeered by Australian soldiers and others: a brave and tragic figure conveyed in the film by our superb Vanessa Redgrave.

Here let me speak aside. In August, 1914, many babies of Army Reservists called to the colours died of starvation in the slums. Mothers, milkless and near penniless, bought 2d. loaves of white bread which they boiled, to give the warm liquid to their screaming babes.

We heard of this in Flanders from some of the reservists re-called to the Colours — the Regular battalions with whom we Territorials were brigaded. These old sweats, survivors of Mons and Le Cateau, acted as nurses to us all. They were bearded, including the junior and company officers. Quiet voices; a brotherhood of mutual respect and duty. These were the men who stopped the Germans breaking through to Ypres — these pre-war workless who had joined the Army for a shilling a day at a time when the word 'soldier' was a social stigma among the clean and respectable working classes.

> These, in the day when heaven was falling,
> The hour when earth's foundation fled
> Followed their mercenary calling,
> And took their wages, and are dead

wrote A. E. Housman, that classic historian and poet, in his *Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries*, at the time.

The poem isn't spoken in the film. It was in my head while I watched the sequences on that small screen in Wardour Street, deeming them to be fair enough, though sometimes shallow: the [illegible]e-characterisation of General Sir Douglas Haig, for example: and the apparent eagerness of his lady wife that her husband should succeed the 1914-15 Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshall Sir John French.

What is the truth? Lady Haig had never desired that her husband should be a senior General. She knew that by such soldiers great burdens must be borne by night and by day. (I have this from the highest authority). Also, surely it was General Sir Douglas Haig's duty to report, after the *experimental* battle of Loos in September, 1915, that Field-Marshal Sir John French had deliberately altered a major item in his Dispatches, viz:- the

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time of handing over the reserves — two new Kitchener Divisions — which had arrived by road from St. Omer on Y/Z night, 24/25 September, several hours before the battle was joined; and in an exhausted state.

The march up by night was hot and oppressive. On the narrow roads were many halts. Road control was not possible. Motor and horse'd vehicles, both going and returning, caused traffic blocks. There were deep ditches on both sides of the narrow roads. No lights could be used. Cross-roads caused additional blocks. Battalions had to get into single file. A staff officer wrote afterwards, 'It was like trying to *push* the Lord Mayor's procession through the streets of London without clearing the route and holding up the traffic.'

There were long stoppages at numerous level-crossings, to allow the shunting and running of supply trains . . . for the French were already fighting a tremendous battle, and required priority. And all experience has to be bought with blood and tears, particularly so in war . . . And curses.

At Place à Bruay, the 64th Brigade (of the 21st Division, New Army) was held up during 90 minutes; and again at the next level crossing, for 45 minutes of that hot and oppressive night in darkness. There had been, of course, co-ordination, or *liaison*, between the French and British Q staffs; but there was also racial disparagement between French and English.

But worst of all, when the 72nd Brigade (of the 24th Division) commanded by Brigadier-General R. B. Mitford, reached the outskirts of Béthune, the four battalions of the Brigade were halted by a 'Redcap' (Military policeman) because 'the brigade commander had no pass to enter the area'.

And thus and thus the columns marching through a rainy night became ragged, lost, taking wrong turnings which led to retracing steps against the wretched masses of traffic; horse and man become slow and heavy with a first experience of war's reality.

In the small hours of Saturday, September 25, 1915, from 1 a.m. onwards, they arrived, in darkness becoming grey and spectral, at the rear area where soon a few batteries of heavy guns, howitzers, and 18-pounders would rock the world of each man, solitary where he lay in the arable fields besides the roadsides. And abruptly the sky leapt and flickered with light, and the earth beneath each man felt to be the bubbling of a great cauldron.

It was Zero hour — 4 a.m. The battle of Loos had begun. Three hours later, reports came in to First Army headquarters at Hinges that I. and IV. Corps had broken through the first defence system of the enemy. General Haig sent a staff officer by car to G.H.Q., urging the necessity of the XI. Corps being ready to advance in support.

Then another message: I. and IV. Corps had reached the German front-line trenches: and might XI. Corps be pushed on at once?

Two hours had been lost. The 21st and 24th Divisions should have been on the move forward at 6.30 a.m. to follow up the initial assault.

When another hour had been lost, Sir John French yielded to more urgent demands: he moved XI. Corps up the line, but retained the 21st and 24th Divisions 'in general reserve', i.e. under his own orders. This was at 9.30 a.m.

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Nearly five hours after Zero Hour the first brigades were on the march up to the battle. Their cookers — ovens and cauldrons on wheels — had been left behind. Some Junior Staff Officer, name unknown, had ordered all transport to be 'massed behind the Divisions'.

I knew that mining country of slag heaps, little villages ('corons') near pit heads and, away in front, whither the little and few roads lay, rising downland, from where everything was overlooked by the Germans from the fortress of Hill 70.

And in the comparative silence of noon, the position was static. The British attack had been undertaken (by the British War Cabinet's orders) to help the French. The French Tenth Army, away to the north, had failed to take their objective, the Vimy Ridge . . . (The autumn sun was going down behind the battlefield like a septic wound upon a dying world of great loneliness. Weary files of laden men in greatcoats trying to move along the margins of a narrow road congested with down-traffic, pocked by shell-craters, and lined with irregular rows of wounded men recumbent and sitting amidst clustering blow-flies).

Sir John French certainly had a case. To push reserves through a narrow gap in the enemy's defences is to have your men 'pinched off'. Yet the Secretary of State for War — Lord Kitchener — had directed that 'the attack be pushed vigorously'.

And when, eventually, the 21st and 24th Divisions were 'flung into the battle' (as the current phrase ran) on Z-plus-1 Day (a Sunday) the Germans had returned to their trenches.

The British lines of advancing infantry broke under fire, and went back in disorder. The Germans were seen to be standing on their parapets, watching them. Our new troops had been asked to do too much, and too soon — unfed, unwatered, untrained. That is why Marshal French had held them back. But in his Dispatches, later, he had apparently forgotten *when* he did this.

A word for Sir John French. He was elderly. He had borne the mental strain of the Retreat from Mons and Le Cateau, in August, 1914, with almost no *liaison* — communication — with the French Armies. Indeed, many British stragglers, with worn boots and near-blank minds, had dropped out during the retreat, after a week of fighting all day and marching back all night. These stragglers were found wandering about by French patrols and shot out of hand as spies.

For the beginning of any war is chaotic. In the rapid advance of the Germans in August and early September, 1914, two German Army Corps (roughly 200,000 men with artillery and all services) were 'lost' for several days by German Main General Headquarters. This led to cancellation of the order to march on Paris, and to the British 'victory' on the Aisne, followed by the French 'victory' on the Marne, as the Allies followed the retreating Germans.

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The British advance continued through Flanders to the North Sea, Sir John French reaching Ypres before the German columns; and we held that town. It was gradually rising country, and wooded in places, east of Ypres; and then *in October* began the battle which went on night and day with massed attacks by the Germans, and that is where we Territorials came in, and marvelled at the calmness of the bearded Regular soldiers, men and officers alike, and never a harsh word in the wood which we held until the battle ended in mid-November and the rains came and we were up to our waists in icy yellow water, and when it froze our boots felt solid, our finger nails pierced by thorns, our greatcoats stiff and heavy as boards; and tears froze on the cheek-bones of many a 17- and 18-year soldier feeling that he was lost for ever and for ever as he tried to sleep upon the hard ground.

The old soldier is a haunted man.

Those nightmare mass-attacks — the sky dilating and roaring with light north and south of the Menin-Ypres road looked a bit different from what we heard on Xmas Day, 1914, a few weeks after the battle had ended in German failure.

'We had one rifle among three *kamaraden*, Herr Englander,' explained a dark-eyed youth with a wispy goatee beard. 'We were students only, and volunteers. Your *automatisch pistolen* were too many for us.'

I learned later that not one Maxim gun remained in operation, after the battle, with the B.E.F. All had been knocked out; including two modern Vickers guns, privately bought before the war by the 14th Battalion of the London Regiment.

What our 'opposite numbers' had mistaken for machine-gun fire into their massed ranks was the 'five-rounds-rapid-fire' of pre-war British and Territorial Army training.

(Are you keeping watch on Wenlock Edge, my Shropshire Lad, for the rest of your 1914 *Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries*?).

> Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
> They stood, and earth's foundations stay:
> What God abandoned, these defended,
> And saved the sum of things for pay.

Those eye-staring, dry-throated attacks on barbed wire, across level No-man's Land, starting early in 1915, in Artois . . . across watery levels the German wire was plain to see; and it was uncut. Our guns had very few high explosive shells. (Later, it came out that Lord Kitchener had decided that shrapnel shells — which explode in the sky and rain down leaden

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bullets — were the shells required to *cut* barbed wire).

The attacks — to 'keep up the offensive spirit' — were political in origin. They came from the Cabinet to the War House, thence by Chief of the Imperial General Staff to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, Sir John French. The attacks, we were told, were 'to relieve pressure on the Russian Front', or, 'to help the French offensive by drawing the enemy reserves North.' So down went the P.B.I. — the 'poor bloody infantry'; and hundreds, thousands of 'officer-material' fell to the mort-blast of the *automatische pistolen* from the Berlin arsenal at Spandau.

Naturally no officer, from second-lieutenant to Field Marshal, wishes to lose his men. Especially on foregone conclusions. So at that battle of Loos in September, 1915, as had been mentioned, the Commander-in-Chief tried to save the exhausted volunteers of New Army men from collapse on that Saturday morning, when we used chlorine gas and some of it drifted back on our chaps. We used 'the expedient', as it was called, because of our lack of heavy guns to destroy the enemy strongholds.

As for the men of the 21st and 24th Divisions, they were obviously not fit to be put into battle.

In any case, the old hero had shot his bolt; and that is what Haig felt it his duty to report. And General Haig was given a Field Marshal's baton.

While the much-praised *Oh, What a Lovely War*! was being made on the Brighton Corporation Rubbish Dump, I had a letter from Mr. Len ~~Leighton,~~ then producing the film. We were already acquainted, and Mr. D. wrote to say how much he had learned from my five novels — one for every year of the Great War (as it was called when I was soldiering). I replied that he could make use of any of the facts in the novels for his film. (*How Dear is Life; A Fox under my Cloak; The Golden Virgin; Love and the Loveless;* and *A Test to Destruction* which covers the Home and War Fronts during the five years).

The facts of 'Passchendaele', for example: how, in August, 1917 when, after the brilliant opening of the campaign on July 31 at the Pilckem Ridge, it began to rain; and it rained on during what was to become the wettest summer for 60 years in Flanders. Then the rain ceased awhile; but started again on Y/Z night of the 2nd Battle, and very bad the terrain became thereafter. But Haig had given Marshal Pétain his word that he would keep up the pressure: for, early in August of that year (1917), the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies had gone to him and told him in confidence that there were 40 French divisions in passive mutiny in and beyond the Champagne area; and should the Boche know of this, he could march to Paris without opposition.

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So, having promised help, Haig kept up the attacks in Flanders. There followed seven more battles, all set-pieces like the first which had captured the Pilckem Ridge — a slight rise in the ground near to Ypres, which had overlooked the British positions.

Passchendaele village lay — nearly all of it — in ruins on the eastern horizon, almost seven miles from the Menin Gate at Ypres; and only a little more than half a hundred metres above sea-level. Ypres was below sea-level, but kept dry in normal times by dykes draining water into the canal which was cut east to Nieuport and so through sluices in the sea-wall to the North Sea — great gates which opened as the tide lapsed from the sands, and were closed again by the rising tide.

In that month of August, 1917, so wet, Germany was in sore straits for some raw materials, rubber particularly. She must win quickly; or lose the war. Her gas-masks were of leather, and lasted only a few minutes: steel wheels, with springs only for cushioning, on lorry and motorcar alike.

Britain also was in sore straits: a month's supply of food in the country, for the German submarines were sinking more British ships than could be built. So both armies went for a knock-out.

By November the stump of the church north of the sky-line village of Passchendaele was reached. No longer could the Germans hold their gunnery school on the upper slopes of the ridge whence the artillery cadets had seen below them, during three years, from ground-level slits in their massive concrete *mebus* ('pillboxes' to us) fifty square miles of shell-holes, now lip-to-lip with water. The battlefield was one great morass wherein every single-file wooden infantry track (duck-board) and heavier, wider beech-wood slab 'road' was deep-littered with corpses of animals, broken limbers, and men, added-to nightly to the drone and scream and pulversing roar of bursting shells.

Little or no movement by day: every movement would be spotted: location fixed on gunnery map: ranged within seconds: shrapnel shells sent screaming over from the Gheluvelt ridge on the German left flank, where scores of heavier guns and howitzers enfiladed our wretched, drowned positions.

By November, 1917, all that was ended. We were on the Ridge overlooking, to the east, a new green country — the Plain of Flanders!

How many soldiers know, even today, that 'Passchendaele 1917' caused a German offensive of 30 divisions to be given up — a drive in the direction of Paris? The Germans had missed the opportunity in the spring of 1917 when those French divisions (and a Russian brigade, who had started the 'rot') were in passive mutiny in the Champagne.

Likewise it seems to be not well known what German History has to say about the series of battles officially called Third Ypres, but commonly known in England as 'Passchendaele'. German military historians declare that 'Haig remained Master the Field'. He had destroyed over 80 of their Eingreif Divisionen — each Shock Troop Division averaging, perhaps, 12,000 men.

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The German Army, they say, never recovered from the mauling it had received. The German *morale* in the West was low. Ours was hardly better. Mutinies had occurred in several of our Infantry bases, prominently at Etaples. And, as has been said, the French Army was as good as done for. And no wonder, after the appalling slaughter in 1914, only matched by Nivelle's win-or-lose fatal offensive — all eggs in one basket — in Champagne, in the spring of 1917.

We, of the British Fifth Army, heard of that mutiny in May, 1917, when we had advanced out of the Somme morasses to higher green downland — cuckoos calling, larks singing, swallows in the blue sky, butterflies — following the enemy withdrawal to the *Siegfried Stellung* (called, by us, the Hindenburg Line). I was sitting in the Expeditionary Force Canteen, recently erected near Achiet-le-Grand (rebuilt) railway station, with an old acquaintance in the Cambridgeshire Regiment of Newmarket days, when he told me that 'two French Army Corps are marching on Paris'.

The Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig is said to have been partly inarticulate to visitors calling at G.H.Q. during the war. Politeness, one suspects, led him to listen, rather than to 'hold forth'.

A friend of mine, who served with the 24th Battalion, The London Regiment (~~Territorials~~) told me the following story. In June, 1916 they were coming out of The Labyrinthe (that place of long and terrible fighting, in 1915, lying east of Lens-Arras road, described in *Le Feu* by Henri Barbusse, the first and finest of the 1914-18 war books).

The sector was now in the British Zone (Third Army) and the 24th Londoners, who had been three weeks in the line, were now relieved, and nearly 'all in', as they went along the road to Arras, some carrying firebuckets, and other clobber. And, suddenly, there was the Field-Marshal, standing in a G.S. waggon, with members of his staff, besides the road.

The battalion was halted, ordered to close up.

'Be like the Guards', urged the Commander-in-Chief. 'Remember that the Guards came out of action, after the days and nights of the retreat from Mons, with all their ammunition pouches filled. Be like the Guards!'

The story went the rounds that the Guards hadn't fired a shot throughout the retreat from Mons . . .

Another story, told to me after the war by Lt. Col. Charlie Foss, V.C., D.S.O., of my Regiment (the 16th Foot). On April 9, 1917, when the Vimy Ridge was taken, in a snowstorm, by the Canadians — a brilliantly successful battle (17,000 prisoners) — Haig motored to Arras. Looking in the direction of the battle he asked 'Where is the Vimy Ridge?'

Charlie Foss, an exquisite painter of wild flowers, seemed to consider this to be an odd enquiry for so eminent a soldier. 'Where is, the Vimy Ridge?' Well, I couldn't see where it was, when I was there in May, 1917. On the

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map, it lies north of Arras; and so do several other downland risings. And one thinks, which one *is* the Vimy Ridge? And asks a passer-by; to learn that it lies almost due north of the city, is distant about seven Kilometers, and on slowly rising ground.

I still can't see the point of Charlie Foss's remark . . . he already knew, of course . . . having been in the very successful British and Canadian assault . . .

I approve, I like the spirit of *Oh, What a Lovely War*!, except for the unknowledgeable scenes where the Madam Tussaud figures of the General Officers prance upon the stage of the Brighton Pier Pavilion. These dummies come only to ventriloquial life: certainly not to truth in the matter of the 60,000 British casualties on July the First, 1916, when the battle of the Somme was joined.

That Saturday was a day of great heat. Pinkish dust from villages, destroyed by bombardment far behind the German lines, hung high in the air. The British 4th Army plan was a slow advance of four lines of infantrymen who were practically carrying parties.

Each line was to walk forwards slowly, at one mile an hour. The objective was the Bapaume Ridge, five miles away to the east.

The idea was to cross a totally destroyed terrain on a twenty mile front which was five miles deep . . . and dig in on the Bapaume Ridge, preparatory to the German counter attack in a few days; to smash the attack with the help of the new-formed Machine Gun Corps, and let the cavalry through into open country. Cavalry, being in effect fast, mobile infantry.

Now German military history records that their Army facing our Fourth Army (which was to fight the battle under General Rawlinson) came near to evacuating the battlefield the night before our assault. Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, at his Army Group H.G. in Bapaume — a long red brick village built beside the main road — called a conference of all his General Officers, to discuss evacuation by their soldiers before the battle was joined.

Had the British an unknown weapon? How else could the British Fourth Army hope to succeed? For weeks the entire German positions had been under heavy bombardment. From the air, the terrain seemed to be totally destroyed by the new British Ministry of Munitions' batteries of 6-inch howitzers.

But appearances were deceptive. For, unlike the German dugouts in the battle of Loos — two and three metres underground in the chalk — the new German dugouts, linked for miles by tunnels, had 40 wood-cased steps down to a depth of 10 metres, each room wood-cased like the connecting tunnels or corridors. Whereas, the British 6-inch howitzer shell penetrated only about a metre and a half into the top stratum of chalk; and so the dugouts were left intact.

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There had been many British raids into the front-line trenches for prisoners to be taken back for identification of units. Could it be that every one of the British reports upon these raids had omitted to state that the new dugouts remained intact under such bombardments?

At this point a German Intelligence officer asked permission to speak. His information was decisive. A message had been intercepted on the German Moritz listening-mechanism. The British Fourth Army Commander had transmitted a message to all troops of his army, to the effect that little opposition could be expected from the German Army on Zero Day — tomorrow.

So, on the morrow, four lines of cumbered British infantry moved slowly forward with the sun in their eyes and keeping line; while in the craters of Noman's Land in places 6-700 yards wide the German machine gunners waited, their Spandau guns pointing east and west, to take the advancing lines in enfilade.

By the afternoon of that day of torrid heat 60,000 men had fallen to the ground. For not one Raid report, of the scores carried out by the British Infantry entering the German front lines during the darkness of June nights, had reported the fact *that there were 40 steps down into the dugouts.*

The Staff wasn't to blame. The information had not been passed on by any of the battalion Intelligence officers. True, Field Marshal Haig had had some doubts. It is recorded that he said to his 4th Army Commander, who was to fight the battle, 'The Infantry Training Manual lays down the principle of "Rush the Position". Have you considered that, Rawly?'

'Yes, Chief, I have,' came the reply. 'There will be little opposition from the Boche front line defences.'

It is a moving last scene in *Oh, What a Lovely War*! — white-shirted and trouser'd youths, wraiths of some of the dead young soldiers wandering back to the South Downs. It might have been below Caesar's Camp, where I had stood alone on Peace Night, July 19, 1919, watching the beacons flaming all along the South Downs. For the dead were with me then, as they are now. And they reappeared in the film, silently; and they were in summery clothes as they sat or lay at the edge of acres upon acres of white wooden crosses; and, as the camera panned, more and more crosses, thousands upon thousands of ghostly crosses, were revealed. And, beside the crosses, but a little apart, stood Haig (played by gentle, compassionate John Mills) a lone, reflective figure.

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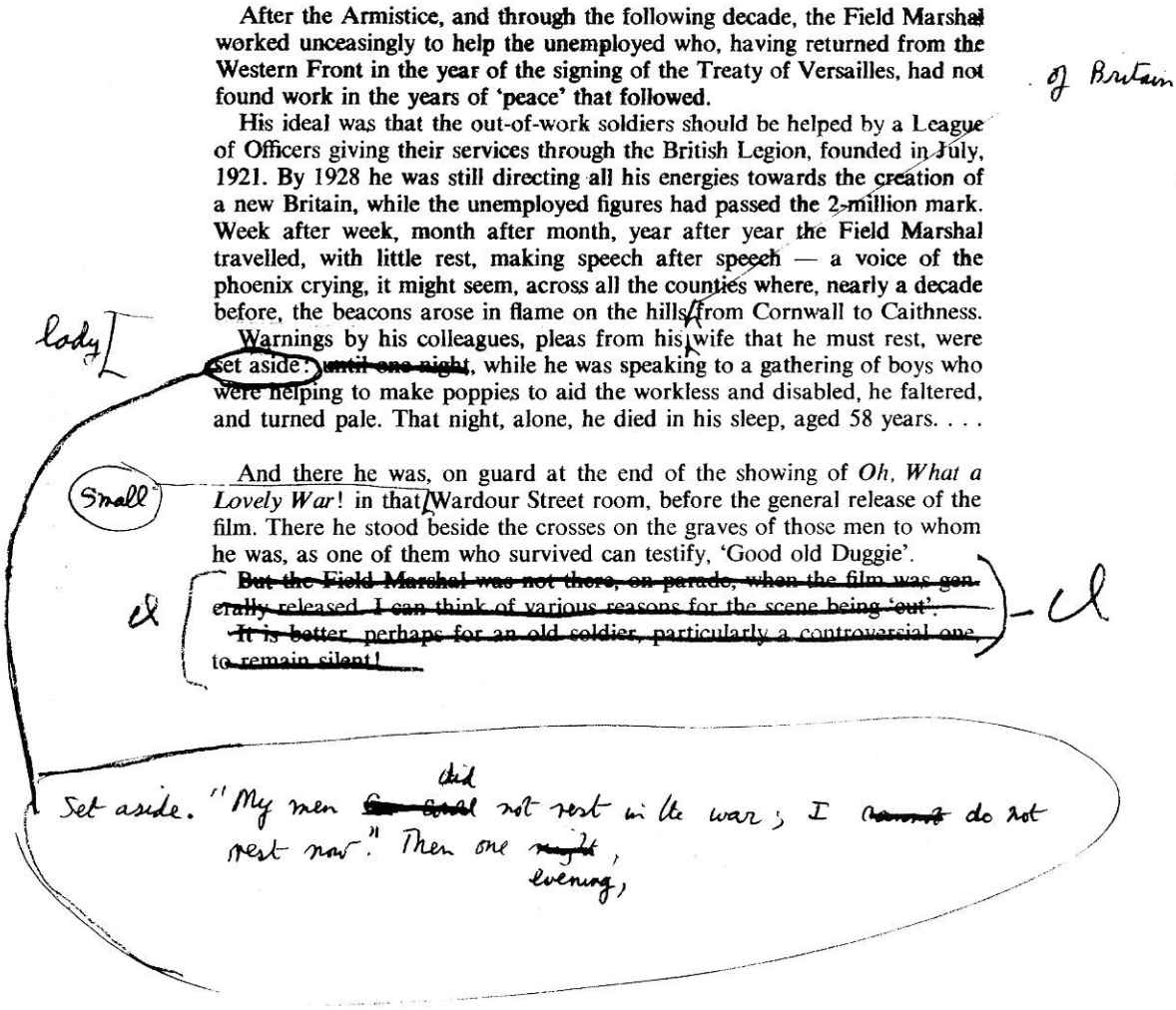

After the Armistice, and through the following decade, the Field Marshal worked unceasingly to help the unemployed who, having returned from the Western Front in the year of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, had not found work in the years of 'peace' that followed.

His ideal was that the out-of-work soldiers should be helped by a League of Officers giving their services through the British Legion, founded in July, 1921. By 1928 he was still directing all his energies towards the creation of a new Britain, while the unemployed figures had passed the 2-million mark. Week after week, month after month, year after year the Field Marshal travelled, with little rest, making speech after speech — a voice of the phoenix crying, it might seem, across all the counties where, nearly a decade before, the beacons arose in flame on the hills from Cornwall to Caithness.

Warnings by his colleagues, pleas from his wife that he must rest, were set aside; ~~until one night~~, while he was speaking to a gathering of boys who were helping to make poppies to aid the workless and disabled, he faltered, and turned pale. That night, alone, he died in his sleep, aged 58 years. . . .

And there he was, on guard at the end of the showing of *Oh, What a Lovely War*! in that Wardour Street room, before the general release of the film. There he stood beside the crosses on the graves of those men to whom he was, as one of them who survived can testify, 'Good old Duggie'.

~~But the Field Marshal was not there, on parade, when the film was generally released. I can think of various reasons for the scene being 'cut'. It is better, perhaps for an old soldier, particularly a controversial one, to remain silent!~~

Set aside. "My men did not rest in the war; I do not rest now." Then one night, evening,

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