The Hundred-Year Itch, or Remembering The Great War

Here are some facts about

The Great War. It started in 1913.

We know that from books.

and the scarred nobles

grandma met in the deli

off 23rd and 8th,

Ich hätte gerne eine Bratwurst

they'd say, eyes scared red.

It was my fault; I must admit,

quanta exist in different places and

in different times;

some have been in my brain,

and also in Hitler's old brain

the war's most famous vet.

Not quite Afghanistan; still, his war

and my war was the same,

A vicious trick,

Russian saboteur

made disasters, it’s true,

walk with me here:

the Soviets invade in 1979.

Great Britain joins France

as the Marne collapses,

a wet snowdrift, over-heavy

in 1914. Add the numbers.

We surround ourselves with stories,

these fluid lines always converge.

Remember that line, the human

marching through town, shrive-faced,

boots laced tight, cap perched on his

kiss-me forehead, rifle shouldered,

we’re gonna beat the Hun—

there’s another line, now, 451AD,

Attila plundering across the plain,

stopped by whom? The Roman? No—

Aetius heads a motley crew of Frank

and Gaul, Suebi, Goth and Visigoth,

and *Saxon*! Yes, the Germans saved

the West from Hunnic rule!

Until—it always comes around to this,

that boy marched home again

some years after the great siege,

at Verdun, Ypres, or Somme;

really it doesn’t matter.

Siege used to mean sit, but he won’t;

not without his boots and cap,

all that chipper stuff gone,

he’s been unseated, the siege lifted

his mien took on a leaner slant,

suspicious eyes for prying words

could not prepare a waiting world

for what came next.

Plenty! Champagne *avec vous*

on all the quays and ways

of Venice, Paris, Bruges;

Sur la table, Monsieur?

If you weren’t there, you can’t know,

and he wasn’t. All there.

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When will war weary of me. Woeful wight,

wailing across the width of destiny,

I sprawl comfortless in a rancid hole,

a thick cloth great-coat stiff with sweat and grist

my second skin, then, for a skull, some tin

riddle: helmet, brain-pan, will you sit still?

The unfrozen mud’s alive, the stench, strong,

rat I’d say, someone’s let them in. Writhing,

muse for a Rosenberg, a whole den’s worth:

and that’s a good day, without bullets, bombs,

or the whistling artillery storm—

the rain of steel shrapnel, cutting like wind

across Europe’s newly irreligious plain—

flesh, it seems, has a its breaking point, splits wide

the human spirit spills, squandered, betrayed

amid the great gulf between my chilled hand

and the quiet, marble hand of German kin;

or British, or French—what odd clay. The flesh

grieves, parted by that vast, pitted waste,

unshrivened the filthy flesh yearns to be

whole again; compartmented, sufficient,

Unified. one man, one nation—one God.

***

A great civilizing wind stirs on the plains.

Leaves cast off the towns, like trees,

the Supple young men march in step

all balled fists, full of boasting oaths

they stride, ennobled by a promise

of liberation, plunder, and rape.

The best of the land! This lot’s the best!

But someone’s pulled a cruel prank.

At the front, the sergeant calls time

with a note pinned to his back. It reads:

“Take my wife, she’s free.”

Below, a crude sketch.

***

On a computer or smartphone,

an educated citizen

has just checked the market. It’s up,

cause for optimism, and sun,

and a feast fit for all the hounds

who prowl our sordid memory,

just looking for some sad excuse

to get me back out in the fury

Heroes fighting heroically during the battle for the Meuse-Argonne, which as everyone knows guaranteed peace for generations of Europeans and was a useful investment of human life and energy. Via US Army Europe Public Affairs

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Great WWI-era Austrian Writers: Musil, Zweig, Roth

During this ongoing centenary of the First World War, I became more interested in the details of the Italian front in that war, a campaign not generally well-known to Anglophones like me. It did not take me long to realize that I was also quite ignorant, historically speaking, of their opponent—the Austrian-Hungarian empire. A friend recommended Robert Musil's

The Man Without Qualities as a very philosophical novel that I would appreciate. From there I discovered Joseph Roth's *Radetzky March* and other novels, and Stefan Zweig's varied fiction and his memoir, *The World of Yesterday*.

All three writers, Musil (1880-1942), Zweig (1881-1942), and Roth (1894-1939), share many similarities. The first thing is that they were all exact contemporaries. They were all born and came of age at the height of fin de siècle Viennese culture. They were all outsiders in that society to some extent. Zweig and Roth were both secular Jews, and Musil's wife was Jewish. All three had books burned, and were ultimately destroyed themselves by the Nazis. Like almost everyone, they were affected by the First World War, and dedicated most of their authorial attention to describing Austrian society before and after the war. All three were preoccupied by suicide, a prevelant theme in Viennese culture then. They were dedicated to literature and the arts, and despite different styles, I believe them to be among the greatest writers of the first half of the century in any language.

When I realized that Musil's magnum opus *The Man Without Qualities* was over 1000 pages, I decided to approach him via a more accessible route. His early novel *The Confusions of Young Törless* is also critically acclaimed, and I immediately understood why. Published in 1906, *Törless* is a Bildungsroman about young boys in an all-male military boarding school, mirroring Musil's own early experience. It is both disturbing and fascinating how Musil probes the psychology and motivations of the three main characters in forming a sort of triumvirate of power over the other boys in the class. This early novel also vaguely foreshadows the latent cruelty and bigotry combined with Germanic militarism that would devolve into the future Nazi state.

The Man Without Qualities (*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften)* was Musil's ongoing project from the early 1920s until his death

in 1942. It is very openly a “novel of ideas,” somewhere between *The Brothers Karamozov* and *The Magic Mountain*. It is easily one of the greatest works of high Modernist fiction, somewhere between *Ulysses* and *In Search of Lost Time*. Though unfinished, its three volumes run to over 1700 pages in some editions, and around 1100 for the English translation. The unusual title refers to the protagonist Ulrich, a young mathematician who is searching for something like a meaning and morality to combat his seeming indifference to life and his place in bourgeois society. There are several other unforgettable main characters: especially Diotima, a cultural muse for Viennese society who held philosophical salons, and her would-be lover Arnheim, a wealthy Prussian businessman who also writes popular books of essays and rivals Ulrich’s intelligence. A character named Moosbrugger, a hulking laborer who murders a prostitute, provides an ongoing digression and topic of moral and legal interest for Ulrich.

As Musil had already demonstrated in an earlier volume of tales called *Five Women*, he had a particular talent for creating rich and interesting female characters, especially compared to other male writers from his time. In addition to Diotima, there is Clarisse, a more intellectual Holly Golightly-type, Bonadea, Ulrich’s bored housewife lover, and Agathe, his mysterious sister that appears only in the last part of the novel.

It seems like Musil’s ambition and his intellect were almost too much to be contained in this single sweeping novel. As a novelist, he seems too big for his time. *The Man Without Qualities*, written in the 1930s during the slow buildup to a bigger war, is set in the period just before the First World War. The main plot deals with the so-called Parallel Campaign, a military-like campaign to plan and execute a national celebration for the 70th year (!) of Emperor Franz Joseph’s reign which would occur in 1918 (the reader knows this never occurred, as he died in the middle of the war). There were

never any specific proposals drawn up, but it was to be a earth-shaking event of cultural and political importance that would remind the world of the centrality of the Austrian nation. It would also, by definition, compete against and surpass the simultaneous Prussian celebration of Kaiser Wilhelm's 30th year of rule. Ulrich was named as the secretary to the Parallel Campaign's director, and all the meetings were held in Diotima's salon. The fact that this event was founded in such a cultural and philosophical milieu is at odds with the real history of the upcoming war that Musil, and the reader, are all too aware of. The best way to describe *The Man Without Qualities* would be combining a satire of Austrian pre-war society with lyrical philosophical musings.

The novel itself is modernist in the sense that it is ironically self-aware and metafictional. It has chapter titles like Chapter One: "From which, remarkably enough, nothing develops." While the strength of the characters and the ideas are enough to propel the narrative for quite a while, it is true that the main plot increasingly feels bogged down by inertia as the pages multiply. At the same time, this fact itself, even considering that the book remained unfinished at Musil's death, feels almost intended. One gets the sense that this novel contains Musil's expression of despair over the First World War and all that was lost as well as a sense of the coming disaster of the next war. It feels as if this novel is Musil's alternate reality for an Austria and Europe that never fell into destructive war, while also satirizing the petty faults of the society that vanished in that war to be replaced by greater crimes and less humanity.

The last part of the novel is also the most inchoate and dreamlike, wherein Ulrich rediscovers his alienated younger sister in their family house away from Vienna. The pair regress into some sort of fantasy world while most of the plot and the world around them seems to gradually disappear. Even with its faults and difficulties, *The Man Without Qualities* is

and will remain a book for serious readers and thinkers for all time.

Joseph Roth's masterpiece is the 1932 novel *Radetsky March*, which follows the gradual decline of the Austrian Empire from 1859 until World War One. If Musil's work is comparable to modernist writers like Proust, Roth's novel is nothing less than a shorter and more ironic version of *War and Peace*. It follows three generations of the von Trotta family from the disastrous Battle of Solferino, which forced Austria to give up much of its Italian territory, to the middle of the Great War. It follows various characters, from servants to the Emperor himself, who is depicted with an empty brain and a constantly dripping nose. At the aforementioned battle, the founder of the von Trotta "dynasty" was a Slovenian lieutenant who stepped in front of an Italian bullet destined to kill the the young Franz Joseph. He survived and was ennobled by the grateful emperor, who thereafter followed his savior's career closely. The event became enshrined in legend and magnified in children's schoolbooks, so that the elder von Trotta became the famous "Hero of Solferino." This hero was so uncomfortable that he prohibited his own son from entering the military, and eventually called upon the Emperor himself to denounce the embellished version of the event.

The Battle of Solferino, though little known today, was one of the biggest and most important battles in Europe in the century between Napoleon and WWI. It was the last battle in history where the armies were all under the command of their respective monarchs (Napoleon III, Vittorio Emmanuele II, and Franz Joseph). It was so bloody that it led directly to the founding of the Red Cross and the establishment of the Geneva Conventions for armed conflicts. It was a disaster for Austria, which was forced to give up its richest Italian province, Lombardy. It was the first big loss for Austria in a series of setbacks that continued unabated until the Empire was disbanded following WWI, just after the end of Franz

Joseph’s 66-year reign. The symbolism of starting the novel with the Battle of Solferino is thus appropriate foreshadowing of the bigger tragedies to come, written as it was a over a decade after WWI of hardship and poverty for the new rump state of Austria.

The opening lines of the novel set a powerful and elegiac tone for the lost past and lost future of Austria and Europe, as seen from the early thirties:

“BACK THEN, BEFORE the Great War, when the incidents reported on these pages took place, it was not yet a matter of indifference whether a person lived or died. If a life was snuffed out from the host of the living, another life did not instantly replace it and make people forget the deceased. Instead, a gap remained where he had been, and both the near and distant witnesses of his demise fell silent whenever they saw this gap. If a fire devoured a house in a row of houses in a street, the charred site remained empty for a long time. For the bricklayers worked slowly and leisurely, and when the closest neighbors as well as casual passersby looked at the empty lot, they remembered the shape and the walls of the vanished house. That was how things were back then. Anything that grew took its time growing, and anything that perished took a long time to be forgotten. But everything that had once existed left its traces, and people lived on memories just as they now live on the ability to forget quickly and emphatically.”

Roth wrote a sequel to *Radetsky March* called *The Emperor’s Tomb* in 1938, the year before his death. It is curiously different in tone and style from the earlier novel; the high realism and irony is replaced with a more comical cynicism and looser narrative structure. It follows a character from another branch of the von Trotta family, and a Polish character related to a wealthy count in the earlier novel; otherwise there is no internal reference or connection between the two novels. *The Emperor’s Tomb* is set in Vienna after the

end of the war, where inflation, depression, and growing extremism now reign in place of the defunct emperor.

Roth's first novel was 1924's *Hotel Savoy*, set in the real and still existing namesake hotel in Łódź, Poland. The hotel serves as a way point and meeting place for soldiers making their way home from the eastern front after the war, along with a variety of other richly drawn character types. It is an almost journalistic account of the broken dreams but still abundant hope people had after the recent war. Here is a taste of the type of muscular melancholic prose Roth employs in this early novel:

"Things were going badly with these people. They prepared their own destiny and yet believed that it came from God. They were prisoners of tradition, their hearts hung by a thousand threads and the threads were spun by their own hands. Along all the ways of their lives stood the thou shalt not of their god, their police, their kings, their position. In this direction they could go no further, and in that place they could stay no longer. And so, after a couple of decades during which they had struggled, made mistakes and not known which way to turn, they died in their beds and bequeathed their wretchedness to their descendants."

Roth cranked out many short novels very quickly in order to make a living during his unhappy years of exile and alcoholism. None of these reach the greatness of *Radetsky March*, but the best of them is, I think, *Job*. It is a sort of morality tale of the Galician Shtetl Jewish community that Roth grew up, in which a desperately poor family reclaims a lost son in America. He deals with his Jewish roots in other books such as *Leviathan*, *The Silent Prophet*, and *The Wandering Jews*. *The Antichrist* is a sort of novelistic *cri de coeur* against the wave of violence and anti-Semitism in his native land, where his books went up in flames. He drank himself to death in Paris the year after the Anschluss, and a few months before the beginning of the new war he had long seen coming.

Stefan Zweig was a prolific writer and cultural figure in the three decades leading up to his death in 1942. His books were popular and best-selling throughout the 1920s and early 30s not only in the German world, but in Europe and the Americas. He grew up in a wealthy, non-religious Jewish family in Vienna. He wanted to be a writer since childhood, and published continuously in a variety of genres from age 19 to his death at 60. His fiction mostly consists of short stories and novellas, and only two full-length novels (one of which, *The Post-Office Girl*, was unfinished and published posthumously). He also wrote popular biographical and historical works, many of which celebrate his literary idols and influences, such as Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Rolland, Verlaine, and Nietzsche. Others include figures such as Marie Antoinette, Mary Stuart, Erasmus, and Magellan. He also wrote a few plays, plenty of journalistic articles, and a well-known autobiography, *The World of Yesterday*.

Zweig was a good friend and admirer of Freud, and that influence shows up constantly in his work. His fiction, but also his biography, is very focused on the psychological motivations of the characters. In a great number of his stories and novellas, the main events turn upon the obsessive and sometimes destructive personal and sexual relationships between characters. This was something not commonly found in literature of the time; Zweig, like Musil, was thus on the cutting edge of psychological writing of the 20th century. His works are the most accessible and entertaining of the three writers I have discussed. His style was fast-paced and full of surprise developments. His novel *Beward of Pity*, for example, is a real page-turner. Most of Zweig's work is so short because his editing style was to cut as much as possible until only what he considered essential to moving the story forward remained (something that could have served Musil well). In addition, his stories are particularly rich in complicated frame narratives in the form of second-hand narrators, discovered letters, etc., which is an old literary technique

that is difficult to pull off convincingly and often outgrows its welcome; nevertheless, Zweig somehow seems to enrich his fiction each time he uses this technique.

One of Zweig's best stories, in my opinion, is "Mendel the Bibliophile". It tells of an old Jewish book merchant who sits in the same cafe all day everyday and has a flawless encyclopedic memory of every page of every edition of every book, or at least every book that has moved through Vienna or Central Europe. He is taken away to a concentration camp when WWI starts, and when he returns years later, everything is changed and hostile. It is a rich and sad tale that, like much of Zweig's work, is evocative of the rich cultural and intellectual life of pre-war Vienna, and laments the destruction of that world by the war. The title and theme of the book also prefigure later stories by Jorge Luis Borges, who had no doubt read Zweig (who was one of the main delegates at the 1936 PEN conference in Borges' home of Buenos Aires).

Another of my favorites is the 1941 novella *Chess Story*, the last fictional work Zweig finished and published before his death. It tells of two incredible and highly unconventional chess masters who meet on a transatlantic ocean liner en route to South America. It is revealed that one of the men was imprisoned and psychologically tortured by the Nazi regime, but was eventually able to steal a small book from a guard's coat that turned out to be a chess manual. Like most of Zweig's work, it is insightful and sensitive to the vicissitudes of human suffering and success. In his novel *Beware of Pity*, the narrator says something which I think applies to the author himself: "Once you have gained some understanding of human nature, further understanding of it seems to grow mysteriously, and when you are able to feel genuine sympathy for a single form of earthly suffering, the magic of that lesson enables you to understand all others, however strange and apparently absurd they may be."

Zweig is well-known also for his memoirs *The World of*

Yesterday. The writer, typically focused on minor transformative episodes in his character's lives rather than big political issues, revealed the depth of pain he felt by the senseless violence of the First World War which shattered the Viennese culture he knew and loved as well as his vision of a unified, cosmopolitan, peaceful pan-European culture. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in learning more about pre- and post-war Austrian society, but it is also one of the most distinctive memoirs I have read in general. After he sent it to his publisher, Stefan Zweig and his wife killed themselves in their new home in Brazil, in despair of the seemingly unstoppable Nazi advance and what it would bring.

All three of these writers were, as I have said, hugely important writers in Austrian culture, but were also enemies of the culture and society that developed between the two wars. In addition to the millions slaughtered in vain in that infinite human folly known as World War One, these three writers were among the tens of millions who were gradually broken by the suffering brought about due to the first war and leading up to the next war. Although Austrians, and, from the Allied perspective, on the "enemy" side, these three writers, like all artists, transcended their national birthright by means of the universal and timeless art they produced. I have profited and enjoying reading all of them much more than any mere history of the wars they abhorred.

Extra author postscript: Gregor von Rezzori, born in 1914 and therefore of a different generation entirely, wrote some books which provide an fascinating commentary on and supplement to the works I have mentioned above. His provocatively titled *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite* is not actually his memoirs but a novel, even if closely based on the circumstances of the author's life. It recounts various minor episodes showing the paradoxes and inconsistencies within the antisemitic family and society the main character was raised in. His actual

memoirs, *The Snows of Yesteryear*, is reminiscent in tone and title to Zweig's memoirs. He tells of his life growing up in an old Austrian noble family that found itself outcast and culturally stateless in the eastern mountains of a newly independent Romania. The prose is rich and evocative of the same lost world recounted by Zweig, but it also reminds me of the Central European milieu Patrick Fermor encountered and described in *A Time of Gifts*. Rezzori spent the entirety of World War Two living as a civilian in Germany; though he was a military-aged male, his Romanian citizenship prevented him from being sent to the front, luckily for him and for us. He is well-worth reading for those looking for more writers from the extinct land of the Habsburg emperors, like Musil, Roth, and Zweig.

New Fiction by Matthew J. Hefti: "Jean, not Jean"

Illustration by Matthew J. Hefti

Jean, not Jean

by Matthew J. Hefti

When I look in the mirror, I think I look stupid. Otherwise, I don’t even think of how I look. But when I do look in the mirror, it’s like I can’t look away. Also when I do, I pick a lot. Today is especially bad.

My mom said once that it’s anxiety from stress.

My dad said, he’s thirteen. What’s he got to be stressed about?

I’m pretty torqued on the way to school. I don’t really know why. I think it’s because I missed the bus. I missed the bus because I couldn’t stop picking at myself, and I think it’s because I can feel everything—like how tight my socks are and how my feet are already a little moist and my socks aren’t doing anything about it, and my shirt’s a little tight in the armpits and it’s pulling at my armpit hairs, and one of the hairs in my eyebrows is curled or something and it’s really annoying me, and I think maybe I have a hair growing in my ear. I’m not sure.

My mom asks what she can do to put me in a better mood.

I tell her that she doesn’t have to do anything.

She says my happiness is important.

It’s important to you, I tell her.

Jean isn’t at school today. He’s probably my best friend. He had an allergic reaction yesterday. He’s allergic to pretty much everything.

Mr. Rogers is subbing again because Mrs. Neumann is sick. Mr. Rogers hates when we call him that and tells us to call him anything but that. We called him all kinds of things for a while, like Mr. Fluffy Head and Poo Poo Bear, but it got boring because he really meant what he said about being able to call him anything. He didn't care.

You wouldn't guess it by his name, but Mr. Rogers is this tough looking dude that used to be in the military. He still has a flat top.

Mr. Rogers calls Jean's name three times, pausing for infinity each time as if it's not completely obvious there's an empty desk and no one is responding. But he says it like Jean, like something you wear or like he's a girl, but his name is Jean, like Victor Hugo's hero. It rhymes with Shawn. You'd think he'd know that by now.

I've never read anything by Victor Hugo, but that's what Jean's mother always says when someone says it wrong: It's Jean, she says. Like the greatest hero in western literature, drawn in full by Victor Hugo. Except she says litra-ture. And then if people say, who's that, she won't answer. She just snorts a little like they're stupid.

I asked his mom once if I could see the picture of the Jean in the book. She said, What do you mean? I said, the one drawn by Victor Hugo. She snorted. I guess she thinks I'm stupid.

Jean told me that his mom named him that because the Jean in the book is like a kind of Christ.

I asked him what that was supposed to mean since there's only one God.

He said, he's not Christ. He's a type of Christ.

I said, you can’t be a type of something if there’s only one of that thing.

He said he asked his dad about it once and his dad said that the only thing he’s the hero of is the miserable ones.

Who? I said. Jean or Christ?

Jean shrugged. Both I guess.

I used to call him Jean too. Even though it’s Jean, not Jean. Everyone did. He’s small and kind of nerdy looking. Plus he’s sick a lot, and saying Jean made us feel stuck up. But now most of us have gotten used to it. It’s just his name.

I didn’t call him Jean because he was nerdy. I called him that because he was my arch nemesis. He stole my job as milk monitor last year, when we were in sixth grade. Each of us had a class duty, and I had the best one.

It wasn’t the best because counting the orders and getting the milks at lunch was so great or anything. But the milk monitor for the fifth and sixth grade classroom had to go with the milk monitor for the seventh and eighth grade classroom. And Heather Saint James was the milk monitor for the seventh and eighth graders. Heather Saint James didn’t have the prettiest face—that was Jennifer Gohrman—but she did have the biggest boobs in the school.

The way it worked was, the older kid would bring the milk crate and wait by our door. That was like the signal to Mrs. Neumann that she needed to wrap it up. Then she’d say, raise your hand if you want chocolate. Then, raise your hand if you want white. You’d count the hands and then go to the gym

closet with the older kid to get the milks, and then you'd bring them back.

Heather Saint James would put the milk crate on the ground to slide open the big fridge door to get the milks and put them into the crate.

I could see right down her shirt where those big heavy things were hanging. While she waited for me to stammer the count for our class, she would stay bent over like that with her hand on the bottom shelf. Like she didn't even realize they were there.

To get to the gym closet, you had to walk through the whole school and then finally the principal's office. You could go through the gym instead of the principal's office, but we weren't allowed to go that way.

When I was in fifth grade and David Pfeiffer was the milk monitor, I thought they made them go through the office because they were afraid the milk monitors would start playing in the gym on the way there. That was before Jean even went to our school.

But then when I got older, I realized that didn't make any sense because all the balls and toys and stuff were stored in the gym closet, which is where you had to go to get the milks anyway.

After I had spent some time as the milk monitor myself, I realized they made you go through the principal's office because they were probably afraid that if you went through the gym, you'd probably goof off in other ways. I never did though.

Jean says I chickened out and had plenty of chances, but that's not what happened. What happened is that he stole my

job.

One day while I was doing the sweater stare—it was fall by then—I had forgotten the count when Heather Saint James asked me the numbers. I thought fast and gave her two numbers that added up to eleven. That's how many students we had in our class after all.

But Jean doesn't drink milk. He's allergic. According to his mom, deathly allergic. So the real number was supposed to add up to ten.

I should have guessed that anyway because that's how many kids had been in my class my whole life until Jean showed up. But I remembered the new kid made us eleven.

It wasn't the first time I had gotten the numbers wrong. It wasn't even the first time I made the mistake of bringing back eleven milks. But the first time I did it doesn't count. I just did it that time because I thought that Mrs. Neumann would let me have the extra chocolate instead of taking it back.

She didn't like that.

I told her I couldn't take it back because Heather Saint James already went back to her classroom.

She told me that she was sure I would find my way. She was always saying that, even when it didn't make sense in context.

The time I forgot the numbers on accident, she asked why I brought back the wrong number of chocolate milks again.

I told her it was because I forgot Jean was allergic to milk.

She said, you know who won’t forget that Jean is allergic to milk?

No, I told her.

Jean. That’s who.

So she made Jean the milk monitor.

When I told my dad what happened, he laughed and said, Well, there’s dramatic irony for you.

I was pretty mean to Jean for a while. Then one day he asked why I cared about being milk monitor so much, and I told him it was obvious.

He said it wasn’t obvious to him.

I mentioned Heather Saint James.

He said, that’s it? Then he claimed he didn’t care about that because he could look at all the boobs he wanted because they had the internet at home. I think he just wanted me to like him.

He offered to stick his finger in one of the milk cartons so I could get the job back. I think he wanted to be liked so badly that he would have really done it, but I told him not to because they might give the job to anyone. And if someone else got the job, he’d just be risking his life for nothing.

It made me feel bad that he was so obsessed with being liked that he would risk his life to get a friend and also give up the chance to sneak peeks down the shirt of Heather Saint James.

So I said sorry for being so mean and that I wouldn’t view him as my arch nemesis anymore.

After me and Jean became friends, I asked him why he came to our school.

Jean said the public school told him he missed too many days. He didn’t want to be stuck in fifth grade.

So I asked him why he could be in sixth grade in our school when everyone said it was harder than the public school.

He said the state couldn’t tell our school what to do. Then he said our school was just as easy as public school. But going to any school is a waste of time, he said.

He had a point there.

When I asked him why he didn’t just get home schooled, he said his mom told him that all home school kids are weird.

He had a point there too.

But why our school? I asked. You’re not even Christian.

Yes I am, he said.

But you don’t go to our church, I pointed out.

Are you stupid or just brainwashed? he asked.

I told him he could use some milk of human kindness.

We both had a good laugh at that one.

It was milk that gave Jean the reaction yesterday, but it could have been anything considering practically half the normal foods in the world are like phosgene or mustard gas to him. I learned about phosgene and mustard gas yesterday in history class, not from Mr. Rogers, but from Jean.

When history class started, Mr. Rogers asked what we were learning about from Mrs. Neumann.

Jean told him World War One.

Tabby Gardner raised her hand and said, why do we always have to learn about wars in history class?

Mr. Rogers told her it was because wars were like the epicenter of an earthquake in a country's timeline with seismic waves moving out in every direction. If you wanted to, he said, you could pick any given war and study the whole country's history just by studying that war. You could ask yourself what led to the war and then what were the consequences of the war. By asking what led to the war, you could go as far back into history as you wanted. By asking what the consequences of the war were, you could study all the history from the war until the present and then as far into the future as infinity if you wanted.

Tabby Gardner told him we'd already been studying World War One for infinity.

I have to admit, I was pretty bored myself.

Well, Mr. Rogers said, if a war is like an earthquake in a country's timeline, then wouldn't a World War be like an earthquake in the entire world's timeline? So doesn't it make sense to spend time studying it?

Okay, Tabby Gardner said, but we already know everything about it.

Then tell me what you know about the war, Mr. Rogers said.

Jean raised his hand, like always.

Mr. Rogers said, I want to hear from Tabby. But then she didn't say anything for a long time, and Mr. Rogers called on Jean, like always.

Did you know, Jean said, that in World War One, they used phosgene and mustard gasses? Also, did you know that the Germans would hit troops with gasses that could get through the gas masks? It would hurt their eyes and nose and stuff so bad that they would take off their masks, even though that could kill them. Then after taking off their masks, they'd inhale the phosgene and mustard and stuff like that. Their lungs would start to blister and their eyes would bleed or they'd start coughing so bad they could puke up their stomachs and all sorts of stuff.

Tabby Gardner raised her hand.

Mr. Rogers called on her.

Real prissy she said, can we please not talk about blistered lungs and puked up stomachs?

You could tell Mr. Rogers was thinking about it because he didn't say anything for a while.

Then he said, so like I was saying before about the earthquakes, I actually know a guy who got messed up really bad—big red oozing blisters all over his body—after he put a mustard round in his truck thinking it was a regular old projo.

Then he told us all about IEDs made with chlorine tanks, stock piles of mustard rounds, troops that got gassed that couldn't get benefits once they got home, and how the whole reason we were there was because some General convinced the UN that there were WMDs there.

Jean ate it up. He loved that kind of stuff.

But what happened with the milk yesterday was, after history class we had lunch. I was reading the joke on my milk carton, and I said, I don't get it.

The jokes were like numbered in a series. Everyone with a number five, for example, would have the same stupid joke. An example would be, Why was the cow jumping up and down? Because it wanted a milkshake. But that wasn't the actual joke yesterday.

Mr. Rogers was at his desk eating his lunch and drinking his milks—he always ordered two chocolates. He asked me what number I had.

Twelve, I told him.

Me too, he said. It's a pun.

But I don't get it, I told him.

He said, you know back when I was in school, milk cartons didn't have jokes. They had pictures of missing kids.

But these have jokes, and I don't get this one.

Instead of jokes, we'd have to look at pictures of these kids who were abducted, he said.

Jean asked what the joke was.

Mr. Rogers said, it's not a joke. It's a pun.

Then Jean said, well then read me the pun.

Mr. Rogers said, you wouldn't get a pun like this if I told it to you. You have to read it.

I can't read it myself, Jean said. I'm allergic to milk.

When I was a kid, Mr. Rogers said, we didn't have all these allergies either. All this helicopter parenting. Kids are too sheltered these days. Protected from everything so they can't handle anything.

I think Jean didn't want to look weak in front of Mr. Rogers.

He grabbed my milk carton to look at it for himself. And I guess a little spilled on him or something because it wasn't long before he started turning red and wheezing and everything.

It's a good thing Mr. Rogers was subbing that day, because Mrs. Neumann probably would have freaked out. She's the nervous type, but Mr. Rogers has all that war training.

Mr. Rogers acted all calm like it was no big deal. He asked Jean if he had an EpiPen and where it was. It was in his desk, so Mr. Rogers grabbed it in no time and gave him the shot. Then he pointed at someone and said, you, go down the hall and have the secretary call 911. Then he pointed at me and said, you, go in the top pocket of my backpack by the right side of my desk. There's an EpiPen in there. Bring it to me.

In pretty much no time, the ambulance had come to take Jean to the hospital.

Mr. Rogers said it was just a precaution.

Jean loves Mr. Rogers. Every time he subs, Jean spends all recess talking to him, and Mr. Rogers doesn't seem to mind.

But today at morning recess, Mr. Rogers just stands at the corner of the soccer field with his hands in his pockets. He swings his foot back and forth like he's kicking apart an ant hill or something, but he does it the whole time. He never looks up at the kids to make sure we're not fighting or anything.

Mr. Rogers looks pretty lonely without Jean there. But before recess is over, the principal comes out and says something to him. Mr. Rogers doesn't say anything back. He just goes inside early and the principal follows after him.

I asked Jean once why he wanted to waste all his recess time talking to the teacher about boring stuff like history.

He said we had to study history because those who don't study history will be doomed to repeat it.

Sounds like the opposite would make more sense. If you don't know about it, it would be pretty random to repeat it, which makes repeating it seem pretty unlikely.

I told him so, and he said we should ask Mr. Rogers what he thought.

I told Jean I'd just take his word for it.

But I guess Mr. Rogers is pretty lousy at the whole not repeating history thing. What I mean by that is, Mr. Rogers isn't in the classroom when we get back inside from recess. While we're all just waiting around, I hear Paisley Schmitt say they fired him because he was talking about bleeding eyeballs and coughed up stomachs during history class yesterday.

That makes sense coming from her.

I say that because the first time Mr. Rogers subbed for us, he told us not to ask if he killed anyone unless we wanted him to kill us. Then the principal made him apologize to the whole class after Paisley Schmidt narced on him to her mom.

And it's doubly believable because Mrs. Neumann shows back up, even though she still looks sick and sounds like she's going to cough up her stomach.

I don't think Mr. Rogers is as great as Jean does, but I think he's okay. He says bad words sometimes when he's telling

stories, and you don’t often get to hear a teacher say swear words. It’s easy to distract him and his stories are pretty good. Better than Mrs. Neumann’s anyway.

But that’s kind of just how he is. He’ll talk to you like you’re on the same level.

Like when he started his apology speech after Paisley Schmitt narced on him. He said, apparently, you’re not supposed to talk about killing with middle schoolers. You could tell he thought the whole thing was stupid by the way he said apparently.

Me and Jean had a good laugh at that too.

New Poetry by Amalie Flynn for the WWI Centennial

Zone Rouge

(for the centennial)

photo by Amalie Flynn

1.
When the land was.

2.
Full of bodies dead. And twisted.

3.
When the fighting was.

4.
Sustained.

5.
With bodies. Dead. Twisted on a riverbank.

6.
Wrist bent. Hand hovers. Over water.

7.
Dead bodies with fingers. Like feathers.

8.
Stretched feathers or the calamus.

9.
Attaching to bird skin.

10.
These are bodies. Bodies of war.

11.
Dead with. Feathered fingers.

12.
Wing of a bird.

13.
300 days of shelling.

14.
The shells were 240 mm. Full of shrapnel.

15.
Mustard gas.

16.
Hitting men and hitting ground.

17.
Making holes. Upon impact.

18.
Shrapnel bursting.

19.
Bloom and rip.

20.
Ripping through dirt and faces.

21.
Ripped skin. Ripping off tissue.

22.
A nose.

23.
Hole in the center of an ear.

24.
Exposing canal and bone.

25.
Missing teeth. One lower jaw is.

26.
Gone. A set of lips.

27.
The chunk of a chin.

28.
And the shells. Shells from Verdun.

29.
Are still there.

30.
Unexploded ordnance. Sunk.

31.
Into dirt pockets. Like seeds.

32.
This blooming. Metal war.

33.
Shrapnel that looks like rocks or.

34.
Smooth egg of a bird.

35.
Soil made of mud and men and metal.

36.
How. Metal leaches and clings.

37.
This soil of war.

38.
Chlorine and lead and mercury and arsenic.

39.
Where every tree and every plant and every animal.

40.
Each blade of grass.

41.
Where 99% of everything died.

42.
Ground stripped raw.

43.
Stripped earth tissue or how this is.

44.
What war also.

45.
Also does.

46.
Damage to properties: 100%

47.
Damage to agriculture: 100%

48.
Impossible to clean.

49.
Human life impossible.

50.
The government declared it *uninhabitable.*

51.
A *no-go zone*.

52.
Broken skeletons of villages.

53.
And the craters that bombs make.

54.
Deep and round holes.

55.
How the bomb craters filled with water.

56.
Making. War ponds.

57.
This is a place.

58.
Where almost everything died.

59.
But the land.

60.
The land was still alive.

61.
Grass stretching again and.

62.
Grafting itself over the bone.

63.
Bone of what happened.

64.
Stretching over trenches and scars.

65.
Like new skin.

66.
And plants and trees and vines.

67.
Rodents and snails and voles and mice.

68.
Deer. Wildcats with metal stomachs.

69.
Still living I say. To my husband.

70.
Who went to war.

71.
War that he did not want.

72.
Afghanistan.

73.
How he came home with hands and feet.

74.
Covered in blisters. *Lesions* the doctor said.

75.
Skin burning. Waking up to him crouched.

76.
On the floor and scratching. Saying *I don’t know.*

77.
And I know.

78.
That this is how war is.

79.
Or later. I will lay in the darkness.

80.
And think about burn pits in Iraq.

81.
Black smoke and jet fuel and fumes.

82.
About Vietnam sprayed. The bare mudflats after.

83.
Defoliation of trees. And birds. Missing mangroves.

84.
How dioxin poisons wind. Sleeps. In a river or sediment.

85.
The fatty tissue of a fish. Atomic blasts in Hiroshima and.

86.
Nagasaki. The incineration of bodies and land.

87.
Tearing skin off people. Tearing trees out of ground.

88.
Tearing everything.

89.
Away.

90.
How black rain fell. Radioactive bomb debris.

91.
Into mouths. Of people and rivers.

92.
How radiation lives. In grass and soil. The intestine of a cow.

93.
About the GWOT. Blood soaked years and streets and.

94.
How many miles of land. Where we left bombs.

95.
Unexploded or forever.

96.
I will think about Zone Rouge.

97.
Trenches like scars.

98.
My husband gardening. The tendons in his arms.

99.
Moving like trees.

100.
Or how war never goes away.

Amalie Flynn

October 2018

An Interview with Jennifer Orth-Veillon, Curator of the WWI Centennial Blog, by Andria Williams

Andria Wiliams: Jennifer, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with Wrath-Bearing Tree.

We are all huge fans of the WWrite blog, which features posts from writers investigating a variety of aspects of the events and legacy of the First World War. Since 2016, you've had close to 100 contributions on topics such as the portrayal and care of wounded veterans and their rehabilitation; German battlefield cemeteries; writer-soldiers of the War; and more. It's truly a feat and, taken as a whole, a remarkably intelligent way to explore the effects of WWI on art, literature, citizens, and the public imagination.

How did you get the idea to start the WWrite blog, and how did you go about it?

Jennifer Orth-Veillon: Over a glass of Beaujolais wine. Seriously. In 2015, for family medical reasons, I packed up my life in the US and moved with my French husband and small daughter to a small village, Cogny, in the wine-making region of the Beaujolais, located in southeastern France not far from Lyon. Prior to the move, I held a 3-year-long postdoctoral fellowship in communication and literature at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta where I initiated the first

student veteran writing group.

Jennifer Orth-Veillon

During these three years, I also taught a class on war literature and veteran memoirs. The students began by studying the literature of WWI as it was one of the first major conflicts that happened on foreign soil. For the returning soldiers, this meant an even greater gap to forge between the civilian community and their war experience. WWI also marked a break with traditional war narratives. Before WWI, these acceptable narratives communicated a sense of patriotism, triumph, and noble sacrifice. The strong soldier fought bravely and didn't complain. The weak soldier was a coward and a criminal. While patriotism, triumph, and heroic sacrifice are certainly important aspects of the combat experience, they do not paint a complete portrait of the long-lasting effects of war on soldiers, on families, and on the community. It could be said that WWI writing, for the first time in history, was responsible for exposing the severity, variety, and complexity of war wounds to the public. Hemingway's sparse prose and Wilfred Owen's grotesque images and irony did something revolutionary.

And why did it take WWI to do this? It inevitably had to do with the unprecedented elements this war introduced to an unsuspecting world—the unbreakable nationalistic alliances formed by powerful empires, the misery of inch-by-inch trench warfare, masses of soldiers suffering deep psychological damage ("shell shock"), new weapon technology that disfigured the human body beyond recognition and razed entire cities in seconds, entire populations wiped out not only by war, but also by the Spanish flu epidemic that swept the continents. In combat, Russia, France, the British Empire, Germany, and Austria lost close to a million soldiers each and their wounded nearly doubled that number. America officially entered only in 1917 but lost around 53,000 soldiers in combat during just seven months in 1918. The Vietnam War serves as an interesting point of comparison—this conflict lasted fourteen years and the combat dead totaled around 47,000. In addition, WWI-era's Spanish flu epidemic cost Americans another lost 63,000 lives by Armistice.

My class at Georgia Tech also read memoirs and war literature through the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, including works by Seth Brady Tucker, Kayla Williams, Brian Castner, and Brian Turner. I was fortunate that these authors were so accessible – Seth Brady Tucker and Brian Castner both had Skype sessions with my class, which was fantastic! And, after we finished the reading, the class, for their final project, had to write a multimedia memoir on a veteran from Georgia Tech or from the Atlanta community. When the students asked Tucker and Castner about their writing influences, both immediately mentioned the writing of WWI for many of the reasons I discussed above. Seth Brady Tucker went as far to say that, while studying Wilfred Owen in an Iraqi foxhole, he learned to both read and write poetry (Incidentally, his post for WWrite is entitled "Discovering WWI Poetry in an Iraqi Foxhole"). In addition, many of the contemporary veterans who became subjects for my students' memoirs cited WWI literature in their interviews.

I left the US, but I knew I couldn’t leave my work there entirely behind. I know that living in a golden-stone medieval village in the middle of French vineyards sound like a dream to any American, but the reality was that moving to France was professionally and personally a new start for me. And I wasn’t in Paris. It’s one thing for people living in this beautiful, rural region to encounter tourists. It’s altogether another matter if someone from the outside wants to come in and be part of the community. The Beaujolais is full of families who have lived there for generations and finding ways to integrate was an isolating challenge. Yet I did find traces of my previous life. I would spend many days driving from village to village looking for work and writer/artistic communities. I didn’t find either. However, each village’s, each town’s center features a monument to the WWI dead.

Beaujolais war monument in the village of Saint Julien, with the names of the dead on the side. Photo by Jennifer Orth-Veillon.

What I learned was that, even if the monument was small, the place's loss was enormous. I would often get out of my car and count the number of dead and then go to the village municipality to see what the population count was in 1914-1918. One village lost 9% of its population. Another lost almost all of its young men. November 11th isn't Veteran's Day but Armistice Day – a national holiday for commemorating WWI only.

WWI monument in the village of Sainte Paule in the Beaujolais. Photo by Jennifer Orth-Veillon.

Once, after a car accident, I had to go to the police station

to finish filing the report. While waiting, someone called to report they had found an unexploded WWI shell while digging a pool in their back yard. After the police officer said he would send someone over and hung up, he looked at me and said "happens all the time." It's worth mentioning that no WWI battle took place in the Beaujolais region. This anecdote illustrates how central the Great War is in the French memory and imagination.

Which is why what I discovered over my glass of Beaujolais was so startling. I was in the town of Vaux-en-Beaujolais, otherwise known as Clochemerle, the setting for a famous French satirical film written by Gabriel Chevallier. Each village in the Beaujolais makes its own wine and has a central wine bar/cellar for tasting it.

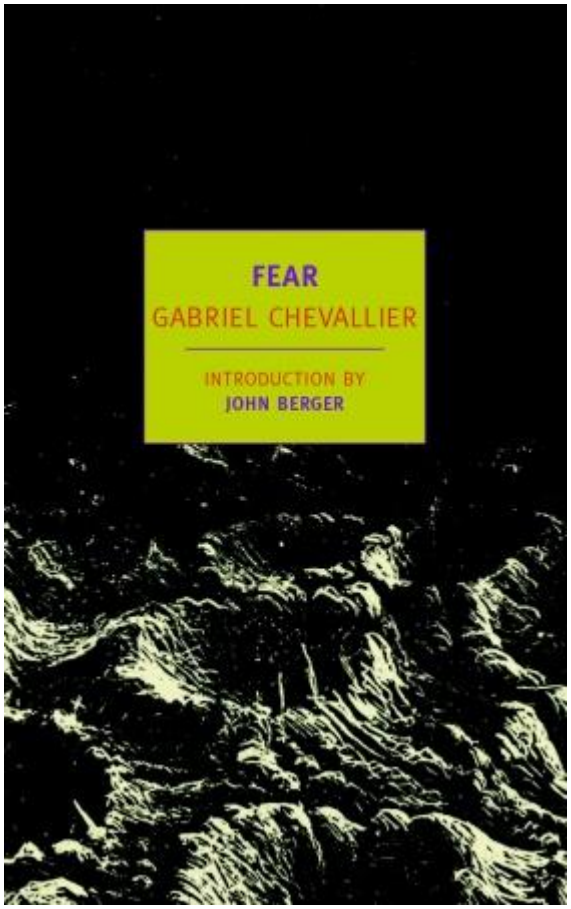
A painting of Vaux-en-Beaujolais by Gabriel Chevallier. Photo by Jennifer Orth-Veillon.

I was chatting with the barman pouring me the wine about possible translation work for the town's tourist brochure when he asked me about my work in the US. I started to tell him about the veteran class [at Georgia Tech], thinking that it would have no relevance to his world and that he would listen because he felt sorry for my loneliness. However, he went to the door of the bar and asked me to follow him. Glass in hand, we went next door, which turned out to be a Gabriel Chevallier museum.

The entrance to the Chevallier museum in Vaux-en-Beaujolais, France. Photo by Jennifer Orth-Veillon.

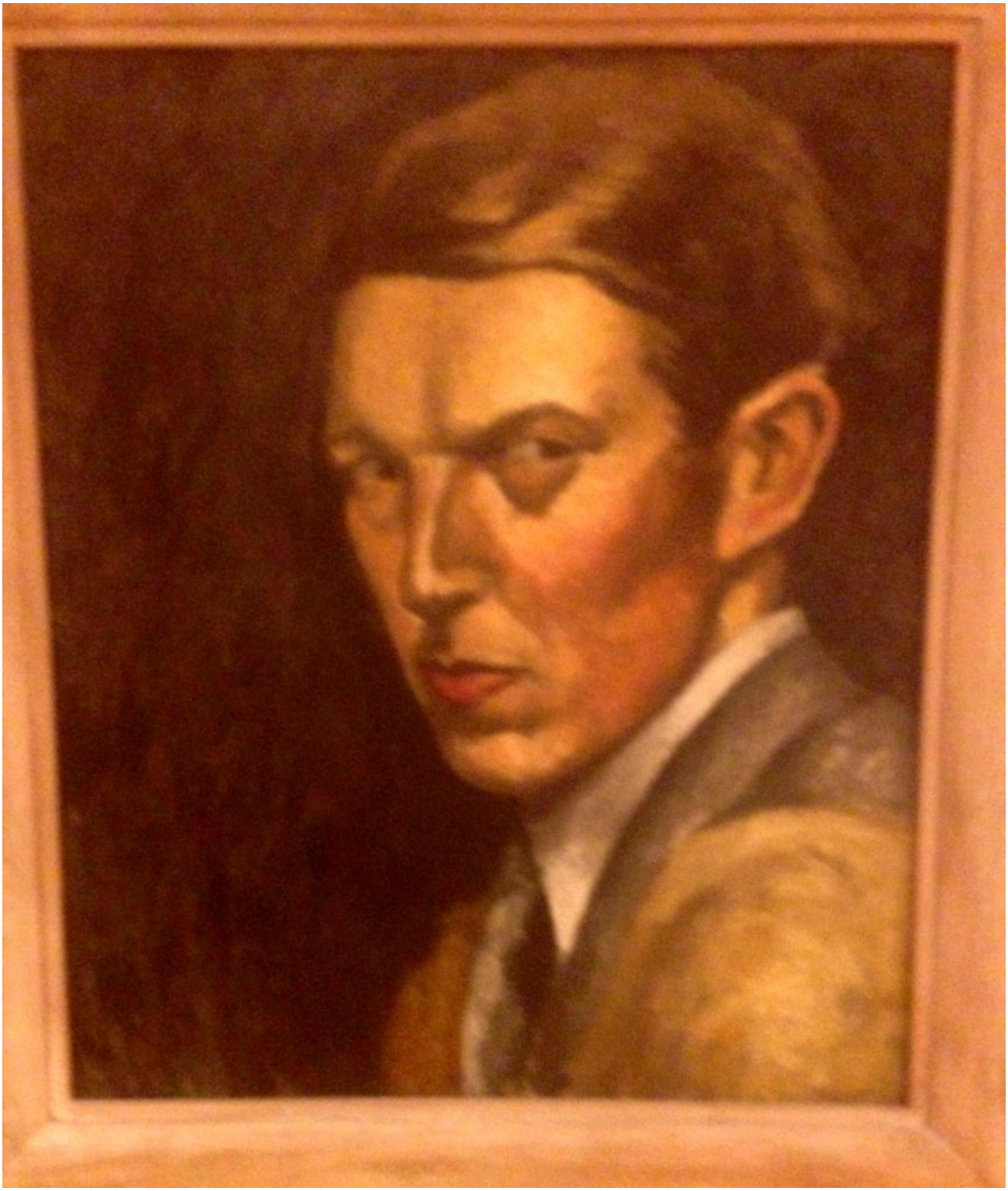
A part of the small museum was dedicated to the famous *Clochemerle,* but a larger section featured Chevallier's WWI experience and his novel, *La Peur*, translated as *Fear.* As I learned through the collections of drawing Chevallier did during the war and the pages from the manuscript, *Fear* was

nothing like the satirical *Clochemerle.* It has nothing to do with winemaking, socioeconomic class, or religion; it was a book that spared nothing as it described the ghastly details of the ways men were killed and maimed during Trench warfare. It was published in 1930, but like many works of art that criticized the Great War in France and elsewhere, it was censored. Today, *Fear* represents all that we know well about WWI found in books like *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Guns of *Steel*- it was a senseless, barbaric massacre.



As it was the only thing that resembled my literary work in the US, I visited the village, the museum, and the bar several times after that. No one was ever looking at Gabriel Chevallier and that's when I realized that, in the middle of a huge national narrative about WWI, holes existed and were ignored. Amidst the monuments, the parades, and the days off, a real discussion of the Great War and the damage it did to France was missing. Everyone knows about the monuments. No one knows that Gabriel Chevallier wrote anything other than

Clochemerle.



Self-portrait of Chevallier. Photo by Jennifer Orth-Veillon.

This was the theme I found in so much of the war literature I studied with my classes. Veterans from every past or present war we studied – the celebrated icons of war– felt neglected

by the public narrative. This did not stop with WWI. In fact, these same veterans, including contemporary ones like Tucker and Castner, had even expressed that this phenomenon was first brought to our attention by WWI writers like Owen and Hemingway. I realized that today's war writers owed something like a debt to WWI writing and, with the imminent Centennial, I wanted to explore that idea. I contact the United States World War One Centennial Commission with my ideas. At the time, they had no substantive information about WWI literature although I found such sites elsewhere. Looking not just at WWI literature, but at how WWI can continue to shape literature, writing, and thought today seemed original. They accepted my proposal and I started work in April of 2016. The first blog post went in January 2017. And it's been going ever since.

AW: Where did your personal interest in WWI begin?

JOV: WWI has always been both a personal and professional interest for me. I realized WWI had more importance than the few pages about alliances in my history textbook when I started working on my first novel, which is based on a lifelong friendship between my grandfather, a WWII battalion surgeon, and a concentration camp prisoner he liberated, a Dutch artist. I read the 1,000+ letters my grandparents wrote each while he was gone and one struck me as very important. It was a letter from August 1945, a few months after VE day in Europe. With his war over, he finally had the space to digest the horrible scenes from combat and he had terrible crying spells and nightmares. That's when he told my grandmother that he finally understood why one of his close relatives, who had served in WWI, was always "crying at nothing." Before that, he had considered this relative weak and unmanly. I knew that to understand WWII, I need to better understand WWI. That's why I jumped at the chance to be TA for a study abroad summer class on WWI and literature taught by James Madison University English professor Mark Facknitz, my former mentor. I was living in Paris at the time working on a Master's Degree at

the French University on WWII and Holocaust literature. Concentrated on Paris and the Nazi Occupation, I had never explored WWI in a deep way. With Mark and about 15 students and other TAs, we traveled in vans across the WWI battlefields and memorials in France, Belgium, and England. We read literature and essays and then applied the ideas about cultural memory and war narratives to the different public memory sites – the American cemetery at Belleauwood, the French ossuary at Douaumont in Verdun, Kathe Kollowtiz's famous statue "The Grieving Parents" in a German cemetery in Flanders. I did this for two summers and came to realize that WWI was present everywhere. It's end was one of the reasons for the turmoil in the Middle East today, it advanced feminist movements, shed new light on racial issues, and shaped many US federal programs today. I believe that to grasp any geopolitical issue today, you have to dial back to WWI to fully understand it.

AW: I know that no one can pick favorites, but I'm curious which contributions or posts surprised you the most, gave you new information or made you see something from a wholly new angle.

JOV: That's like asking which child you love most! I have valued, loved, and learned so much from every single blog post and its author. That's what's so great about the blog – not only the variety of different kinds of posts, but the incredible quality of the writing. I have never been disappointed by a post and each time I get a new one, I feel so lucky to have discovered this author and their work. I guess that before the blog, I felt like a fair amount of knowledge about trench warfare, the events of combat, the major battles, the perils of nationalism, the poetry, the literature, the culture of commemoration. However, I knew much less about the role women, African Americans, Native Americans, and immigrants played. And, sadly, I came to learn how much they had been forgotten. Chag Lowry's post on his

graphic novel about Native Americans, Soldiers Unknown, Tracy Crow's post about female Marine Sergeant Leila Lebrand, Peter Molin on Aline Kilmer, Joyce Kilmer's wife, Keith Gandal on the treatment of African Americans after the war, and Lorie Vanchena's post about German immigrant poetry provide a few examples. I also have a new perspective about WWI in other countries, even in enemy countries through Ruth Edgett's short story about Canada, "Hill 145," , Andria Williams' (your!) post on the British "Black Poppies", Michael Carson on Victor Shklovsky and the Russian Revolution, Mark Facknitz on German POWs in Japan, and Benjamin Busch's post about finding a British WWI cemetery in Iraq. From an ideological perspective, I was struck by Elliot Ackerman's post on Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel*. Through Junger, Ackerman argues that we live in society that pushes us to thrive on violence rather than mourn war and hate death. But again, these just come to mind at the moment. If I had space and time, I would list every post as one of my favorites. Every post has given me new information and angles.

AW: What has been the biggest challenge in curating the WWrite blog?

JOV: I've had two major challenges. The first is the technical side of the blog and issues of design. I'm not a coding expert and I have to make everything fit the platform requirements of the WWICC site. I think it is much more sophisticated than I am. Formatting takes an incredibly long time. I've spent an hour on getting a picture inserted, margins adjusted, etc. But, I think this is an issue that many artists have to confront today. The digital medium is necessary but requires extra training and patience. The second is convincing writers that they are, in fact, influenced by WWI even if they don't think they are. Sometimes I'll contact a writer and, even if they are interested by the project, they say no because they don't know anything about WWI. I beg to differ! Everyone is touched by this war in some way. It just takes a little

digging. For example, I met and actor/writer in Atlanta named Darryl Dillard. We talked about the project and he basically said, good luck! But later he came back to me because he realized that African American WWI soldiers faced horrible racism, similar to what they faced on stage at the time.

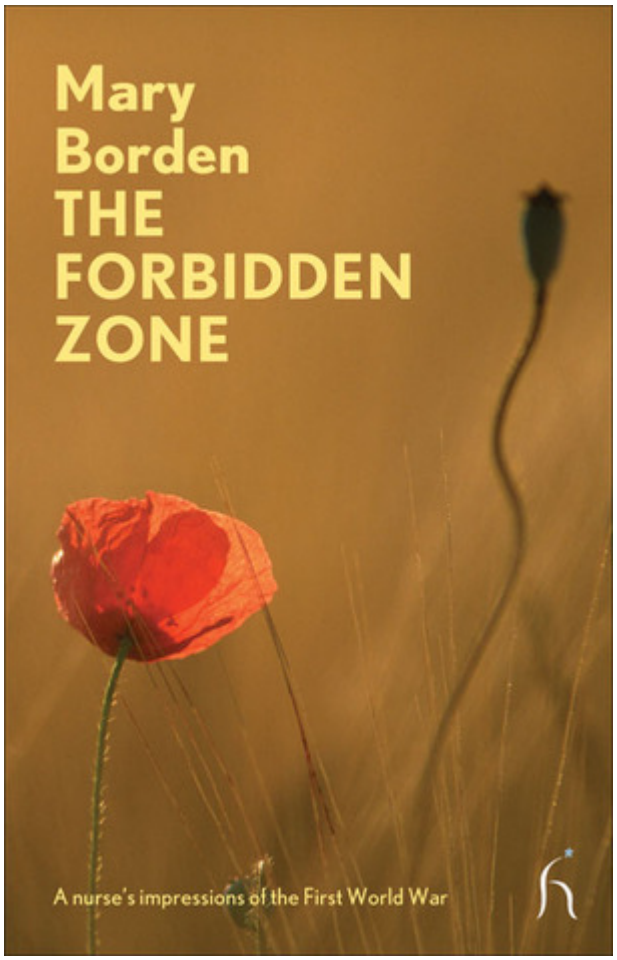
AW: Woodrow Wilson famously (after H.G. Wells) called WWI "the war to end all wars." How do you find the study of this war significant in our modern approach to conflict? Are there any particular lessons you think humanity stands to learn, or does WWI paint only a bleak picture in terms of the way history repeats itself?

JOV: I don't know if history is repeating itself or it's just the present asserting itself against things that haven't changed but should have throughout history – like nationalism, economic inequality, class inequality, gender oppression, emasculation, misogyny, racial oppression, using technology to kill masses of people – these things at the heart of WWI's tragedy haven't gone away. They are still present and still cause harm. So, yes, it's a very bleak picture.

However, I do believe that's it's not irreparable as long as we can take action by engaging in a fight to make these issues better. Remembering and commemorating war is not enough. As the French say, we need *engagement.*

AW: What is your favorite piece of art or literature to have come out of World War One?

JOV: Once again, picking favorites is hard. I think the work that has stood out for me most recently is Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone*, which was, of course, censored because it was considered too ghastly and graphic. As a nurse, she wrote this surreal memoir about the war during a period when most war memoirs were written as conventional autobiographies.



Using images and other aesthetic strategies, she seems to show that conventional language wasn't enough to capture WWI combat. Conventional autobiography cannot push the limits of human experience the way war can. I admire her battle to challenge us with language, to show that there are parts of war that are unimaginable, that don't fit into proper punctuation or sentence structure. The work is indeed ghastly, but it is so much more that I come up against my own limits of expression when I try to describe it to anyone. And, it's in that incapacity to describe that I know her writing comes from where no one can go and survive intact – no man's land, the space between the trenches. She uses language to take on that space. It's a battle.

WWrite Blog contributions by *Wrath-Bearing Tree* editors:

Adrian Bonenberger: Brest-Litovsk: Eastern Europe's Forgotten Father

Michael Carson, "The October Revolution, Russian Occupation of Persia: WWI Soldier Viktor Shklovsky's Sentimental Memoirs"

Rachel Kambury, "War Without Allegory: WWI, Tolkien, and The Lord of the Rings"

Andria Williams, "Black Poppies: Writing About Britain's Black Servicemen"

Election Special: To Hell With Civility by Rob Bokkon

I'm so tired of re-writing this article.

The drafts kept piling up and piling up and piling up, one after the other. I'd think I was done, and then—here comes the goddamn news again.

Shock. Anger. Horror.
And again.
And again.
And again, but way worse this time.

I'm beginning to feel like a character in a Borges story, or a Lev Grossman novel. A chronicler fated to write the same story over and over again, only to find that he has to begin it all over, once more, as soon as he reaches the end.

Because the atrocities just *will not stop.*

As of this writing, bombs are still traveling through the mail to “the enemy of the people,” the media. You know, like the headquarters of CNN. Those are words, you may recall, said by the sitting President of the United States. You probably forgot that quote, given the torrent of appalling things he says daily. This most recent bomb came on the heels of many other potentially deadly packages sent to the leaders of the Democratic Party, including two former Presidents.

Poster found on Purdue campus this past week. Photo: Patrick Johanns.

As of this writing, two black grandparents are dead in my home state of Kentucky, shot down in the produce section of a Kroger by an avowed white supremacist who was heard telling another person of his race, “whites don’t kill whites.” The shooter was a white supremacist who had attempted to gain access to an African-American church just minutes before shooting up the grocery store.

As of this writing, a synagogue in Pittsburgh has lost eleven of its congregation. They were shot, by a Nazi, in the United States of America, in the year 2018.

The worst thing is: by now you're almost OK with it.

Stop. I don't mean you condone it. I don't even mean you accept it. But I do mean that you're becoming, more and more each day, *used to it*.

The nature of fascist violence, fascist politics, fascist ideology, is not insidious. It is not subtle. It is not clever.

Fascism is brassy. Loud. Bombastic.

Overwhelming.

Eventually, you start to tune it out. Whether from compassion fatigue or a sincere desire to protect your own mental health or just sheer exhaustion, you start to push it aside. Ignore it. Convince yourself that someone else is doing something about it, just so you can focus on the important stuff like getting dinner ready or taking out the garbage or your kid's grades.

Which is, unfortunately, exactly what fascists want.

They are counting on you to be overwhelmed. They are counting on you to change the channel. They are counting on you to see so much hateful rhetoric, so much ethnic violence, so much anti-LGBT+ legislation that you just can't anymore.

And so this, gentle reader, is where we are. We have actual Nazis marching the streets. We have a government that refuses to do anything about it, that is known to cultivate them for votes and political support, that only makes the most terse and backhanded of statements "condemning" them.

We have a Supreme Court likely to deliver the death knell to

the last vestiges of a woman’s right to choose, in the United States of America.

We have an executive branch making determined and deliberate assaults on LGBT+ rights on a scale literally never before seen. The rabble-rousing polemics of the George W. Bush administration, the casual hatred of Reagan: these are nothing compared to the systemic offenses committed by Trump, Pence and their evangelical cronies. The transgender military ban, the attacks on title IX, the effort to ban the same-sex spouses of diplomats from entering the USA—all a product of Trump’s America.

See? You’re tired already. You’ve heard it all, or if you haven’t, you’re not surprised.

There are worse things than being tired, though.

Actively encouraging this stuff, for example. Those people, though—the ones who still support Trump, the ones who think his plan to end birthright citizenship (and with it the Fourteenth Amendment) is a great idea, the ones who believed the Democrats actually mailed bombs to themselves—those people are lost to any rational appeal. We can’t count on them anymore. They’ve been given the opportunity to regret their decision, to show some basic decency, and they’re not going to do it.

And yet, we have among us those who are, to my mind, even worse than the Trumpites. That would be the legions of people standing around wringing their hands and wondering aloud why we can’t all get along. The people yelling about “the discourse.” The people who inevitably seem to lecture the left on something called “civility” while utterly ignoring the actual fascists marching in the streets.

These would be that lofty political class known as “the moderates.” I say “lofty” because every single last one of them will tell you, at some length, about their moral

superiority to “extremists.” They “don’t vote party, they vote for candidates.” They “refuse to condemn someone over something as trivial as politics.” They “remember when there was a spirit of bipartisanship in this country.” And what’s more, they will tell you in no uncertain terms why you’re what’s wrong with this nation, and how it doesn’t help to call Nazis what they are, and…I’m making myself sick writing this.

I just don’t understand. Twenty or thirty years ago, maybe, I could see that sort of thinking. Back when the GOP wasn’t entirely composed of homophobes and plutocrats. Back when the Democratic Party still nurtured a few nasty Dixiecrat types. Back when neither party much cared about LGBT rights. Back when the GOP still believed in the social safety net. But now?

Now, in this day and age, you’re telling me “you vote candidate over party” when the party platform of the GOP is explicitly anti-LGBT? You’re telling me that you’re sometimes OK with taking away a woman’s right to choose? You’re telling me that you’re sometimes OK with dismantling the entirety of the New Deal and the Great Society? You’re telling me that you’re sometimes OK with a brutal and xenophobic, to say nothing of racist, immigration policy?

You’re *sometimes* OK with the guy who was endorsed by Nazis?

Fuck that. And fuck the calls for “civility” from these very same, amoral people. These people will tie themselves in knots over Mitch McConnell getting his dinner interrupted, but then blithely ignore the fact that he is actively seeking to remove health care from millions upon millions of aged and poor people. They get upset when people shout at Sarah Sanders, but ignore the fact that she lies for, and repeats the lies of, a man who is actively placing children in cages because their parents had the audacity to seek asylum in the United States of America.

When they say “civility” they don’t even know what they mean

by it. They think they're calling for politeness. They think they're calling for decorum. But you cannot be polite to someone who is actively seeking to disenfranchise, dehumanize or otherwise harm you through the apparatus of the state. You cannot afford common social graces to people who, through their hateful rhetoric, inspire acts of terror against marginalized groups. You cannot extend greater consideration for those who would oppress you than they would extend to you.

Because to do so is to cede power. To do so is to say, "You are deserving of better treatment than I am." To do so is to prop up the very power structures that are currently aimed at us like weapons, to be complicit in our own ruin.

Martin Luther King did not sit down with the leaders of the KKK. Gandhi did not concede that the British Raj "had some ideas worth considering". And Marsha P. Johnson was not worried about respect, or civility, or decorum when she threw the first brick at the NYPD during the Stonewall riots. She was worried about her survival. Her right to exist. Her right to be a fully recognized human being.

So no, I won't be civil to these fascists. Not now. Not ever. And you shouldn't either.

The Long Road of History Impacts Today

More than one hundred years ago, nine thousand acres of fruit trees and farm land in Maryland were converted to one of 16 cantonments established in preparation for America's entry

into WWI. Laws establishing Camp Meade were signed in April of 1917. By September of that same year, the first recruits arrived, moving into wood barracks so hastily erected the men walked through clouds of sawdust as they entered.

In five months, 1200 wood barracks were built on Camp Meade in the first phase of construction to hold troops preparing for WWI.

Throughout its 100 years, Fort Meade was the home to a great many firsts, many of which were a direct result of WWI. Troops at Camp Meade were the first to receive new Browning automatic rifles, including the M1917 Browning .30 caliber machine gun.

The first women in uniform, known as the “Hello Girls,” operated telephone trunk lines at Camp Meade which connected the states to the battlefields in France. Some of the women deployed with the troops and worked from bunkers near the front lines.

After the war, having realized that poor food and sanitation

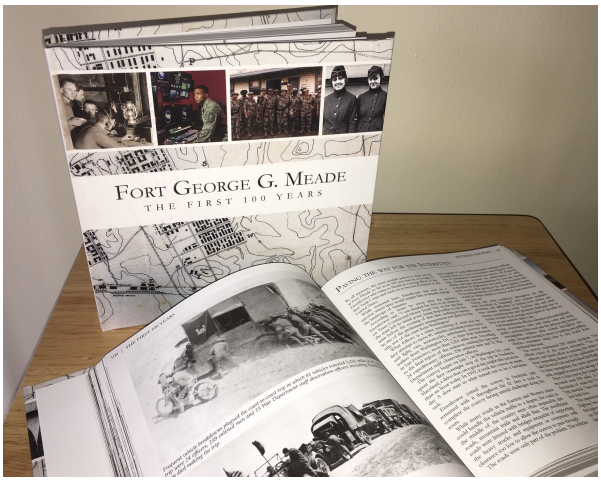
can greatly impact a soldier's ability to fight, the first school for military cooks and bakers would be established at Camp Meade.

Also after the war, U.S. tank crews trained and equipped in France, would return to Camp Meade to establish the first Tank Crops. Among them were seasoned tank operators who had engaged in the deadliest WWI battle, the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Under the command of Lt. Col. George Patton, 165 French Renault FT tanks from the 304th Tank Brigade, attacked fortified German positions along a 20-mile front. As leaders in the first Tank Corps, Patton, and Dwight D. Eisenhower would write the book on battlefield tank tactics, and they would practice those tactics at Camp Meade.

Eisenhower with a Renault FT-17 Tank

Today, Fort Meade is home to the nation's newest combatant command –U.S. Cyber Command, where 24/7 service members of all branches engage in conflict and competition in the firth dimension of warfare.

Despite all of these Fort Meade firsts, there had never been a definitive book written about the installation's history, until now.



A free PDF version of the book is at www.ftmeade.army.mil. *Hardcover versions are at Amazon.com.*

Fort George G. Meade, The First 100 Years is a more than 300 page book, a majority of which concentrates on WWI and the rapid construction, first arrivals, training and deployment of hundreds of thousands of men and women from Camp Meade. The pages are filled with historic photography, poetry, letters, essays and personal memories of people connected to the installation. The following is just one of more than 100 essays that trace the installations role in conflicts from the trenches of France, to the terror threats of Iraq and Afghanistan and into the current conflict platform, cyberspace.

Paving the way for the Interstate

Excerpt from Fort George G. Meade: The First 100 Years

By all measure, the most notable person to have served at Fort Meade so far in its 100 year history is Dwight D. Eisenhower who came to Meade as a young officer of the first Tank Corps and went on to be President of the United States.

While stationed at Meade, Eisenhower was sent on a mission which later would inspire him to literally change the landscape of America.

In notes he wrote describing the mission, Eisenhower said, “I was detailed for duty as an observer on Trans-Continental Motor Truck Trip on the day that the train left its initial point, being impossible to join the train before the evening of that date, nothing is known by me of the preliminary arrangements and plans for the trip, nor of the start from Washington.”

Printed in Fort George G. Meade; The First 100 Years, courtesy of the Eisenhower Presidential Library.

What follows is a sober recounting of what was the first attempt to move 81 vehicles, including trucks; heavy and light; cars, motorcycles, ambulances, tractors and trailers from Washington D.C., to their final destination in San Francisco, more than 3,251 miles away. According to the final report of the endeavor, making the trip were 24 expeditionary officers, 258 enlisted men and 15 War Department staff observation officers. Due to his late addition, it would seem Eisenhower's orders were to serve as part of the War Department staff.

The convoy began on July 7, in Washington D.C., and spent the first overnight stop on of the trip in Fredrick, Maryland, a drive that, on a good day, might take just more than an hour today. In 1919, it took the convoy an entire day. A slow start to what turned out to be a herculean task.

Eisenhower joined the convoy in Fredrick and remained with it throughout the 62 days it took to complete the trip facing untold challenges along the route.

While many roads in the Eastern and Western states could handle vehicle traffic to a degree, the roads in the middle of the country were often impassable dirt roads, mountain trails and alkali flats. The insufficient roads were littered with bridges incapable of supporting the heavy trucks and equipment or overpasses with clearance too low to allow the convoy to pass through.

The roads were only part of the problem. The vehicles were capable of vastly differing speeds making it difficult to keep them in a convoy formation and frequent stops due to breakdowns harassed the drivers. All along the way, Eisenhower assessed the performance of each vehicle and made recommendations for how they should or shouldn’t be deployed in the future. “Motorcycles had much trouble after getting in the sandy districts. Except for scouting purposes, it is believed a small Ford Roadster would be better suited to convoy work than motorcycle and side car.”

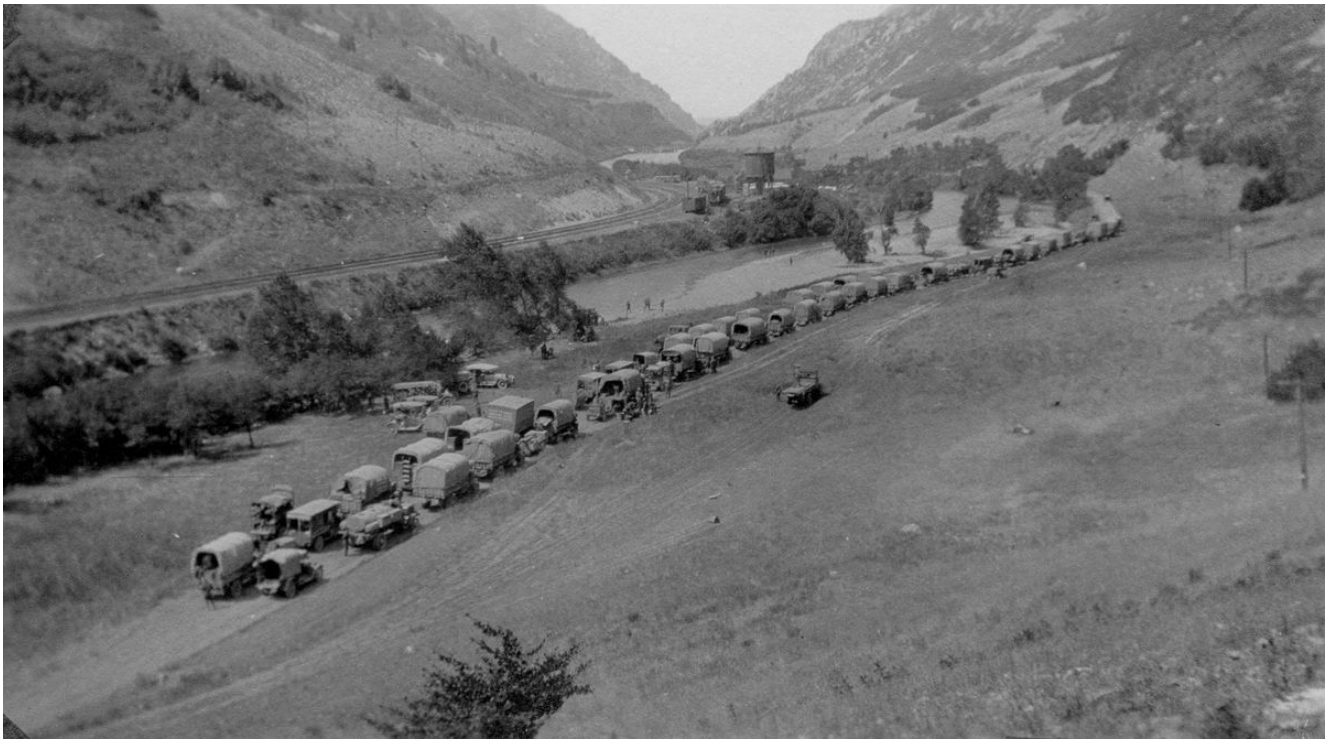


Photo courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library

Living and work conditions throughout the trip were described as “hardship,” with constant sanitation problems, and difficulties in finding food, shelter and even suitable drinking water. Extreme rain and wind storms, punishing heat and persistent challenges due to terrain resulted in an average travel speed of six miles on hour or just under 60 miles a day.

The convoy experienced 230 vehicle accidents. The official report of the convoy recounted, “The most arduous and heroic effort in rescuing the entire convoy from impending disaster on the quicksands of the Salt Lake Desert in Utah and the Fallow Sink Region in Nevada. In these emergencies, the entire personnel, regardless of rank, engaged in rescue and salvage operations.”

Prior to this convoy, the longest military vehicle march recorded went 900 miles. It is reported that, over the thousands of miles the Trans-Continental Motor Truck Trip traveled, “thru various casualties en route,” 21 men lost their lives.

The experience of the trip traveling along the Lincoln Highway became something that stuck with Eisenhower throughout his life. After WWII and his experience driving on Hitler’s Autobahn, the importance of a functioning highway system and the role it might play in the defense of the nation hit home. Once he became president, Eisenhower made developing an interstate highway system one of the major goals of his administration.

100 Years of Fort George G. Meade is available in PDF format on the Fort Meade website at www.ftmeade.army.mil. A hardcover version is available at Amazon.com.

M.L. Doyle has served in the US Army at home and abroad for more than three decades as both a soldier and civilian. She calls on those experiences in her award-winning Master Sergeant Harper mystery series, her Desert Goddess urban fantasy series, erotic romance and coauthored memoirs which all feature women who wear combat boots. M.L. Doyle serves as an editor for The Wrath-Bearingtree.com