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Home Away From the Home Front:
The British in the Balkans during the Great War

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June 2014

Declaration

The work presented in this thesis is my own.

Abstract

This thesis is a social history of the British in Serbia, Greece, and what is today Macedonia during the Great War. It explores British wartime experiences by examining their perception of national identity and their attitude towards other nationalities, their relationships and standards of propriety and appearance, aspects of everyday life including recreation, food and drink, the role that events played in forming a communal identity, reactions to and interactions with space and place in Salonika, and their motivations and perceptions of the worth of their work. British people on the Balkan front adapted to their wartime experiences and circumstances with the aid of their cultural background and priorities, existing connections and relationships, their interpretation of their environments, and their sense of duty and accomplishments. Rather than considering or acting as though their wartime experiences were a deviation from their prewar lives, Britons actively integrated these experiences into their everyday lives, and furthermore relied upon their prewar perceptions, connections, and understanding in order to make sense of their wartime lives.

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It would be impossible to acknowledge all of the debts I have accrued on this long process, but there are many people who have contributed in meaningful and significant ways to this thesis. Firstly, thanks to my supervisor, Fred Anscombe, for his unfailing support, confidence-building, and astute observations. Thanks also go to Joanna Bourke for her input during the early stages of this project, particularly on what eventually became chapter five, and to David Feldman and Maria Margaronis for their support when I needed it most. Thanks also to the Birkbeck department of history for the generous award of the BIRS which made possible the completion of this thesis, and to my fellow graduate students for lighting the way with their friendship and examples. I have been amazed at the wealth of scholarly and emotional support forthcoming from the academic community. Parts of this thesis made their debut as conference papers at the LSE, Goldsmiths, and UCL PhD Symposium on South Eastern Europe (chapter one), the 2010 Social History Society conference (chapter four), the University of Liverpool Port Cities at War conference (chapter five), and the Birkbeck graduate student research seminars (chapter two). Chapter six has taken inspiration from my MA thesis, *"The last place for joy-riders": British Experiences and Gender Roles at the Serbian and Macedonian Fronts, 1914-1918,* submitted at CSU Bakersfield in June 2007. The faculty there, in particular Cliona Murphy and my supervisor, Mark Baker, deserve thanks for encouraging and supporting me to embark upon the PhD. I would also like to thank the many libraries and archives who have aided my research, in particular the staff at the Imperial War Museum department of documents, the special collections at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, and the Social Sciences reading room in the British Library.

I would like to thank my colleagues (and friends) at Working Partners for their patience and understanding throughout the years, without which it would have been impossible to continue. In particular I would like to thank Charles and Chris for the kindness they showed me in my darkest hours. Thanks also to my family for their unfailing guidance and love over the years and miles, particularly to my sister for endless gchats and stationary supply and my brother for channelling our mother in his editorial, emotional and material support. Thank you to my friends who have tolerated years of complaining, tears of joy and sorrow, and most recently, my complete disappearance. Special mentions must go to Eva for enforcing productivity on "library nights" and wielding her editor's pen, and Jenn, the most dedicated copy-editor this side of the Atlantic. And above all thank you to Brett, for everything from track changes to laundry to making this past year, with all its hard work, the best of my life so far. Thanks to him, I am now as inspired about the future as I am about the past.

*In loving memory of Frances Whitney
who would have been the first and most eager reader of this work.*

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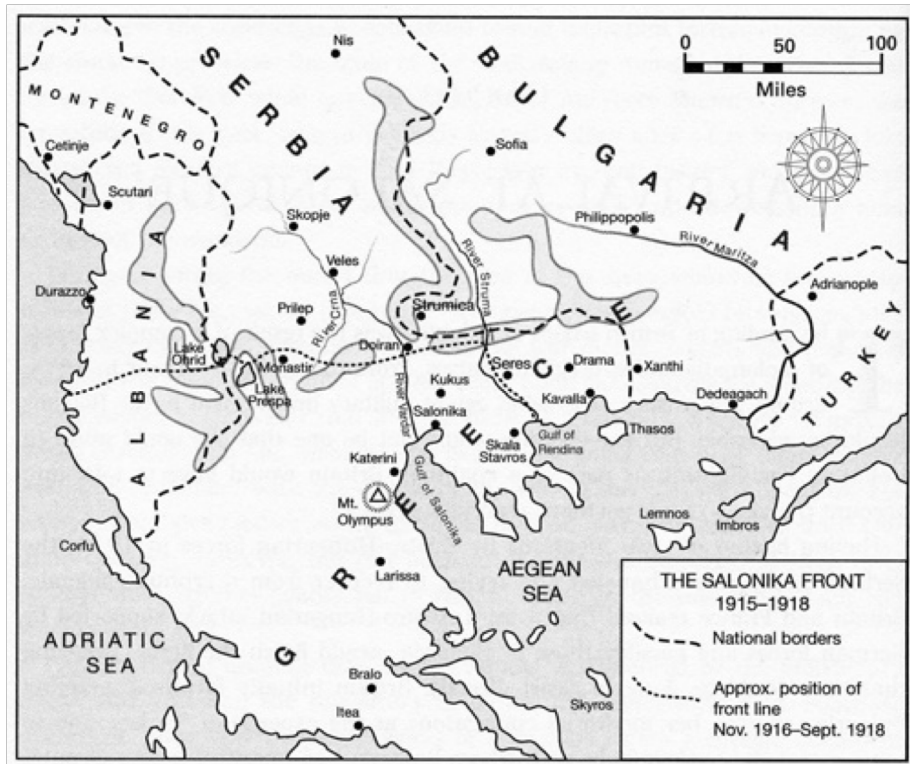
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Map of the Salonika front



From Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody, *Under the Devil's Eye: Britain's Forgotten Army in Salonika 1915-1918* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004).

Map of the Balkan front showing Serbia and Macedonia



From A. F. Pollard, A Short History of the Great War (London: Methuen, 1920).

List of abbreviations

BRCS	British Red Cross Society
BSF	British Salonika Force
CO	Commanding Officer
CMO	Chief Medical Officer
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
POW	Prisoner of war
SRF	Serbian Relief Fund
SWH	Scottish Women's Hospitals
VAD	Voluntary Aid Detachment (Usually refers to individual volunteers)

A note on place names

For the sake of readability and consistency, I have not attempted to replicate the various transliterations of Serbian place names. (Kragujevac was particularly problematic.) Instead, I have used the modern Serbian Latin spelling throughout, for example Niš and Vrnjačka Banja.

Likewise, I have favoured the "k" spelling of Salonika, although in this case I have not altered original sources where they use "Salonica."

Introduction

Historical Background

In the introduction to her memoir of war work, Dr Isabel Emslie wrote,

I only wish I could set down adequately the story of the everyday patience and heroism of the Allied troops and their leaders, or make you share the sufferings of gallant little Serbia... I would also like to tell you of the constant war that the doctors, sisters, and V.A.D.s waged against unromantic dirt, death and disease, and of the splendid unselfishness that was universal - the cheerfulness of service, the good comradeship and charity, the absence of sex antagonism, and, above all, that make-the-best-of-it spirit which was triumphant even in the most trying circumstances.

But you will not only hear of war, for I have beautiful things to show you too, and as you sit with me in the laboratory hut examining prosaic dysentery and malaria material, the gods on the snowcapped Mount Olympus are gazing down at you. When you come a midnight round of the hospital you will see Lake Ostrovo black and silver in the moonlight. You will raise your eyes from the operating-table to the Serbian hills, with their ever-changing shadows and lights, and go on cheerful and hopeful to the next case.... You will hear with me the sounds, the uncanny howl of starving jackals and wolves, the "zizz" of the mosquito, the low moan of sick men... You will inhale with me the delicious fragrance of springtime in Macedonia, the stench of a Bulgarian prison camp... You will feel the furnace-like glare of the sun, the cutting blast of the Vardar wind, and the driving sleet in your face. But enough – let me begin from the very beginning.¹

After having been rejected by the RAMC, in 1915 Emslie joined a unit of the Scottish Women's Hospitals that was attached to the French army. "I should have preferred to join one of the Serbian units," Emslie wrote, but she had promised her mother that she would not go to "that awful typhus-stricken country." However, "One never knows what may happen in war, and three months later we were all in Serbia in spite of ourselves, the unit having been ordered there by the French."²

Like Emslie, many Britons on the Balkan front, especially women, were not connected with the British military; they had volunteered as foreign aid for Serbia and for the Serbian army in Salonika. Twice in 1914, Austria invaded Serbia, but Serbian forces repelled the Austrian army. The effect on the Serbian army, already exhausted from the two Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913, was deadly. In the aftermath of the military movements, typhus broke out, killing at least 100,000. Fatalities were particularly bad among the Austrian prisoners of war.³ Gruesome reports of typhus printed in British newspapers

¹ Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928), 14-16. Although her books are published under her married name, I refer to Dr Emslie Hutton by her maiden name, as that is the name by which her wartime colleagues and friends knew her.

² Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 18.

³ Henry Oliver Lancaster, *Expectations of Life: A Study in the Demography, Statistics, and History of World Mortality* (New York: Springer, 1990), 333. For more details, see R.J. Crampton, "The Balkans, 1914-1918," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War*, ed. Hew Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 66

inspired hundreds of British citizens to volunteer for relief aid in Serbia through organisations such as the Serbian Relief Fund (SRF) or Scottish Women's Hospitals (SWH). Founded by Dr Elsie Inglis, a prominent Scottish suffragist, the SWH hospital units were staffed exclusively or mainly by women with the aim of proving women's right to suffrage.⁴ These hospitals were rejected by the British War Office but accepted by the French, Russian and Serbian armies.⁵ They operated several hospitals, ambulances, and canteen units on the Balkan front throughout the war.⁶

British military involvement in the Balkans started with a small naval mission sent to Belgrade in 1915. The Serbian government, concerned about the threat of Bulgaria on the Eastern frontier, petitioned for French and British troops to be sent to their aid. When Allied troops arrived in 1915, it was already too late.⁷ They advanced briefly into Serbia but were forced to retreat to Salonika.⁸ Further north, a joint Austro-Hungarian-German invasion was routing the Serbian army while the Bulgarian army came in from the southeast. When the Serbian army command realised it could not defend itself against an invading force more than twice its own strength, instead of surrendering, it chose to make a retreat across the mountains of Albania and Montenegro to the Adriatic, escaping to recover and fight again. Although the estimated numbers of casualties vary widely,⁹ the great retreat had a devastating effect on the Serbian population, both military and civilian.¹⁰ Many of the British volunteers in Serbia accompanied the army on their tragic retreat; others fell under German or Austro-Hungarian occupation and, after a period as prisoners of war, were repatriated.

The remnants of the Serbian army were sent to Corfu by the Allies, where they recuperated, and thence to Salonika, where the Allied force had remained, entrenching themselves against the advancing Bulgarian army.¹¹ An inter-Allied force was based in

and Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Twentieth Century*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 115.

⁴ Eva Shaw McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1919), 3-4.

⁵ Monica Krippner, *The Quality of Mercy: Women at War: Serbia 1915-1918* (London: David & Charles, 1980), 29-30; McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 3-5.

⁶ For details, see McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*.

⁷ Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 16, 22. According to Richard Davis, an American journalist writing about the French Army, there were 60,000 British and 110,000 French troops in this initial expedition. Richard Harding Davis, *With the French in France and Salonika* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 143.

⁸ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans, 1804-1945* (Longman, 1999), 213.

⁹ According to historian Benjamin Lieberman, "the exact number of refugees was never firmly established [much less how many of them died], though observers spoke of thousands, tens of thousands, and even hundreds of thousands of Serbs on the move." Benjamin Lieberman, *Terrible Fate: Ethnic Cleansing in the Making of Modern Europe* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 85. According to McLaren, 23,000 of the 30,000 boys evacuated by the Serbian government died on the retreat. McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 157.

¹⁰ Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans*, 211.

¹¹ Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans*, 212, 215.

Salonika for the remainder of the war, and eventually included Russian, Italian, Greek, and Serbian troops, in addition to the French and British troops and their colonial troops from India, North Africa, and Vietnam. Coupled with the multi-ethnicity of Salonika's population, and especially considering the imperial make-up of much of the Allied troops, Salonika became a cosmopolitan muddle – one of the aspects of the city most frequently commented upon.

Salonika itself, now Thessaloniki, had been a spoil of the First Balkan War in 1912 when it changed hands from the Ottoman Empire to Greece. Situated in a natural harbour at the bottom of the Balkan peninsula, Salonika has been militarily important, and fought over, for millennia. In addition to Greeks, Turks, and various refugees from the upheaval of the Balkans wars, there was a large Sephardic Jewish community.¹² The heterogeneity of Salonika's population and the lately Turkish, and therefore oriental, aspect of the city made it seem glamorously exotic to outsiders – at least, from a distance. As a city, Salonika was already swollen with refugees and other newcomers from the Balkan wars and their aftermath. The influx of hundreds of thousands of soldiers caused Salonika's population to more than double, to around 400,000.¹³

During this time, Greece was officially neutral, although the Allies had landed at Salonika on the invitation of the Greek Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos. The Greek King Constantine, however, was pro-German, and resisted attempts to bring Greece into the war, despite Venizelos' pro-Allied stance and a mutual-aid treaty with Serbia in the event of an attack by Bulgaria, signed after the Second Balkan War. Their tug-of-war continued even after a national schism brought Greece officially into the war at the end of 1916, under Venizelos' provisional government in Salonika. The country was re-united in 1917, although the power struggle between Venizelos and Constantine persisted until after the war.¹⁴

In addition to the soldiers working at the front line, the armies and volunteer organisations were doing the necessary support work to the rear of the front. Voluntary relief organisations, as well as many military hospitals operated by the Red Cross, staffed by both men and women, were located all over the front. A plethora of staff officers and journalists lived and worked in Salonika itself. The actual front, however, expanded as the various armies slowly advanced through Macedonia.¹⁵

¹² Richard Clogg, "Jews," in *Minorities in Greece: Aspects of a Plural Society*, by Steven Bowman (London: Hurst and Company, 2002), 70.

¹³ Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430-1950* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 311.

¹⁴ Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans*, 213.

¹⁵ More details on the military events of the Macedonian front are given in Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika*.

On September 14, 1918, a successful attack on the demoralized Bulgarian army preceded the frantic advance of the Serbian army, which the French army struggled to follow. By the time an armistice was signed, the Serbs had retaken their entire country and advanced into Austria-Hungary.¹⁶ But the armistice was not the end of the war for the many volunteer workers struggling against wounds and disease, and the struggle for the public memory of the Balkan campaign (at least among Anglophone countries) continues to this day.

The presence of so many volunteer aid workers, most of them women, together with the soldiers, officers, and support staff (including hospitals and their doctors and nurses) of the BSF, meant that there were a very large number of Britons, both men and women, in a fairly concentrated area of the Balkan front. The comparative lack of danger from military combat, narrowness of territory, and isolation condensed these people into a small scale society that, while shared with their allies, became a wartime microcosm of Britishness. The close knit nature of this community and the relatively few members of it make it an ideal target for study. Because of the relatively small scale of operations and of participants on the Balkan front, I have been able to make a fairly comprehensive study on British habits, attitudes, and the way the war affected their lives. The British relied on familiarity as a key tool for coping with the changes of wartime, both individually and collectively. This supports an argument for societal continuity from the prewar era.

Historiography

Today, the words "First World War" have become essentially synonymous with "trench warfare"—but not just any trench warfare. The First World War in public memory calls to mind the trenches of France and Flanders. In the preface to what is arguably one of the most iconic books about the First World War, Paul Fussell writes, "This book is about the British experience on the Western Front from 1914-1918."¹⁷ Fussell continues, "Correctly or not, the current idea of 'the Great War' derives primarily from images of the trenches in France and Belgium. I have thus stayed there with British infantry, largely disregarding events in Mesopotamia, Turkey, Africa, and Ireland."¹⁸ Fussell is following a long tradition of First World War historians when he chooses a title for his book that implies comprehensive coverage of the First World War but ignores, among other subjects,

¹⁶ Crampton, "The Balkans," 79.

¹⁷ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), i.

¹⁸ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, i.

the Balkan front. He does not even mention Serbia or Macedonia in the list of places he intends to overlook.¹⁹

This historical silence reveals how the Balkan front has been remembered—or, more accurately, forgotten. It is understandable that the western front received so much attention. Belgium and France were much closer to Britain than the locations of other fronts. The biggest and most militarily important battles took place there. It was also the front with the largest number of troops. However, current historians agree it is time to move away from the focus on the western front. Hew Strachan writes, in his introduction to a history of the war,

For a war that was global, it is a massively restricted vision: a conflict measured in yards of mud along a narrow corridor of Flanders and northern France. It knows nothing of the Italian Alps or of the Masurian lakes; it bypasses the continents of Africa and Asia; and it forgets the war's other participants—diplomats and sailors, politicians and labourers, women and children.²⁰

Jay Winter agrees, writing, "What has not emerged is a European history of the war.... We still have precious little to say about the Eastern Front. Austria, Italy, Russia, Serbia, a whole world at war is there, but not here."²¹

The Macedonian campaign was reviled by the public during the war, and then forgotten immediately after the war. Serbia, which lost a greater percentage of its population than any other belligerent, is hardly considered by western historians.²² The women who served in Serbia and Macedonia fared better, with some interest in the unique opportunities that service on the Balkan front brought them. Still, the main discussion of women in the war follows the direction of research on the war in general, and tends to focus only on the western and home front.

What works regarding the Balkan front that do exist form part of a more traditional history: biographical or narrative accounts, political and military histories. Alan Palmer's *The Gardeners of Salonika* (1965) is concerned with the topic of the Macedonian campaign and does not go into detail about the Serbian front prior to late 1915. Palmer's book mainly deals with the military and political aspects of the campaign.²³ More recently, David Dutton's monograph, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (1998), focusing exclusively on Allied politics

¹⁹ See for example, John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 471. Macedonia warrants two citations in the index, Salonika four, and Serbia fares better with fifteen, compared with nearly a page for France, 463-464.

²⁰ Hew Strachan, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xv.

²¹ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between History and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 236.

²² Winter, *Remembering War*, 7.

²³ Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika*. James Lyon's unpublished dissertation, "Serbia and the Balkan Front, 1914," is another political and military history, focusing exclusively on Serbia. James B. Lyon, "Serbia and the Balkan Front, 1914" (University of California, Los Angeles, 1995).

in the Balkans, is an important contribution to knowledge of the political and diplomatic aspects of the campaign, but he restricts himself to the official side of these debates.²⁴ Neither of these books provides much cultural insight into the effects of these political debates and military events on the lives of soldiers and volunteers in the Balkans. Andrej Mitrović's recently updated and translated *Serbia's Great War* (2007) is an excellent overview of political, social and military aspects of Serbia during the First World War, but, while it does hint at some insights into the perceptions of the British by the Serbians, the scope of the book is too wide to go into any real analysis of the relations between the British and the Serbs, or the work of the British in Serbia.²⁵ A few amateur works have recognised the heroic deeds of "British women in Serbia,"²⁶ such as the un-scholarly *Quality of Mercy* (1980) by Monica Krippner, which deals entirely with the British women in "Serbia"—although she does also discuss the work of British women in Macedonia and elsewhere with the Serbian army. It is a collection of narrative accounts (lacking a bibliography²⁷) and facts (some of them inaccurate²⁸). Krippner also published a chapter in

²⁴ David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1998). Roy Prete's article, "Imbroglia par excellence: Mounting the Salonika Campaign, September-October 1915," is along the same lines. Although Prete goes into detail about the diplomatic relations between the British and the French in 1915 and the debates behind the Salonika campaign, like Dutton he is concerned with the official and political side of these events. Gerard Silberstein, in his article, "The Serbian Campaign of 1915: Its Diplomatic Background," explores the diplomatic negotiations and concessions behind the campaign in the Balkans in 1915, but he focuses on the Central Powers' effort to persuade Bulgaria to join the war effort. Gerard E Silberstein, "The Serbian Campaign of 1915: Its Diplomatic Background," *The American Historical Review* 73, no.1 (1967): 51-69. Charles Fryer has authored various works on the small contingent of the British navy in Serbia under Admiral Troubridge in 1915. Although these, too, mostly focus on military matters, they do give some insight into the relationships between the naval men and the Serbian soldiers. Charles Fryer, *The Destruction of Serbia in 1915* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1997); *The Royal Navy on the Danube* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1988); "The Watch on the Danube: The British Naval Mission in Serbia, 1914-1916," *The Mariner's Mirror* 73, no. 3 (1987), 297-312.

²⁵ Andre Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War* (London: Hurst, 2007).

²⁶ Claire Hirshfield, "In Search of Mrs. Ryder: British Women in Serbia during the Great War," *East European Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1986): 387-407; Krippner, *Quality of Mercy*; Marianne P. Fedunski, "Women Physicians Serving in Serbia, 1915-1917: The Story of Dorothea Maude," *McMaster University Medical Journal* 4, no. 1 (2007): 53-57. Some of the better-known women who volunteered in Serbia have featured in works on the general theme of women and war and have even inspired biographies. For example, Kate Adie in her popular history, *Corsets to Camouflage*, mentions Mabel Stobart, Elsie Inglis and various other Scottish Women's Hospitals members, and of course, Flora Sandes. Kate Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War* (London: Coronet Books, 2004), 87-88, 77-78, 83-39, 54-57. Susanna De Vries mentions Agnes Bennett in *Great Australian Women*. Susanna De Vries, *Great Australian Women: From Federation to Freedom* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2001), 108-119. There have been several biographies written about Elsie Inglis: Frances Balfour, *Dr. Elsie Inglis* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918); Margot Lawrence, *Shadow of Swords* (London: Michael Joseph, 1971); Leah Leneman, *In the Service of Life: The Story of Elsie Inglis and the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1994). Flora Sandes is famous for joining the Serbian Army and fighting as a soldier; she is discussed in many sources including Joanna Bourke's *Intimate History of Killing*. Joanna Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999), 294-297, 306-307. Her story was fictionalized in Alan Burgess' *The Lovely Sergeant*. Alan Burgess, *The Lovely Sergeant* (London: Heineman, 1963). Louise Miller, *A Fine Brother: The Life of Captain Flora Sandes* (London: Alma, 2012) is a recent, well-researched biography of Sandes which also gives a good overview of the events and conditions of the Balkan front.

²⁷ Krippner, *Quality of Mercy*, 217-218.

Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travellers in the Balkans which features many of the same flaws but does have citations.²⁹ The most important and useful secondary source is Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody's *Under the Devil's Eye: Britain's Forgotten Army at Salonika 1915-1918* (2004).³⁰ However, a major problem is that the book *only* discusses the British Salonika Force and, therefore, neglects the large number of the British on the Balkan front who had no military attachment or were working with other Allied armies. Like Krippner's book, *Under the Devil's Eye* is a narrative history, told mostly through passages taken from primary sources. It shows meticulous research but does not draw any conclusions about the experiences of "Britain's forgotten army."

The most relevant scholarly work on the British on the Balkan front has been done by Eugene Michail. His chapter "A sting of remembrance!: collective memory and its forgotten armies" appears in an edited volume on the First World War and popular culture, and his book, *British and the Balkans: Forming Images of Foreign Lands, 1900 – 1945*, includes a chapter on the Great War.³¹ Michail is mainly concerned with presenting a historical view of British interactions with the Balkans. His chapter in the edited volume asserts the problems of public memory of the war as it applies to the Salonika army. Michail makes some interesting points, but not entirely successfully, as will be discussed. He contradicts himself by arguing that the "otherness" of the Balkans contributed to a lack of public interest in the Salonika campaign, while at the same time emphasizing British interest in Balkan exoticness.³² He also overstates the jealousy that male soldiers felt towards their female aid-worker compatriots.³³ His use of sources in the section on aid workers in his book is particularly suspect; as he relies on Sandes (arguably the most atypical of experiences, and also, for the majority of the war, not technically an aid worker) and the previously discussed, flawed chapter by Krippner in *Black Lambs, Grey Falcons*. Despite these faults, he raises some interesting points about the memory of the Balkan campaign and the perception of aid work, which I will engage with more fully in the last chapter.

The lack of secondary material on *this* aspect of the Great War is an invitation to the

²⁸ For example, Mabel Dearmer died of typhoid; she was not a casualty of the typhus epidemic (Krippner, *Quality of Mercy*, 80; Mabel Dearmer, *Letters from a Field Hospital* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 173). Krippner also states that Jan and Cora Gordon had "traveled extensively in Serbia before the war," but they had done their travelling earlier that year (Krippner, *Quality of Mercy*, 124; Jan and Cora Gordon, *The Luck of Thirteen: Wanderings and Flight through Montenegro and Serbia* (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1916), 3).

²⁹ John B. Allcock and Antonia Young, eds., *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travellers in the Balkans* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

³⁰ Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody, *Under the Devil's Eye: Britain's Forgotten Army at Salonika 1915-1918* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), v.

³¹ Eugene Michail, *The British and the Balkans: Forming Images of Foreign Lands, 1900 - 1945* (London: Continuum, 2011) and Eugene Michail, "A Sting of Remembrance!: Collective Memory and Its Forgotten Armies," in *British Popular Culture and the First World War* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

³² Michail, "A Sting of Remembrance!", 246-247.

³³ Michail, "A Sting of Remembrance!", 248.

curious historian. The Balkan front contained a microcosm of British society, (although one complicated by the skewed age demographic, the presence of other nationalities and the vagaries of the wartime situation), from which can be drawn insights into how the British used their prewar experiences to cope with the challenges brought about by the war, and how these wartime experiences affected their postwar lives. Thus the war, rather than being an aberration in society and individual lives, fits into the context of both personal and cultural history. By studying the experiences of those on the Balkan front, both as individuals and as a community, it is possible to see the role of continuity in dealing with wartime experiences for the British as a nation.

The scarcity of secondary literature dealing specifically with the Balkan campaign creates the need to draw from wider historiography. Although the war years dictate the time frame for study, this thesis is a cultural history and so will be using appropriate secondary literature for analysis and reflection. In many cases, this requires reaching beyond the traditional military historiographies to inform analysis of wartime experiences and place them within the context of a continuous British social narrative before and after the war; comparisons are drawn to the British who were abroad before the war as part of the British Empire and those who travelled abroad after the war, as well as British perceptions of oriental and Balkan lands and peoples. This thesis is an attempt to recognise the relationship of pre and postwar lives to the war experience. In order to do so, it is useful to look beyond the field of war studies to include travel and tourism and colonial studies in order to find frameworks of analysis for the sources.

Recent scholarship of the Great War has called for a change of how the war is viewed, particularly the role of gender and the so-called "experiences" of women. Although most of this work, if not all, is focused on the western front or home front, there is an increasing recognition of the limits of this narrower approach and calls for investigating the war in other arenas have brought to light the necessity for looking beyond the traditional theories about the First World War, in geography as well as in approach and sources.

In *Fighting Different Wars Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (2004), Janet Watson describes how

by the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the conflict... the popular definition of culturally legitimate war experience had narrowed to that of the soldier in the trenches... What might be called the "soldier's story" of the war had been created in memory, and had significantly hushed—though never entirely silenced—alternative views."³⁴

³⁴ Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 186.

The "soldier's story" is the dominant image of the First World War—one that is inevitably called to mind whenever the war is mentioned. Ironically, Janet Watson perpetuates the supremacy of the western front in a book that explains the development of the "soldier's story," which denies the legitimacy of any non-trench experience. In "Part II: Memory and the war" of *Fighting Different Wars*, Watson discusses how this new "definition" denied the legitimacy of the war experiences of those who did not fall into the narrow "soldier's story." Watson argues that the "soldier's story" is an artificial construct that does not actually represent the vastly different experiences of the war. According to Watson, "The story of the war that has entered popular culture was a product much more of the time in which it was created than of the time it ostensibly represented." She discusses the ways in which the retrospective accounts that defined the "soldier's story" (Sassoon and Graves) differed from their contemporary counterparts—or the letters and diaries on which they were based.³⁵ Watson includes an engaging discussion of the experiences of *both* men and women. She takes issue with Fussell for how his book "strengthened the view of [Sassoon's and Graves'] centrality to the canon of war accounts" which denied the legitimacy of other accounts, particularly those of women.³⁶ According to Watson, "Veterans who were not in the infantry, other active non-combatants, and especially women reimagined themselves as survivors surrounded by devastating carnage (whether physical or emotional)."³⁷ However, while she recognises the problems of the ascendancy of the trench experience, she focuses on the attempts by women to reclaim the legitimacy of their war experiences, and she does little to redress the issue in terms of the de-legitimized accounts of those who served on other fronts. Gervase Phillips, in a review of the book, complains, "There is, perhaps, an occasional hint that the author still regards service on the western front as the only valid combat experience."³⁸ All of the accounts Watson discusses either epitomized what she calls the "soldier's story" (in the case of Sassoon and Graves), or imitate it (in the case of Brittain and Rathbone) and are centred on the western front experience. Using the "current idea" of the First World War as an excuse to limit the study of it to the western front, as Fussell does, only perpetuates the myth that the war can be encapsulated in the ubiquitous trenches of France and Flanders.

Although women's place in the war has traditionally been marginalised, with the increase of women's history over the last couple of decades, that has started with change, with historiography dealing with debate about the significance of the war in women's

³⁵ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, 217-218.

³⁶ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, 220.

³⁷ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, 220.

³⁸ Gervase Phillips, "Review of Watson, Janet S. K., *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain*," March 2005, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=10279>.

history, and research into women's roles during the war now appearing. Gail Braybon, in her introduction to *Evidence, History, and The Great War* (2002), emphasizes the importance of realizing that "women" can not be encapsulated into a single "experience" as though women of all races and classes had the exact same war experience; indeed, as if even women who shared upbringing and national identity, and participated in the war in similar ways, could have the same perception of their own experience.³⁹ She calls for a wider approach to the study of the war, not in scope but in focus. According to Braybon, every detail that we learn about the lives of individuals during the war adds to our knowledge of it, and the future of First World War study lies in the collaboration of scholars pooling their knowledge and their introspections, fitting together the pieces of social cultural material like pieces of a puzzle.⁴⁰ At the same time, Braybon points out the dangers of not looking beyond the traditional interpretations of "women's role" in the Great War which are "far from invisible in popular British iconography." Braybon especially argues against the idea of the war as a watershed for women. She believes that the preoccupation with whether the war was good or bad for women is limiting, because it is only the experiences "of a relatively small group of young women... that are discussed in favour or against these arguments."⁴¹

Other works deal with additional aspects of gender and the war. Susan Grayzel's *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (1999)⁴² focuses exclusively on the western and home fronts and, despite the word "gender" in her subtitle, deals solely with women. Grayzel argues that the presence of male non-combatants and female workers at the front broke down the distinctions between the war zone and the home front. According to Grayzel, women's wartime participation should have challenged meanings of gender but instead it reinforced "fundamental aspects of women's gender identity," particularly the importance of motherhood.⁴³ However, in arguing that socially acceptable roles for men and women in war were as soldiers and mothers, respectively, her book ignores the power of nursing and other volunteer work as equivalent service for women during the Great War. Grayzel mentions that the existence of male non-combatants and presence of women at the front helped to break down the distinction of the front as male and the "home front" as female.⁴⁴ However her focus on

³⁹Gail Braybon, ed, *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-1918* (New York: Berghahn, 2003), 20

⁴⁰ Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War*, 21.

⁴¹ Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War*, 89.

⁴² Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁴³ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, 6.

⁴⁴ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, 10.

maternity, which seems somewhat artificial, prevents her from making conclusions about how the presence and work of these male non-combatants and women at the front may have further broken down gender distinctions. Gail Braybon, in her introduction to *Evidence, History and the Great War* (2004), states that "we also need research which concentrates on small groups, individual lives, the events of a few days or weeks. We need to appreciate the scale of the war's disruptions."⁴⁵ According to Braybon,

the more one finds out about the experiences of individuals, social groups, armies, populations, the more one sees that the classic, simplified picture of the war, as described by Fussell, Leed, Eksteins or others like them, is not only disturbingly Eurocentric, but deeply flawed, even on its own terms. The Western Front, for example, was not the only kind of battlefield in 1914-1918; in other areas, environment and strategy were different. Those seeking to use the mud, the blasted landscape of No Man's Land, and the tunnels and trenches as some kind of metaphor for a dark twentieth century have usually ignored this inconvenient fact.⁴⁶

She also argues the need for research that incorporates other, "smaller nations" in a way that appreciates non-Western perspectives, and that addresses issues of gender and "other social, racial and ethnic groups.... We need more diversity in the 'greater' war story."⁴⁷

The idea of the soldier's story has dominated the public memory, although the debate about the Great War has changed over time, particularly with landmark books such as Arthur Marwick's *The Deluge* (1965)⁴⁸ and Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995). Winter broke away from the idea, espoused by Marwick, that the Great War represented a watershed within British society which effectively created modernity. Instead, Winter explores how aspects of the prewar cultural persisted in spite of the changes brought about as a result of the war.⁴⁹ Although Winter focuses a great deal on postwar society, his argument and the debate brought about because of it have been hugely influential and remain important for work on many aspects of the Great War. These books focus on the consequences of war and the reactions of the British public after the war, and less so on the actual war time work, relationships, and daily lives of the participants themselves. Gerard DeGroot's *Blighty* (1996), which examines British society during the Great War, argues that continuity, not change, was the dominant force.⁵⁰ Yet the argument for continuity is not yet over, as evidenced by George Robb's *British Culture and the First World War* (2002), which argues against DeGroot's findings, and by the persisting popular

⁴⁵ Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War*, 21.

⁴⁶ Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War*, 7.

⁴⁷ Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War*, 22.

⁴⁸ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

⁴⁹ Jay M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵⁰ Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in an Era of Great War* (London: Longman, 1996).

conceptions of the war. DeGroot has released an updated and revised edition of his work, *Back in Blighty* (2014), which takes his central claims and aims them at the wider public.⁵¹

Since the publication of *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, there has been a proliferation of works on the cultural history of warfare which call into question previously held truths about the Great War. The centre of First World War historiography has shifted with the rise of "new" military history, focusing more on the individual lives of soldiers; new studies on masculinity provide the basis for comparing gender relations during the war years. Joanna Bourke and Jessica Meyer address issues of masculinity in their works on men fighting on the western front.⁵² Ever-expanding research and scholarship has changed focus to look at the "different wars" (to borrow the phrase from Watson) of non-combatants, women, or even soldiers on the western front who do not fit with the disillusioned ideal of the soldier's story. But despite this increasing interest in the First World War, particularly in the issues of women's work during the war, gender relations and identities, there are still many gaps in this area of study. Although the historiography of women and the Great War has come a long way from women's work being granted a sentence or perhaps paragraph in most works, if at all, and then reduced to nursing and munitions works, there is still room for exploration, particularly in the areas of gender relations and of women's perception of their own work. Furthermore, the focus on the "memory" and collective experience of the war can be said to have detracted focus from the individual lives of participants. Arguments about the continuity of culture through the war and after tend to have a "top-down" approach, looking at society from a meta-perspective, rather than the minutia of ordinary lives.

It is only very recently that historiography of the First World War has turned the focus to popular culture, patterns of consumption and recreation in everyday life. Jay Winter argues that soldiers maintained links to civilian lives via a shared popular culture, "a code of ordinary life which reminded soldiers" that they were only temporarily soldiers. According to Winter, soldiers relied on the familiarity of home life to cope with wartime situations: "These men in effect never left home; they brought it with them in their imagination as cultural baggage which saw most of them through the worst of what they had to face."⁵³ Studies of entertainment, tourism and food show how familiarity was an

⁵¹ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Gerard DeGroot, *Back in Blighty: The British at Home in World War One* (London: Random House, 2014).

⁵² Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁵³ Jay Winter, "Popular Culture in Wartime Britain," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, by Aviel Roshwald and Richard Sites (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 332-33.

essential tool for soldiers to cope with the demands of warfare on the Western front.⁵⁴ This echoes strongly with my research, suggesting that soldiers' everyday experience of the war was not so different on the Balkan front as contemporaries might have perceived. Furthermore, these themes are also echoed in women's writings of their Balkan front experiences, suggesting gender parity where men's and women's lived experiences were fairly intertwined and similar.

My thesis supports the continuity argument with further evidence from ordinary lives. Moreover, it fills in the gaps in research, providing details of the lived experience of popular cultures by soldiers and volunteers at the front, the lack of which has been noted recently by historians. Krista Cowman asserts that "Several studies have demonstrated continuities between men's prewar and army lives, suggesting that these were essential for survival" yet both she and Amanda Laugesen point out that little is known about their leisure activities.⁵⁵ Their studies of tourism and entertainments suggest that leisure was one of the main ways troops cultivated a sense of familiarity in their daily lives in order to cope with the situations of wartime. My thesis also contributes to the study of detailed experiences of wartime popular culture. It provides a history of the cultural experiences of the British community in Greece and Serbia during the Great War, which does not exist elsewhere. This front, because of its small size, relative stability, and isolation, provides the perfect tool to study not only the details of cultural life on a war front, but their effect as a whole on a community of Britons aboard in wartime.

Chapter Outline

The approach and themes of this thesis have been inspired directly by the sources. The fundamental question centres around the British society on the Balkan front: its formation and its functions. A careful reading of a large sample of these records, taken from as wide a social scope as possible, reveals certain overarching themes and reactions that seem to be indicative of the general British experiences. These themes form the basis of the chapters of this thesis. By exploring these themes and with the careful use of case studies, this thesis aims to build a picture of the socio-cultural life of Britons on the Balkan front, and to place that life within the wider context of the twentieth century by examining

⁵⁴ Rachel Duffett, "A War Unimagined: Food and the Rank and File Soldiers of the First World War," in *British Popular Culture and the First World War*, ed. Jessica Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Sam Lebovic, "A Breath from Home?: Soldier Entertainment and the Nationalist Politics of Pop Culture during World War II," *Journal of Social History*, November 4, 2013, 263–96; Amanda Laugesen, "More than a Luxury: Australian Soldiers as Entertainers and Audiences in the First World War," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 6, no. 3 (August 1, 2013): 226–38; Krista Cowman, "Touring behind the Lines: British Soldiers in French Towns and Cities during the Great War," *Urban History* 41, no. 1 (2014): 105–23.

⁵⁵ Cowman, "Touring behind the Lines," 106; Laugesen, "More than a Luxury," 226.

the ways in which the British relied on their prewar lives to inform their wartime experiences and relationships, and to place these experiences with the context of broader national wartime experiences.

Chapter One: "The only nation that's trusted & respected wherever it goes": British identity

The Balkan front was a mix of many different nationalities. Chapter one examines British attitudes towards other nationalities and what these attitudes say about self-perceived Britishness. Ideas of Britishness are surprisingly consistent across comparisons with different nationalities, from the perspective of different sources, and within enduring British national identity. The British on the Balkan front used the peculiar circumstances of the war to define their national identities. Being abroad changed both the context and the definition of Britishness; the presence of and close interaction with other nationalities made obvious the importance of Britishness, but reinforcing distinctions carried over from home normalized the situation and made them feel more comfortable. The British relied on the familiar aspects of their national identity to maintain a sense of self while interacting with others in a foreign land.

Chapter Two: "You seem such a happy family!": Connections and community

The British used their prewar associations to seek out old and new acquaintances for both personal and professional means. Through a variety of ways they expanded their professional and social networks, mainly relying on their individual and collective pasts to inform both the ways they made new acquaintances, and their relationships with one another. These relationships were implicitly and explicitly informed by the traditions and customs of home life, even while the war called for some changes in the ways they interacted. Throughout was the concern about how wartime relationships would affect postwar lives, both personally and professionally, and British people strove to preserve their friendships and prevent any rivalries from damaging reputations or opportunities. This chapter also looks at the concern within the British community for maintaining appearances, behaviour, and propriety or decency. Wartime situations did not always allow for the same values; the standards which were relaxed, the humour with which they dealt with lapses in standards, and those that were upheld at all cost while others were more easily compromised were a reflection of British culture. The British relied on both continuing prewar networks and familiar ways of networking for their wartime connections. Attitudes towards behaviour remained fairly consistent, even where circumstances materially changed.

Chapter Three: "War seems further off than ever": Everyday life on the Balkan front

Activities and preoccupations are mentioned countless times throughout the sources and were demonstrably an important part of the quotidian life of the British. A close examination of these activities shows how, where possible, the British exported their daily habits and attempted to live a life that was as similar to that at home as was conceivably possible. Changes were reluctantly made, and the most sorely missed aspects of life at home reveal their priorities. The way that the British dealt with drastic changes to their everyday life reveals both a resilient culture accustomed to such changes and a robust appreciation for the most quintessentially British aspects of everyday life. The community also bonded over sharing the changed aspects of everyday life, dealing with those unfamiliar hardships through the familiar act of commiseration.

Chapter Four: "All of us who had been on the Serbian front": Events and community identity

The fourth chapter explores the roles that extraordinary events played in building a sense of community for the British and how that sense of community contributed to the feeling of isolation which was such an important part of the overall experience of the British on the Balkan front. There are many events in the history of the Balkan front that are mentioned countless times in the sources. These significant events, when witnessed by a large number of people, helped to form a consciousness of solidarity within the British community. They created a currency of legitimacy, a sense of inclusiveness for participants and witnesses (and an implied exclusiveness to those who were neither). This chapter examines accounts of and reactions to such events: the Serbian retreat of 1915 and the POW experiences of those left behind; the great fire of Salonika; the downing of a zeppelin over the city; and the death and funeral of Katherine Harley. These events came to represent an important aspect of the localized history of the Balkan campaign, used as a shorthand currency of credibility amongst participants and as a validation of their involvement. This chapter examines how these events functioned within British society on the Balkan front, and how the shared experience of them helped to establish and maintain a strong sense of identity and belonging. The British used these events to build community, and they made sense of their wartime experience with the familiar context of this community.

Chapter Five: "Piccadilly Circus" in Salonika: Reactions to and interactions with the city

The fifth chapter turns to the British relationship with the city of Salonika which

served as the Allied base for most of the Balkan campaign. Like the response to aspects of everyday life, the British response to Salonika went through phases: the immediate reaction was to focus on the obviously foreign and oriental nature of the city. This, however, did not overly familiarize the city, and the British, in order to feel at home, attempted to domesticate the unfamiliar by relating it to home. They also worked to interact with the city, transforming it into their own space. Britons dealt with both the excitement and trauma of being abroad during the Great War in two seemingly contradictory ways: by either glorifying in the exoticness of their locale, or making efforts to reconceptualise their surroundings into more familiar terms. The seemingly contradictory reactions of exoticising and normalizing the environment were both ways of attempting to place it within a context that they could understand. The impulse to normalize their environment, and the ways in which they attempted to do so, reveal their reliance on these aspects of British society. The British made sense of an unfamiliar environment by using the familiar discourse of the exotic "other."

Chapter Six: "To die for someone else's country": Motivation and perception

This chapter deals with the differences in attitudes across the genders, and between relief workers who had volunteered for the Balkan front and soldiers who had been sent there by military command; the value that people placed on different aspects of work and the self-worth they accordingly felt in relation to the perceived value of the work they were doing; and how this idea of worth affected their wartime experiences. The divide between those with positive versus negative perceptions of worth at first appears to be drawn along gender lines, but closer examination of narratives written by men who were on the Balkan front in a volunteer capacity finds that they bear a closer resemblance to the motivations and attitudes of women volunteers than to other males who were in the military. The laudability of volunteer work, most of which was service-based, and the satisfaction involved directly contrasted with the frustration of military work, the inaction, perceived ineffectiveness, and the lack of popularity of the campaign on the home front which all contributed to a lack of confidence and disillusionment for those in the military. At a time when so much importance was placed on the war effort, ideas of self-worth were largely tied up with the perceived importance of one's work. Later historiography addresses the distinction between "work" and "service" and examines the de-legitimization of wartime efforts of non-combatants and those who fought on non-western fronts. Similarly, this chapter analyzes how one's work was directly tied to one's self-perceived ideas of worth and the validity of one's experiences. Even in their most war-based activities (the activities that had as little in common with prewar life) and experiences, Britons relied on the

familiar connection with and attitudes of the home front to frame their own perception of the overall worth of their contributions. The lack of appreciation and recognition that Balkan front participants perceived from their compatriots created a sense of dissidence between their own experiences and those of the nation as a community. This disconnect between those on the Balkan front and the rest of society unfortunately created discontinuity, particularly when participants attempted to integrate their wartime experiences within postwar society, but it reveals the importance of familiarity. It was an essential tool for dealing with wartime difference, which made it all the more disturbing when it failed.

Sources

Participants wrote about their war experiences for propaganda purposes, education, posterity's sake, and defence of self or the campaign. Other accounts may have been belatedly published by well-meaning descendants. Emslie, mentioned at the beginning, believed that her war book would add to the general knowledge about the war. Emslie wrote that she initially resisted her friends' suggestions that she write about her war experiences because, she thought, "I had nothing very interesting to tell." She gradually realised, however, that she did have some perspective to add. For example, "no one had yet written of the victorious advance of the Serbians in 1918."⁵⁶ She described reading over her diaries, which inspired a sense of nostalgia: "everything comes back to me vividly, so that not only do I see, but I also smell and hear in retrospect, and long to be able to transmit something of it all to others."⁵⁷ Mather echoed this justification when he wrote, "Among the many war books which have been published I cannot remember one describing life in the Balkans as seen through the eyes of a very humble member of the P.B.I. (Poor Bloody Infantry to the uninitiated!)"⁵⁸

The intended audience for each source also affects the way it must be read. There are varying degrees of public and private memories within each source. No source is completely private. A series of letters, such as Olive King's to her father and sister, was written with a specific, if limited, audience in mind. Furthermore, Hazel King, a historian, edited King's letters to include details from sources both more "public" (King's lecture notes) and more private (King's diary) than King's letters. Elsie Corbett's diary was written privately but heavily edited before being published. Her later inserts were made obvious by

⁵⁶ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 13.

⁵⁷ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 14.

⁵⁸ William D Mather, "Muckydonia", *1917-1919: Being the Adventures of a One-Time "Pioneer" in Macedonia and Bulgaria During the First World War* (Ilfracombe: Stockwell, 1979), 13.

the retrospective knowledge she added to many entries, but without the original comparison, one can only guess what she took out. Memoirs like Emslie's were written explicitly for public consumption, but Emslie relied heavily upon, and quoted extensively from, her diary (private) and letters (semi-private). Lorimer presumably wrote her diary as a private source, but hinted at an anticipated audience when she wrote, "What awful rot this sounds, I wonder if anyone will understand and not think I'm writing for the sake of words."⁵⁹

Many other memoirs made the transition from private (hurried notes scribbled in the midst of the campaign) to public, some very hastily. Accounts such as those of Fortier Jones, and Alice and Claude Askew, which were published during the war and concerned a recent event, the great retreat, had to be published quickly in order to be current.

This transformation process in itself is fascinating. Angela K. Smith, in her book *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism, and the First World War*, closely examines the relationship between later, reworked accounts of participants and the original sources on which they were based.⁶⁰ For example, Smith argues that Sandes' later autobiography (1927) is "more down-to-earth" and "lack[s] the romanticism" of her 1916 account.⁶¹ Smith compares Stobart's *The Flaming Sword* and the campaign diary on which the book is based. According to Smith, Stobart "always kept the wider significance of the war in mind" and she transformed her diary into a "public text" to promote her own political agenda. Although Smith is more interested in Stobart's use of language and the literary quality of her narratives than historical truth, her examination of the two texts reveals how Stobart re-remembered her experiences to suit the context of the political atmosphere in which it was published, as other participants may have also done. According to Smith, "Stobart attempts to eliminate contradictions and ambiguities, with varying degrees of success, in order to privilege her anti-war leanings." These changes make her published account less personal, less accurate, and, according to Smith, less powerful than the contemporary diary.⁶²

Accounts published during the war may have been censored to present a positive picture of the war effort or to create a glowing report of work done in order to serve a propagandist purpose. Fortier Jones and the Askews, for example, may have focused on

⁵⁹ E C Lorimer, "Papers," IWM 76/192/1, 28.

⁶⁰ Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 49.

⁶¹ Smith, *The Second Battlefield*, 54.

⁶² Smith, *The Second Battlefield*, 58.

gruesome details, such as mothers carrying frozen babies on the retreat,⁶³ in order to produce a greater shock for propaganda value.

The motives of accounts published during the war must be especially suspect, but later accounts are also problematic. Retrospective accounts, even when based on contemporary diaries, are, as historian Arthur Marwick points out, "subject to the fallibility of memory."⁶⁴ Even without the literal or social censorship of the war, the authors may have subjected their accounts to self-censorship. For example, despite the subtitle of "A Personal Diary of Experiences," Corbett, in her account, gives few details of personal thoughts and feelings on private matters. The description of her receiving the news of the death of her brother—with whom she was close—is short and emotionless. It is appended to a description of a "splendid" celebration of Christmas day. Her "diary" reads, "Late that night I got a garbled cable that told me my younger brother had been killed in an air battle, in France."⁶⁵ It is possible that she later edited personal details out of her diary for public consumption; on the other hand, even had she not used her diary to record what must have been devastating feelings, she did not, while preparing her record for publications some forty years later, feel the need to reflect upon how her brother's death affected her. Also, it is clear from the diary that Corbett and Kathleen Dillion became virtually inseparable from the moment they first met, and remained so throughout the war and the rest of their lives.⁶⁶ Corbett described the many trips she and Dillion took together after the war, mainly to visit other women who had been a part of the transport column.⁶⁷ She also apparently lived in Dillion's home town of Spelsbury, Oxfordshire, until her death in 1977, spear-heading such projects as the abolishment of the pub and providing a home to rescued ponies and donkeys.⁶⁸ Corbett does not give any details about the development of this relationship in her diary. Yet, with the distance of time, Corbett felt justified in revealing the details of a scandal that loomed over the first six months of her transport column's existence. This incident is particularly revealing for the discussion of individual memory.

Research for the thesis included nearly one hundred diaries, collections of letters and memoirs left behind by veterans of the Balkan campaign. In addition, primary research has

⁶³ Alice & Claude Askew, *The Stricken Land: Serbia as We Saw It* (London: E. Nash, 1916), 234; Fortier Jones, *With Serbia into Exile: An American's Adventures with the Army That Cannot Die* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1916), 204-205.

⁶⁴ Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* (Chicago: Lyceum Books, 2001), 156.

⁶⁵ Elsie Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia 1915-1919: A Personal Diary of Experiences* (Banbury, Oxon: Cheney & Sons, 1964), 91.

⁶⁶ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 1.

⁶⁷ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 62.

⁶⁸ See the biographical note in Elsie Corbett, *A History of Spelsbury Including Dean, Taston, Fulwell and Ditchley* (Charlbury: Wychwood Press, 2006).

included official and organization records of the Foreign Office and the Scottish Women's Hospitals. In addition to these primary sources, this thesis makes use of biographies and other secondary sources, which give details about persons active in Greece and Serbia during the war years. The sources vary widely: published and unpublished; written during the war, or more than fifty years afterwards; some memoirs cover the author's entire life, while others are strictly limited to the timeframe of the war, revealing little about the author's life before, or afterwards. Of thirty-two published sources, twelve were published during the war, six were published immediately after (within four years), and fourteen were published over ten years later.

The authors, also, vary widely. Both official military personnel and medical and relief volunteers are represented. Men and women, people of all classes and every British nation (as well as a few Anglophone nations who interacted chiefly with the British), and a wide variety of roles and professions left behind source documents. Although sources written by women are less than half the number of documents by men, this number is still disproportionate to the ratio of men and women present on the Balkan front. This imbalance is in part a reflection of the class imbalance and also may be a result of the comparative value that later generations placed on the more unusual women's war experiences, *vis-à-vis* the more typical men's experiences. Regardless, this surplus of women's sources is highly beneficial as this thesis attempts to make sense of British relationships within a makeshift society.

The majority of published sources were written by men and women volunteering with humanitarian relief organisations or working for the Red Cross. They are problematic in a number of ways compared to unpublished sources. Many of them were published during the war and have a distinct fundraising or propaganda purpose, and thus bias. Other memoirs were written up to fifty years after the events they are describing, when the effects of time and especially the effects of postwar restructuring of the wartime experience had a significant effect on memory and the stories it told. Other accounts, based on contemporary letters and/or diaries, had been edited to exclude and emphasise different events and emotions. As with all sources, these things, along with motivation for writing, the audience in mind, and the perspective of the author should be taken into account.

Unavoidably, the spread of sources is skewed towards the middle and upper classes. Despite the fact that the vast majority of British on the Balkan front belonged to the other ranks, there are just over twenty sources that explicitly belong to the rank and file or non-commissioned officers, as well as a few more that can be presumed to be so. This compares to a much greater number of documents created by officers, chaplains, doctors,

nurses, journalists and volunteer relief workers – the vast majority of whom were middle or upper class. This must therefore present a skewed picture of life on the Balkan front. There is no need to present the typical experience of 'everyman' in Macedonia; Moody and Wakefield focus on life and experience at the front line, which was more exclusively concerned with military matters.⁶⁹ While I recognise that this monotonous life, in the barren hills, was the reality for the majority of British on the Balkan front, beyond the hills existed the society that makes this area such a fruitful study for the purposes of cultural history.

⁶⁹ Wakefield and Moody, *Under the Devil's Eye*.

Chapter One: "The only nation that's trusted & respected wherever it goes": British identity

In 1917, after the fire destroyed much of Salonika, ambulance driver Olive King described the relief effort in a letter to her father. She wrote,

I'm proud to say not one Tommy looted a thing. The people knew it & trusted them with anything. It gives you a glow sometimes to realise you belong to the only nation that's trusted & respected wherever it goes. Hated & feared by some, but always honoured, & never despised.¹

This passage demonstrates the great pride that many Britons felt in their nation and nationality, it specifies what was considered by many one of the most positive aspects of Britishness, and it highlights the complicated nature of Britishness itself. King had travelled all over the world and lived in many different countries; her sister lived in London and was married to an Englishman, her father was in Sydney, where she had been born and raised.

There have been many attempts to parse the various meanings of Britishness in its various forms. Although it serves as a parameter for sources in this thesis, Britishness was not the only identification utilized by those on the Balkan front; there were myriad overlapping, and sometimes contradictory allegiances and labels that made up the complex identities of those on the Balkan front. I address the themes of identity here in order to, if not answer, at least explore the issue of the pertinent "who" question of historical inquiry. The aim of this chapter is firstly to define the subjects of this thesis, secondly to introduce the methods by which the sources are analysed, and thirdly to introduce the main argument of the thesis. Wartime experiences, particularly interactions with other nationalities, reinforced Britons' own self-perception. This was largely positive and coincides with British national identity to this day, showing continuity through the twentieth century despite its many upheavals, including the Great War. Britons relied on familiar concepts, including those of national identity, in order to make sense of the new challenges and experiences presented by their wartime activities. Although the war created new experiences and situations for British participants, they viewed their experiences and dealt with their situations by relying extensively on familiarity. This reveals the importance of continuity as a tool for dealing with the trauma of wartime.

Who is British? Parameters for this thesis

While a large-scale dissection of ideas of "Britishness" is not within the scope of this thesis, it is important to identify how the term is used. Historical sources were recorded by people with varied and complex self-identities. In modern times there is often an

¹ Hazel King, ed., *One Woman at War: Letters of Olive King, 1915-1920* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987), 60.

immediate reaction against the application of the label "British" to those who come from the British Isles. The recognition of separate national identities within Britain is not a new phenomenon; however, being over cautious about "Britishness" when examining ordinary people in the past risks both prioritizing political issues over autonomous self-identification and being artificially a-historical. Linda Colley, in her seminal book *Britons*, argues that Britishness was forged alongside other identities, including Englishness, Scottishness, Welshness and Irishness. She writes, "Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at the same time." Britishness is not a blend of regional identities, nor is it Englishness imposed on England's Celtic neighbours. Rather, Colley argues, "Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other."² According to Ward, who discusses Colley's analyses of Britishness, this interpretation "enables 'the British'... to be responsible for the development of their own identities. They allow for inconsistencies, contradictions and flexibility of daily identity formation."³ This definition allows for the complexity of identities; it also grants legitimacy to people's own view of their identities and recognises their agency as human beings, not just historical sources.

Most of the sources used in the thesis were written at a time when recognition of the different nations of Britain was not what it was today. Although there is a good deal of "Scottish pride", possibly due to organisations such as the Scottish Women's Hospitals, there is a tendency to conflate "British" with "English", especially amongst those of non-British origin, and even amongst those from the non-English nations within Britain. It is a tendency which I have made an effort to avoid; but to correct "British" for "English" when discussing a Scottish person's perspective of their community (as both Lorimer and Inglis do⁴) seems somewhat artificial. Fluidity indicates more than the haphazard application of these national labels; Marjorie Morgan, in her book on national identity and travel, explores how British men and women changed the way they identified themselves based on context.⁵ In some cases this may have been merely pragmatic: Fitch wrote, while on the retreat through Albania, that

We found that cries of "Ingleski" had a wonderful effect in making us immune from these attacks. The English have a great name in Albania, and even the one or two Scotsmen in our party sank their nationalism for once. The word "Britanski" would not have saved their skins.⁶

² Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 4.

³ Paul Ward, *Britishness Since 1870* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

⁴ E C Lorimer, "Papers," IWM 76/192/1, 17; Eva Shaw McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 129.

⁵ Marjorie Morgan, *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 4.

⁶ Henry Malden Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth: A Naval Journal*. (London: Macmillan, 1937), 208.

While romantic images and memories of local landscape and sub-culture feature in accounts of people from all over the British Isles, particularly amongst the many Scots, it is notable how strongly these people identified themselves as British, a word which, at the time, was often conflated with English.⁷

There were a large number of Irish serving with the army in Salonika. Irish men and women also served prominently as volunteers and in other roles on the Balkan front. Notably, Flora Sandes was often identified as an Englishwoman of Irish descent.⁸ The Irish situation was complicated and disputed, often violently so; however, for the entirety of the Great War all of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom. Irish men and women can and did identify themselves as British alongside their Irishness, just as Scottish, Welsh, and English men and women did. Many felt a sense of pride in their Britishness, perhaps unsurprising amongst a group of people who had travelled thousands of miles and endured many hardships in the name of the Allied cause. Britishness may have been disputed by Irish nationalists but was certainly not, on an individual, communal or even national level, mutually exclusive with an Irish identity. Irishness, Scottishness, and other regional identities were derived from a particular place of origin or residence, whereas Britishness reflected a self-perceived civil or political identity, and was therefore more flexible. Thus, I am referring to all those from the British isles, including Ireland, as "British," while taking into account wherever practical and possible the other identities that would have had an effect on their viewpoint, including class, gender, and national or regional identity.

Self-identification and community

More controversial is inclusion in this thesis of Americans, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders and other Anglophone war participants of non-British origin or background. These sources add significantly to the discussion of the British community on the Balkan front and their use has been considered and contextual. Self-perception and community are the most important indicators for inclusion. If a source considered his or herself to be British, their self-identification should be respected. Olive King, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is a perfect example. Despite the common existence of strong familial bonds in the UK and their membership in the British Empire, the inclusion of Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians in the definition of British is problematic, not least because British people often considered Australians as separate from themselves,

⁷ Elsie Corbett and Isabel Emslie Hutton are both good examples of this.

⁸ Eugene Michail, *The British and the Balkans: Forming Images of Foreign Lands, 1900 - 1945* (London: Continuum, 2011), 61.

sometimes derisively so.⁹ However, to disregard their self-identification as such at a time when they were legally British subjects would be disingenuous. Given the shared purpose that inspired the patriotism of many war participants, and the fact that, as Paul Ward points out, the British Empire was "a major prop to Britishness", this would have been a strong aspect of their identity.¹⁰

Community is more important for discussing the use of sources throughout this thesis, rather than in this chapter in particular. There are a number of very useful, descriptive and insightful sources that come from Anglophone non-Britons, particularly Americans. The late entry of the United States into the war and the placement of the vast majority of their troops on the western front meant there were very few Americans on the Balkan front throughout the war: mainly journalists and aid workers. Nevertheless, some of them produced interesting and useful records of the Balkan front, for example Fortier Jones' journalistic account of the retreat, *With Serbia into Exile*.¹¹ Their common cultural and linguistic ties made them ideal social and professional partners for the British. They inhabited the same sphere, and their accounts of life on the Balkan front, while essential to remember they are coming from an outside perspective, provide excellent insights into the everyday life of Britons.

Britishness vis-à-vis others

Being abroad gave Britons the opportunity to define themselves by nationality in a foreign land, and in opposition to many other nationalities. In some cases this encouraged them to focus on unity and overcome differences that might have previously divided them (such as class, ethnicity, gender, politics). However, divisions remained a factor in self-identification and national unity was not always able to overcome such differences. For many, their sojourn in the Balkans provided their first interactions with people of other nationalities; the fact that perception of their own national identity remained largely unchallenged is significant. It indicated another way in which Britons maintained their continuity in spite of – or perhaps because of – their wartime experiences.

Colley's *Britons* focuses on the importance of encounters with the "other", arguing "Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other."¹² Although these

⁹ L Creighton, "Papers," IWM 92/22/1, 1 Jun and 23 Jul 1917. For an interesting example, see King, *One Woman at War*, 53.

¹⁰ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 8.

¹¹ Fortier Jones, *With Serbia into Exile: An American's Adventures with the Army That Cannot Die* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1916).

¹² Colley, *Britons*, 6.

methods are useful for a discussion of British interactions with other nationalities, the labels of "self" and "other" disengage from both individuality and recognising groups of people by their common collective identification. The fluidity of labels such as 'British,' makes it sometimes difficult to delineate between the inclusive "self" and exclusive "other". An Australian might be an "other" to an English person yet part of a group of "we Britons" when opposite Serbian peasants. A sympathetic Serbian officer might be considered "one of us" by a Briton facing an administrative battle against the French. Of course, the British, French, Serbs, Italians, Russians, and eventually the Greeks were all part of the overarching "self" of the Allies, with the Central Powers as the hostile "other". But that did not stop the British from, in some instances, preferring the Bulgarians to the Greeks. Group identities were not *simply* binary; they were not binary at all. They were, like national identities, fluid, complex, overlapping, sometimes exclusive and sometimes inclusive, muddled and chaotic. Although these issues are sometimes discussed in terms of Britishness versus the aspirational or condescended "other", Britishness is only one aspect of identity that might be formed in opposition. A Briton one day might be English the next, then nurse, or Ally, or anti-Semite, all within the same person.

Ward discusses the clarification of national identity for Britons who took foreign holidays in the latter half of the twentieth century. He quotes Kipling, who asked, "What should they know of England, who only England know?", thus, Ward argues, "privileging imperial Britons with greater knowledge of national identity than those whose lives had been spent entirely in the imperial metropolis. But Kipling had a point. Identities are often formed in relation to the 'other'".¹³ According to Ward, the postwar trend for foreign holidays exposed more Britons to encounters with

the 'other' in an alien setting.... In such constructions of foreigners, Britons are also constructing themselves.... Holidays have therefore played a part in the reinforcement of national identity in Britain in the twentieth century.¹⁴

Morgan's *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* examines how Victorians established their identities through their travels throughout Britain and the continent. She argues that their encounters with foreigners and outsiders were

crucially important [as] a frame of reference for crystallizing personal and collective identity.... travelling removes people from their familiar milieux and confronts them with the other, or the foreign. This confrontation... forces them to reflect on the familiar, making them more aware of how it defines them individually and collectively.¹⁵

Britons' wartime encounters with foreigners gave them the opportunity to employ this method of self-definition. Due to the vagaries of coalition warfare, the cosmopolitan

¹³ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 85.

¹⁴ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 88- 89.

¹⁵ Morgan, *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain*, 2.

Balkan front contained representatives from Serbia, Greece, Italy, France, Russia, and not least of all Britain and its empire — to name the Allied side only. Hardly a belligerent nationality was unrepresented. Being abroad changed the context and the definition of British identity. The presence of and close interaction with other nationalities gave men and women — some of whom had not travelled before the war — the opportunity to be British in a way that was defined *against* other nationalities. This chapter examines the process and language of Britons on the Balkan front using their interactions with other nationalities to define their own Britishness. Overt discussions of national identity were rare. However, it was common for others to view their experiences of other nationalities as implicit or explicit comparison with the British, usually as a criticism or comparison that upheld positive perceived national characteristics.

The Britishness presented here, in sharp contrast (or rosy comparison) to criticisms of foreigners often perceived as backwards and uncivilized, does not necessarily present an accurate portrayal of the British or their allies and foes. The circumstances may have led many Britons to take an overly positive view of both Britain and Britishness. It is not an objective definition of national identity but what Britons perceived themselves to be under a very specific set of circumstances. Given that an objective definition is impossible, that is perhaps what discussions of Britishness can only ever be. The authenticity of British ideas of foreign characteristics is equally dubious, other than what Britons perceived them to be at a specific time and place.

"Shake hands and offer cigarettes to the captured": Positive Britishness



British troops with Bulgarian POWs © IWM (Q 32230)

What do the specifics of the British self-defined character reveal? Self-portrayals were rarely negative. Occasionally British politicians were criticized for their policies and the effect they had on the ground on the Balkan front. Even more occasionally, the politics or behaviour of another group of British people were criticized (suffragists being the most frequent target). With some notable exceptions (in particular, the British penchant for drink), criticism of individuals was not seen as a reflection of national character.

For some, the contrasts between Britain and the Balkans served to bring out in greater clarity what it was they so cherished about their home country. As will be discussed in the chapter on space, Britain compared or contrasted always favourably to the Balkans. Marquerite Fedden, a VAD nurse with the British Red Cross, wrote on her journey to Salonika,

a few days in the East had made me see the greatness of my country... I had often criticised my country, but going East, only a little way, makes one proud of being British. Our men could not be bettered in style or manner and no others could touch them.¹⁶

As demonstrated by King's quote at the beginning of the chapter, Britishness exemplified trustworthiness. Craigie Lorimer and one of her fellow nurses, upon their escape from the Serbian retreat to Salonika, wrote,

It was so good to see English officers again that Westie in her impetuous way went up and accosted two and asked for news with the result that we were asked out to tea and later to dinner! It is perhaps a little curious and unconventional, but then that's just the delightful part of being British, you can always trust your menfolk.¹⁷

This trustworthiness is also implied by British men's protectiveness of British women. King dismissively described the possessiveness of her male chauffeur counterparts in the British army: "They solemnly assure you "If anyone touched a 'air of your 'ead it'll be over my dead body", which is very nice, but no one seems inclined to scalp us."¹⁸

British portrayal of their own treatment of the refugees, wounded, prisoners of war, and enemy combatants is a strong indicator of what they considered to be important national traits. Bertram, a nurse working in a hospital in Serbia that employed (to use the term loosely) Austrian prisoners of war as orderlies explicitly equated Britishness with magnanimity. She wrote:

The Nursing Staff was truly British. We had no enmity towards the Austrians, only sympathy..., that we used to bring some of our own food... to give them, because they got so little food & rest & had to work!¹⁹

¹⁶ Marquerite Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters: Salonika* (London: Grant Richards, 1921), 49.

¹⁷ Lorimer, "Papers," 79.

¹⁸ King, *One Woman at War*, 22.

¹⁹ E Bertram, "Papers," IWM P348, 4.

Ingram described the selection of Austrian orderlies for work at the various hospitals: "Poor dears, they were all dying to get chosen, because as our head orderly said, though he knew the work was hard, he was willing to do it if only he could keep clean."²⁰ Interactions with Austro-Hungarian POWs in Serbia of 1915 gave the British the opportunity to encounter the enemy in an everyday setting, rather than acts of war. One example is the account compiled and largely written by James Berry about the Red Cross hospital he headed in Vrnjačka Banja. He described in detail his interactions with a variety of nationalities from Austria-Hungary, from the POWs who worked as orderlies in their hospital to the commandants of the town, once the Central Powers had invaded Serbia, making *them* the POWs. According to Berry, there were many comments about the futility of war, something which both "races" could agree upon. However, a special reluctance on the part of the Austro-Hungarian soldier, the emphasis on the horrors of war and "Kanonenfutter," and their lack of dedication to the Central Powers' cause implied a superiority of both the Allied approach to warfare and their war aims.²¹ According to Berry, the Austro-Hungarian soldier was "a kind of mixture of... sheep and hero."²² He wrote:

It was noticeable that among the soldiers we came across, in whatever capacity, we found no shade of animosity towards ourselves as representatives of an enemy country. Their interest, indeed, in the war seemed often of the slightest, and universally their one desire was that the war should end, so that they could return to their homes... In the officers, as in the soldiers, we found no signs of animosity towards England; they still seemed to look on the English with the friendly sentiments which have always been felt towards us by the Hungarians, and to consider the war an interlude, which, when it was over, would leave things just as they were before.²³

Berry got along well with the Hungarian officials, who went to great efforts to ensure that the repatriation of the Berry unit went as smoothly as possible, despite German interference:

Our two Hungarian [guards] were furious with the Germans for their rudeness, and kept on saying apologetically: "Wait till you get into Hungary, and then you will see how different it will be. There everybody will be polite to you." And they were quite right, as events proved.²⁴

In spite of wartime allegiances, hatred of the Germans was another thing the British and Hungarians seemed to have in common. As Berry wrote, any argument could be settled by finding "subject of conversation mutually satisfactory to both... - namely, abuse of 'these pigs of Germans.'"²⁵ The relationship with Austro-Hungarians as described by Berry helped the British to maintain their positive national identity through implying the superiority of

²⁰ M Ingram, "Papers," IWM 86/48/1, n.d. Jun 1915.

²¹ James Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit in Serbia* (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1916), 201, 213 and 231.

²² Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 239.

²³ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 231-233.

²⁴ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 278.

²⁵ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 279. See also page 235.

the Allied cause, upholding their benevolent and respectable international reputation, even among enemies, while at the same time not significantly challenging the negative German stereotypes that contributed towards their dedication to the war effort.

Other accounts imply that while benevolence may have been sentimental, it was an innately British trait and one worth having. Moore wrote of "One Greek prisoner. Fed him up. What fools the English soldiers are. Thank the Lord I'm English."²⁶ Knott, while digging in British cemeteries noticed graves for Turkish and Bulgarian prisoners, "a good mark of British respect."²⁷ British troops were always quick to hand out cigarettes to "cheer up" groups of Bulgarian POWs. After news of an air skirmish nearby, Knott wrote, "They say it was an impressive sight to see our airman shake hands and offer cigarettes to the captured."²⁸ Many did not consider the harmless Bulgarians their true enemy – that honour was reserved for the Germans. The feeling was mutual. Holderness, an officer, wrote,

The following rather significant note was found by one of our officers whilst patrolling enemy lines: "Why do you fight us? Why don't you go to France and fight the Germans?" ...I am... certainly of the opinion that the Bulgarians are not particularly keen on fighting the British forces out here.

He continued, "And I should like to say this about the Bulgar. He fights like a true sportsman, and as such he is respected by the British Army."²⁹ The implication was, of course, that everyone in the British army also fought like a true sportsman. A memory article from the perspective of a German fighter pilot attached to the Bulgarian army also reflected this mutual respect.

Isn't it perfectly swinish that we've got to fly against the Tommies? Just imagine what it would have been like if we had been fighting on the same side, my lad! ... I can't help it, but I like them all. Not only in the mess; I like them in the air as well... And I'm very pleased that they like us too.³⁰

Hennessey wrote that while guarding a section of the front line he and his comrades had "gained the impression that the Bulgars opposite us seemed to be quite a decent lot of blokes really."³¹ British relationships with their less fortunate dependents, prisoners of war and refugees, and even their enemy, gave them the opportunity to display the benevolence and trustworthiness of their nation.

²⁶ L G Moore, "Diary," IWM Con Shelf 12814, 21 Mar 1917. See also Mosquito, n.117 (1957), p.35-37 in G J Davidge, "Papers," IWM 96/23/1.

²⁷ W Knott, "Papers," IWM P305, 19 Jun 1916.

²⁸ Knott, "Papers," 5 Jan 1917. See also C R Hennessey, "Papers," IWM 03/31/1, 136.

²⁹ G W Holderness, "Papers," IWM 81/41/1, 4 Nov 1916.

³⁰ Haupt Heydemarck, "War Flying in Macedonia" *Wings: Flying Thrills* Vol. 1 No. 3, Winter, 1935, London: John Hamilton Limited, in W G Ostler, "Papers," IWM 73/200/1

³¹ Hennessey, "Papers," 148.

"Troops are never purists": Drunkenness and pilfering

Belying Olive King's assertion that Tommies never looted, it seemed that one sin permitted to soldiers was pilfering. This is discussed in detail in the section on drink in chapter three. On that note, drunkenness was the only fault of which Tommies were genuinely accused by one another.³² Knott's diary contains disapproving comments on men being drunk on departure for overseas service after having had one "last night out."³³ Sellors, a reverend en route to Salonika, reported that,

The commandant of the camp... asked men, if they got drunk, to get their friends to get them to the train in an orderly manner as some unfriendly people in the town liked to have a chance of pointing out a drunken British Officer. Another thing he asked was that men would not go to a certain brothel in the town as three men during the week had contracted Gonorrhoea [sic] there. He spoke these things as if asking the men to do him a favour of abstaining from these two horrible vices. It seemed a shameful and disgusting thing to me that British Officers should be capable of such things, or that such advice should be for the moment at all necessary.³⁴

Knott ranted, "It is a lasting shame on the army, the number of young boys who have acquired the taste for drink, by taking rum as medicine."³⁵ St Patrick's Day was a holiday for the tenth Irish division, but Knott was unhappy with the arrangements, writing,

Unfortunately the night was a time of drinking for the majority and before 8 o'clock I do not think there was [sic] a dozen sober men in the camp. It is events like this that prolong this terrible war; it is a disgrace to the British nation!³⁶

By their own admission, Britons tended to have a problem with drink that did not reflect well on them as a nation. Given the importance of drink for British cultural life, it is interesting that drunkenness was seen as the main negative national trait. However, due to the scarcity of drink on the Balkan front, complaints of drunkenness were relatively rare. Generally, drunkenness was overshadowed by other, more positive, British traits.

"In the Balkans one must get used to things": The uncivilized other

Blatant statements of nationalism such as those discussed above were fairly limited. The more subtle retellings of relations with or observations of other nationalities provide, by comparison, insight into British self-perception as a nationality. As mentioned previously, interactions with foreigners provided an opportunity for Britons to define themselves in opposition.

Wendy Bracewell describes how western "travel writing about the Balkans revels in

³² H R Preece, "Diary," IWM 04/4/1, 28 Nov and 1 Dec 1917.

³³ Knott, "Papers," 11 July 1915.

³⁴ J Sellors, "Papers," IWM 87/10/1, 21.

³⁵ Knott, "Papers," 5 Mar 1917.

³⁶ Knott, "Papers," 17 Mar 1917.

difference and the exotic, and particularly in violence or the primitive - traits that serve (so critics tell us) as a foil to self-congratulatory definitions of the west as modern, progressive and rational."³⁷ According to Vesna Goldsworthy, the "Balkanist" narratives of "superior Westerners dealing with primitive and infantile Orientals... were set in stone before the First World War".³⁸ In a way, those recording their war memoirs followed in this tradition. Yet Britons reached beyond the discourse of difference in order to form a relationship with the Balkans, not just as observers but as participants, as will be discussed in chapter five.

In the early twentieth century the Balkans had a particular reputation; British accounts list examples of what they considered to be Balkan incivility. The Balkan peoples with whom they interacted included the Serbs, Greeks, Macedonians, and Turks – groups of people that were sometimes distinguishable from one another, but often times not. Greeks today would likely take exception to being considered "Balkan" and grouped together with Macedonians, as the British exhibited a tendency to do. British perceptions were not often favourable, and when they were, it was usually in a way that glorified the exoticness of these "others". Negative "Balkan" characteristics, on the other hand, affirmed British ideas of their own civility. While the Serbs were also attributed with many negative Balkan characteristics, they had a special role to play in their interaction with the British, and therefore in British construction of their own role and identity. This relationship allowed Britain to play the part of the saviour and friend, big brother, and therefore redeemed Serbia of much of her backwardness. Other Europeans (there was a distinction made between Balkan peoples and Europeans by many Britons), specifically the French, reflected positively on the British, due to their tendency to exhibit negative characteristics, and in the way they treated the Serbs with not as much respect, affection, and assistance as the Brits did.

It is often unclear whether British people are describing Macedonians, Greeks, Turks, or Jews when they observe the local inhabitants of their surrounding areas. This is largely due to the mixed nature of the population, but also sometimes to ignorance. Haines, for example, described Macedonians as "Half Greek, half Turk."³⁹ However, their opinion, language, or descriptions rarely changed dependent upon the race or nationality, ethnicity, or religion of these "others". In many ways, Britons' discussion of the native population allowed them to participate in the explicit "othering" of these peoples. For the sake of

³⁷ Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis, *Balkan Departures: Travel Writing from Southeastern Europe* (Berghahn Books, 2013), 1-2.

³⁸ Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (London: Hurst and Company, 2013), xxii.

³⁹ O C M Haines, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 3245, 5 Aug 1916, 212.

simplicity, I have grouped the discussion of "locals" together, referring to them as such except where their national and ethnic origin is made clear, and drawing out examples where suitable.

Lack of civility was the most common negative characteristic attributed to the local population. As Maria Todorova points out in *Imagining the Balkans*, the use of the word "Balkan" as a pejorative began in the early twentieth century as a result of atrocities during the Balkan wars.⁴⁰ Balkan barbarity was perceived throughout the geographic region, including Serbia and the Serbs, despite their nation benefiting from more British respect and affection than the Greeks and Macedonians. Britons were dismissive in their summaries of local inhabitants and their habits, referring to them, literally or figuratively, as "Balkan." For example, Bonner wrote that she "came across a party of very villainous looking wood cutters — Turks I should think."⁴¹ They were sloppy and unclean.⁴² Creighton objected to a "ruffian... [who] turned my toast with his fingers — which I had seen being used for other purposes. But," she added, resigned, "in the Balkans one must get used to things."⁴³ Public hair-cutting was, she later disapprovingly wrote, "a regular Balkan sight."⁴⁴ Appearance and hygiene habits were only one of many differences between British civilization and Balkan lack thereof. Balkan peoples were —as generalized by the British— dangerous, untrustworthy, ungrateful, rude, lazy and inefficient, and cruel to animals. These qualities contrasted with British cleanliness, sportsmanship and fair play, and benevolence. The differences between themselves and the local population allowed the British to see themselves in a positive light.

The British tendency to conflate the various ethnicities of Macedonian residents did not mean they did not recognise such differences existed. In fact, they criticized unequal treatment within the different groups in the local populations, demonstrating an awareness of minority oppression that was perhaps a result of political engagement both at home and abroad. Rose complained of the Serbian hospital orderlies' treatment of an outpatient. "Our bolnichars⁴⁵ won't do anything for her, won't even wash her dishes, because she's a Macedonian."⁴⁶ Courtney, working with Macedonian refugees from occupied territories, opined that they were "for the most part I fancy minor [Serbian] officials from Macedonia who have fled to escape the vengeance of the Bulgarian population they have been

⁴⁰ Maria N. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.

⁴¹ H D Bonner, "Papers," IWM 07/31/1, 25 Sep 1917.

⁴² F Marshall, "Papers," IWM 07/3/1, 1.

⁴³ Creighton, "Papers," 29 Mar 1917.

⁴⁴ Creighton, "Papers," 14 Apr 1917.

⁴⁵ "Bolnichar" is how the British referred to their Serbian hospital orderlies, from the Serbian word for hospital, "bolnica."

⁴⁶ Jean K Rose, "Diary," IWM 78/4/1, 6 Nov 1917.

oppressing!"⁴⁷ Creighton, who ran a Serbian Relief Fund outpost in a Macedonian village, noted, "All the Christians in the village are said to be poor, but this is not the case with the Turks, who form the larger number of the population." At the Serbian official's insistence, the Christians received relief first, and separately. She also wrote "The Serb corporal is very scornful of the non Christians, & always wants me to give them less."⁴⁸ Such examples only added to the negative British perception of the Balkan population.

Like most of those on the Balkan front, Creighton often did not distinguish between Slavic Macedonians and Serbs – the Macedonian ethnicity, if considered at all, was thought to be a slightly denigrated version of Serbian. Corbett, for example, wrote "Vranje⁴⁹ was the first town of Old Serbia we got to and one noticed at once the fine type of real Serbs, tall, frank, thoroughbred, after the mongrel Macedonians."⁵⁰ Creighton often referred to Macedonians, or Christians, as "Serbs" and Muslims as "Turks." Despite her implicit criticisms of the Serbian reluctance to give aid to the Muslim population, she was varyingly sympathetic and scornful of both the "Serbs", including the army officials she was working with, who may or may not have been from Macedonia, and each contingent of the local population. Part of her scorn was due to the understandable frustration with the lack of respect for her privacy; she wrote

I have more or less discovered who are the various men who come in & out of my room as they like. [A government official, his scribe, the *kmet*⁵¹, 2-3 local police, 2-3 soldiers.] The corporal never leaves us, but as he is a real Serb & always amused, all is well. Perhaps he is there to watch the proceedings for the government.⁵²

For a woman usually afforded Edwardian propriety, this must have seemed barbaric; Creighton's incredulity is palpable as she wrote: "One of the Serb engineers came to visit me unasked while I was lying on my bed & did not leave when he found me there."⁵³ Less threatening, although also annoying, were the voyeuristic habits of the rest of the population: "It gets on my nerves to have old women arriving silently on bare feet & looking up to find them staring at me as I eat my frugal meal. They are liable to appear at any time during daylight."⁵⁴ Despite her own frustrations with the lack of privacy afforded her by her male counterparts, Creighton was unsympathetic to parallel foibles in the female local population. She derisively described a story related by one of her Scottish Women friends: the local women so feared the men that one ran away screaming when she saw two

⁴⁷ Kathleen Courtney, "Papers," IWM PP/MCR/C3 & P96, 7 Jan 1915.

⁴⁸ Creighton, "Papers," 30 and 31 Mar 1917.

⁴⁹ Spelled Vranja in original.

⁵⁰ Elsie Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia 1915-1919: A Personal Diary of Experiences* (Banbury, Oxon: Cheney & Sons, 1964), 156.

⁵¹ A serf or peasant.

⁵² Creighton, "Papers," 31 Mar 1917.

⁵³ Creighton, "Papers," 26 Apr 1917.

⁵⁴ Creighton, "Papers," 9 Jul 1917.

of the Scottish Women ("naturally astride" and so mistook them for men) out riding with two officers. The Macedonians wore braids around their waist to make themselves unappealing "to the Turks, & to simulate pregnancy."⁵⁵

Creighton's extended and in depth interactions with various nationalities allowed her to develop nuanced views and opinions regarding those peoples. Most Britons, especially soldiers, had only limited opportunities for interaction and their opinions were more simplistic, as indicated by the rumours and warnings that circulated British society: the local population were dangerous. Marshall wrote, "We hardly knew how to take them as we were told soon after arrival that some British 'Tommys' had been found murdered, stripped of everything and left by the road side, therefore, our orders were never to go out alone."⁵⁶ Ford reported, "Some of the people out here to my idea are uncivilized, and it is very unsafe to go about by night by yourself."⁵⁷ Fitch also described the dangers of going about Salonika after dark.⁵⁸

Mugging and theft were not the only crimes to be feared; Britons found that locals were generally unscrupulous in their dealings with the British. Brooks wrote, "Greek canteens opened by the camps & we learned the difficulties of Greecko-English and also that [a] Greek requires careful watching in money matters."⁵⁹ Incidents of soldiers stealing from Greek entrepreneurs, Pedler reported, were "not discouraged by the Officers because they didn't approve of the hawkers being there at all."⁶⁰ Hennessey wrote home,

I was down in Salonica last Wednesday, my "holidays". Had a good time. I never buy anything there for you because the shop-keepers have risen to the occasion, & as a rule their goods are gaudy, & altogether too dear for the article itself. They are just like Jews.⁶¹

It was not just their pricing that was unreliable; Creighton complained: "It is absolutely impossible ever to get at any facts in this country."⁶² On the other hand, she also wrote of her time in up-country Macedonia, "One thing which made life there much more comfortable than it would have otherwise been was the absolute honesty of the people, & of my two retainers."⁶³ It's important to realise, that, however capable the British were of making sweeping generalizations based on their interactions with the locals, they were also

⁵⁵ Creighton, "Papers," 9 Jul 1917.

⁵⁶ Marshall, "Papers," 2.

⁵⁷ Edwin Ford, "Papers," IWM Misc 321, n.d [1918?].

⁵⁸ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 285.

⁵⁹ H E Brooks, "Papers," IWM 03/30/1, 13 Dec 1915.

⁶⁰ R A Pedler, "Papers," IWM Con Shelf 4716, 24 Jan 1917.

⁶¹ Hennessey, "Papers," 247. See also Preece, "Diary," 22-28 Aug 1917.

⁶² Creighton, "Papers," 24 Aug 1917.

⁶³ Creighton, "Papers," 30 Sep 1917.

happy to note the exceptions, their own positive experiences with those they interacted with on a close level.⁶⁴

Even Greek neutrality was seen as an indication of unreliability. Ingram and Lorimer both noted humorously while travelling to Serbia en route via Salonika that "Greece for the occasion is 'closing the other eye'".⁶⁵ However, that same neutrality made allied troops feel exposed when they arrived in Salonika, and Greece was criticised by Serbians and Serbian sympathizers for failing to come to Serbia's aid when she was attacked by Bulgaria, which the Serbs interpreted as Greece failing one of the provisions of the treaty that ended the second Balkan war.⁶⁶

In addition to being unscrupulous, locals were ungrateful and rude. Preece, in his tour of duty helping put out fire, reported, "Greeks with their characteristic gratitude attempted to cut our hose."⁶⁷ Brooks complained, "The French built the railway between Larissa & Salonika. We also built the great military road to Seres from Salonika.... It cost millions & must be priceless to the Greeks. (till they let it go to ruin.)"⁶⁸ Gertrude Holland, on the eve of Allied intervention for Serbia, passed through then-neutral Salonika and found people were rude to the British, "bumping into them without apology! Shopkeepers barely civil!"⁶⁹ Creighton, describing the results of her food-distribution, wrote, "The people, being Christians, showed their feeling slightly more than the Turks. Some even thanked me of their own accord, some when told to do so by their kmet, & some said nothing even when it was suggested."⁷⁰

Balkan reputations for laziness and inefficiency were well established. Ingram, en route to Niš, wrote without irony, "Our train was only 1 hour late so we got off in excellent time."⁷¹ King wrote to her father,

I don't know why it is, but in Serbia you always have to catch a train at 5 in the morning, and never arrive anywhere before midnight. There are never any lights anywhere, the station is usually at least a kilometre from the town, and when you finally reach the only hotel, you can't get a room.⁷²

Knott complained about the Greeks helping to make roads getting paid more and according to him, working half as hard.⁷³ Burtenshaw drew a distinction between the varied people within Greece itself; he described passing through Larissa on his way home. He

⁶⁴ For another example, see Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 205-206.

⁶⁵ Lorimer, "Papers," 3 and Ingram, "Papers," 5 May 1915. See also Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 129 and 149.

⁶⁶ G Holland, "Papers," IWM 88/26/1, 179.

⁶⁷ Preece, "Diary," 22-28 Aug 1917.

⁶⁸ Brooks, "Papers," 29 Aug 1918.

⁶⁹ Holland, "Papers," 156.

⁷⁰ Creighton, "Papers," 1 Apr 1917.

⁷¹ Ingram, "Papers," 10 May 1915.

⁷² King, *One Woman at War*, 137.

⁷³ Knott, "Papers," 27 Dec 1915.

wrote, "the difference between this end of [Greece] and Salonica end being noticeable on account of farming people seem more civilised. This part is known as Old Greece."⁷⁴ It was only when leaving Macedonia, and Greek Macedonia, that one returned to civilization. The Greeks were not alone in being marginalized. Serbs shared their reputation for laziness, inefficiency and unscrupulousness.⁷⁵ Creighton complained that a Serbian official in the Macedonian village where she worked was always found with "half a dozen uniformed or ununiformed officials smoking & talking & doing nothing, as usual. It always takes a number to keep any village going, however small it is."⁷⁶ He was, she complained, "amiable, but so slow; & if one goes down to buy before 3 p.m. he has to be waked from his afternoon sleep."⁷⁷ The fact that she felt no compunction about waking an official from his siesta indicated that she strongly felt he should not have been sleeping in the first place, but rather should work all day, like herself.

The British took great exception to the local population's treatment of animals. As Pedler wrote,

We have got a good dog with us now which has followed us for quite a long while & seems quite fond of us. He hates the natives like poison and rushes up barking most furiously whenever one approaches.... The truth is I think that the Greeks do not know how to treat animals and a S.P.C.A. is badly needed here.⁷⁸

Despite all the tensions, there could be a more light-hearted aspect of relations between the British and the local population. Hennessey, working as a dental orderly, commented that he got "pretty well of Greek patients to practice on."⁷⁹ Fitch wrote in his memoir, "It has never been my fortune to find an Englishman who played bridge anything like as well as most of those Greeks."⁸⁰ He later wrote, quoting from his diary, "I love to fleece the Greeks."⁸¹ Hennessey, upon arrival in Katerini, commented on the hostile stares received from the inhabitants. "It may be that their appearance was due to having to live in a hole of a place like this, but we certainly got the impression that they didn't take very kindly to our arrival." However, when they left a few months later, "A local band played us out, and I must say that the inhabitants looked a great deal more friendly than they appeared to be when we arrived. After all we had caused a minimum of trouble, and had spent a large number of drachmas in the town."⁸² As Lucy Riall reveals in her study of a

⁷⁴ H J E Burtenshaw, "Papers," IWM 01/35/1, 29 May 1918.

⁷⁵ Ingram, "Papers," Jull 1915; Holland, "Papers," 160 and 168; Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 192.

⁷⁶ Creighton, "Papers," 30 Apr 1917.

⁷⁷ Creighton, "Papers," 26 May 1917.

⁷⁸ Pedler, "Papers," 24 Jan 1917.

⁷⁹ Hennessey, "Papers," 321.

⁸⁰ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 254. For another example see H M Fitch, "Papers," IWM 76/191/1, 16 Feb 1917.

⁸¹ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 294.

⁸² Hennessey, "Papers," 131.

British community in southern Italy, such attitudes of superiority, while boasting "a sense of patriotic pre-eminence" and justifying authority over a people portrayed as childlike and/or barbaric, did not foster lasting relations between the two communities.⁸³ It takes a minimum of mutual respect to overcome prejudices, as can be seen by the British relationship with the Serbs.

"A wonderfully cheery lot": Plucky little Serbia



A British officer and a member of the Scottish Women's Hospital dancing the Kolo (the Serbian National Dance) at a Serbian Slava or Regimental Festival. Salonika, 1916. © IWM (Q 32068)

Relations between the British and their Serbian allies were much easier than relations with the Greeks or Macedonians. As discussed above, the British observed the Serbs sharing many of the unattractive "Balkan" characteristics of their geographical neighbours. However, many Britons worked in alliance with the Serbian army, and their personal interactions gave them both a political and emotional imperative to rewrite the British perception of Serbians. The positive relationship with Serbians enabled Britons to demonstrate their capacity for generosity and sympathy, and their interactions gave them exposure to a culture that many of them considered exotically aspirational and romantic. Those on the Balkan front, particularly those serving in a humanitarian capacity or those who worked directly with the Serbs, saw themselves as something like saviours – one small nation defending another, much like the propagandist portrayal of the British defence of Belgium.⁸⁴ Thus, their impressions of Serbians tended to be much more sympathetic, and their relationships with Serbs reflected their status as ambassadors and redeemers. As King,

⁸³ Lucy Riall, *Under the Volcano: Revolution in a Sicilian Town* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 173, 175-176.

⁸⁴ Knott, "Papers," 18 Nov 1915; R Gwinnell, "Papers," IWM 01/38/1, 105; King, *One Woman at War*, 18.

who by that time was working directly in the Serbian army as an ambulance driver, wrote: "I love the Serbs, & would hate to leave them. I always feel one can't do enough for them."⁸⁵ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the diaries and memoir of Henry Fitch, who served as liaison officer, working closely with the Serbian army throughout the war. He spent a good deal of time at the Serbian Headquarters near Salonika, reporting in his diary the enjoyable evenings he had there. He wrote, "I went out to Derok's⁸⁶ Mess where I dined... we had a most cheery evening – all of them expressing great friendship to me. I think they are really very very fond of me which is a great joy."⁸⁷

In Fitch's diaries, the feelings of affection between the British and Serbs were clear; the Serbs only criticized the British when they felt the British government had failed to give them the necessary aid. In these cases, frustration from the Serbs was mainly expressed against the central government, rather than their representatives on location, who usually sided with the Serbs and criticized their own government.⁸⁸ At the height of the 1915 crisis, when Serbia was overrun by the Central Powers and the Allied powers promised military aid but failed to act quickly enough, Fitch wrote, "We are certainly not so popular as we were and the Serbians are raising the cry that the Allies have betrayed them." Significantly, he added, "The French and English troops certainly appear to be at least 6 weeks too late."⁸⁹ In his postwar memoir he goes even further, writing, "We have detected a big change in the Serbian attitude towards us. A short time ago we were very popular, but there is now a definite coolness. They are raising the cry that the Allies have betrayed them and, in our opinion, they have good cause for doing so."⁹⁰ He was disappointed in the lack of military effort on behalf of the Serbs, adding to reports of their criticisms, "and I don't blame them."⁹¹ Fitch was also frustrated with delays to his scheme of Serbs being trained by the British navy: "I am sick of waiting."⁹² Fitch fought for the Serbs on smaller issues, as well. He wrote that his Serbian counterpart was "very bored over an English order that the Y.M.C.A canteen at his camp is to be closed – no English goods being allowed to be sold to the Serbians. It seems a very great pity." Fitch attempted to work around this restriction by buying supplies, including a "British warm [overcoat]", from the British canteen for Serbian officers in his own name.⁹³ The importance these Britons placed upon their own

⁸⁵ King, *One Woman at War*, 50.

⁸⁶ Spelled Derok in original. Colonel Derok was an officer in the Serbian Army Service Corps.

⁸⁷ Fitch, "Papers," 14, 24 and 26 Jan 1917.

⁸⁸ King, *One Woman at War*, 123-125.

⁸⁹ Fitch, "Papers," 7 Nov 1915.

⁹⁰ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 203; see also 219-220.

⁹¹ Fitch, "Papers," 28 Apr and 12 May 1917.

⁹² Fitch, "Papers," 21 Feb 1918.

⁹³ Fitch, "Papers," 25 Oct 1917 and 31 Jan 1918.

good treatment of the Serbs, both individually and as a nation, can be seen by their annoyance with perceived snubs or let downs. Rose wrote with implied criticism that "The CO neglected to reply to" a speech given by the officer in charge of the bolnichars on Orthodox Christmas.⁹⁴

There was, as always, a lighter side. Fitch reported "I beat the great Mitrović⁹⁵ in three straight games at chess after lunch, much to everyone's delight. It's the first time he had been beaten for months & they took it allegorically & said the English always came in at the end!!"⁹⁶ King wrote to her father, "We had an old Serbian colonel to supper, so gave him the most British meal we could manage. He had his revenge last night, he asked us to a Serbski supper & we've all been feeling rather worse for the wear ever since."⁹⁷ Fitch's future wife, Lorimer, found different aspects of the Serbian soldier praiseworthy. Upon her arrival in Belgrade, she wrote:

The Serbian officers are really remarkably handsome men, I'm sure the average of looks must be much higher than ours – every second one seems out of the ordinary-ily good-looking. They seem a wonderfully cheery lot and certainly a magnificent type of fighting man, bronzed and hardy and broad shouldered.⁹⁸

Lorimer described the Serbian officers she interacted with as charming, "polite and respectful."⁹⁹ Rose described one of the men who visited her camp in Ostrovo as "one of the perfect kind of Serb Officers. Perfectly natural & simple."¹⁰⁰

Even less savoury traits were told in a humorous light, as demonstrated by this story in Fitch's memoir:

One day the Admiral sent me out to General Jivković¹⁰¹ to demonstrate a trench periscope and to tell him that, if the Serbians wished, we would order 20,000 from home. The General, who was seated in a leafy hut in the garden of his headquarters, spent a pleasant afternoon putting the periscope round the door-post and startling approaching Staff officers by speaking to them before they actually appeared in sight. It became his inseparable plaything. He went into the town to take tea with a well-known hostess. When she apologized for her late appearance he said, "It is quite all right, Madame, I saw you bathing in your courtyard – by means of this little toy with which the English have presented me." My propagandist mission was a failure.¹⁰²

In some cases, the relationship between individual Britons and Serbs went beyond political alliances and mutual respect. There are quite a few such instances, including the

⁹⁴ Rose, "Diary," 15 Jan 1918.

⁹⁵ Spelled Mitrovitch in original.

⁹⁶ Fitch, "Papers," 2 Feb 1917.

⁹⁷ King, *One Woman at War*, 42.

⁹⁸ Lorimer, "Papers," 33-35.

⁹⁹ Lorimer, "Papers," 37, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Rose, "Diary," 28 Apr 1918.

¹⁰¹ Spelled Jivkovitch in original.

¹⁰² Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 159.

friendship between King, Emslie, and "Yovi" (Milan Yovitchitch¹⁰³, the Serbian liaison officer).¹⁰⁴ Fitch's diary records his frustration with his job as secretary for Troubridge, which came to a head with a public argument in December 1917. Fitch complained in his diary "after dinner was in such a mood that I gambled heavily and lost 600 drachmas at Couveles. I never have any luck when I gamble."¹⁰⁵ His last statement is an exaggeration; as will be discussed later, Fitch was a compulsive card player, but in this instance it did nothing to improve his mood. The following evening, he made one of his habitual visits to the Serbian motor transport camp where "Col Derok provided a useful outlet for all my troubles in the evening and was very sympathetic."¹⁰⁶ This mutual support explains, and perhaps results from, Fitch's commitment to the Serbian cause. In the following weeks, he seems more dedicated than ever, complaining that he was the only British officer present at the Crown Prince's birthday celebration. He also reacted against the German peace proposal, which would reinstate Serbia as before the First Balkan war, writing, "This would be quite unacceptable."¹⁰⁷

These international friendships evidentially had a huge emotional impact on a personal level. The British relationship with Serbia enabled Britons to view themselves in a positive light, both from their position as benefactors, and in their perceived cultural superiority. This explains why some expressed such frustration and disappointment when they felt their government or military organisations were failing in their support for the Serbs.

"Rather an up hill job": Language and communication

Language was another aspect of British-Serbian relations. Language lessons, in addition to being a means to an end, became an important means of interaction and exchange. Making efforts to study and learn Serbian was a mark of respect and dedication towards the Serbs, and many expressed a desire to do so, although those numbers who actually became relatively fluent in Serbian were fairly few. Kathleen Courtney struggled with communication in her work trying to arrange for refugee relief amongst the various Allied officials in Salonika. Her motivation revealed dedication to her job and the people

¹⁰³ The correct transliterated spelling should be Jovičić, but I have kept the original spelling as it was consistently used by the Yovitchitch family and their friends in publications. Milan's father Alexandra was a Serbian diplomat who married a British woman; his sister Lena wrote several books including a biography of their father and account of her experiences under occupation in Second World War Yugoslavia. Lena A. Yovitchitch, *The Biography of a Serbian Diplomat*, (London: Epworth, 1939).

¹⁰⁴ Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928), 100.

¹⁰⁵ Fitch, "Papers," 1 Dec 1917.

¹⁰⁶ Fitch, "Papers," 2 Dec 1917.

¹⁰⁷ Fitch, "Papers," 16 and 17 Dec 1917.

she was trying to help. She wrote, "I would give a good deal to speak Serbian fluently and am thankful for the little I have learnt."¹⁰⁸ Creighton, working with villagers in Macedonia, also found difficulty communicating. "The Macedonian they talk is debased form of Serbian, & I struggle on with the little Serb[ian] I know & get somewhere with them."¹⁰⁹ She found it varied from village to village, and that her Serbian assistant had even more difficulty making himself understood. "All the same I get on very well with the villagers, & only wish I could really talk to them."¹¹⁰ Later, she wrote, "It was really quite a wrench leaving Skočivir,¹¹¹ but of course not being able to talk their language I was not able to make real friends of the people."¹¹² The desire to serve was often tied up in a desire to communicate, so Serbian language lessons often came out of a sense of dedication to one's work, whether that was refugee work or Anglo-Serbian relations. Fitch recorded his struggles with almost daily lessons with a Serbian officer. "The teacher promises I shall speak the language decently in 3 months," he reported, "but I very much doubt it. I put it at a year."¹¹³ His efforts came to fruition when, a year later as predicted, he made Christmas and New Year's speeches in Serbian that were received "amid great enthusiasm." He wrote, "in middle of mine I was shouldered round the mess! Dear fellows."¹¹⁴

Conversely, a lack of effort towards language learning was often indicative of a lack of dedication. Lorimer wrote that the lectures on work in Serbia and Serbian lessons organised on the voyage to Salonika were "rather an up hill job and I'm afraid our hearts aren't very much into it."¹¹⁵ For most, it was not until they were in the midst of their war efforts that they found the motivation for such a difficult task and language learning. Some passages from sources describe communication mishaps or encounters with strange languages, using a tone of condescension or mocking that implied a lack of respect or ambivalence towards communication. Rose complained that the CO has appointed a nurse as temporary Sanitary Officer "thinking that as she has had training as a mental nurse she may be able to make the bolnichars do what she wants even though she doesn't know their language."¹¹⁶ Bailey described a night spent in a Greek church with six others who

were kept awake most of the time by a Hindu who alternately sobbed over a torn-up arm or wandered around bewailing (no doubt in excellent Hindustanese) the loss of

¹⁰⁸ Courtney, "Papers," 7 Jan 1915.

¹⁰⁹ Creighton, "Papers," 2 May 1917.

¹¹⁰ Creighton, "Papers," 9 May 1917.

¹¹¹ Spelled Skocivir in original. A village in present-day Macedonia.

¹¹² Creighton, "Papers," 30 Sep 1917.

¹¹³ Fitch, "Papers," 8 Nov 1916, 9, 11 and 18 Jan 1917; Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 271.

¹¹⁴ Fitch, "Papers," 7 Jan 1918.

¹¹⁵ Lorimer, "Papers," 13-14.

¹¹⁶ Rose, "Diary," 6 Nov 1917.

some "Grik moni, Indiah moni", unfortunately none of us could understand Hundustanee (or whatever it was) and he knew no English, so he mourned alone...¹¹⁷

Communication with the French was "carried on by much waving of arms and explanatory noises and grimaces" and a mixture of pigeon English and pigeon French: "Salonique! Biere, vin rouge, Johnny... Bulgar fineesh, no bon!"¹¹⁸ Ingram described the orderlies in the Red Cross hospital where she was working in Serbia: "Practically all our men come from Bohemia or "Burmia" as they call it and they all speak German as well as Bohemian, or Slav or Check (that's not spelt as well as it might be) or whatever their language is."¹¹⁹ Her flippant tone sits awkwardly against stories of her warm relationship with these same orderlies. Bailey's tales of miscommunication, while they may offend the modern reader, were intended as humorous anecdotes to connect him with his distant family. Yet the tone of these abstracts marks a striking contradiction with the efforts that some went to in order to make themselves understood, and perhaps more importantly, to understand. Rose, for example, told a similar antidote but with a gentler tone. She described walking in Macedonia and befriending "4 small boys who shared our tea, demanded 'para' which they didn't receive, tried to teach us Turkish words in return for English ones..."¹²⁰ The potential for miscommunication was huge, and sometimes carried high stakes. Fitch described the difficulties of marine warfare on the Danube in 1915. "Tempers were getting frayed and there was likely to be misunderstanding of sarcastic remarks translated into three languages."¹²¹ Communication difficulties were not limited to those who spoke different languages. Lorimer, a Scot, described her American colleague thus: "he really is a dear man, though he and I can never make out what the other says!"¹²² A passage from Rose's diaries demonstrated that it was not so much the skill that mattered; when it came to languages, a little effort went a long way: "As to languages, the Italians knew absolutely nothing but their own; for the rest — a little French, a little English, a little Serb[ian]; speeches, toasts, songs for 3 hours plus!"¹²³ King agreed, writing,

When we go home, we'll find it quite impossible to talk proper English. For 2 ½ years now we've all talked a mixture of French & English, & now so many Serbian words have crept in, too, that it's the most extraordinary polyglot imaginable. In letters, I find I've got to watch all the time, to keep our ridiculous mélange out.¹²⁴

While some saw language as the key to communication with allies, Davidage took a more nuanced view. He described a meeting with a Greek policeman on a tour of the

¹¹⁷ R J Bailey, "Papers," IWM 92/36/1 & 2027, 12 Sep 1916.

¹¹⁸ Bailey, "Papers," 1 May and 7 Aug 1916.

¹¹⁹ Ingram, "Papers," n.d. Jun 1915.

¹²⁰ Rose, "Diary," 12 Nov 1917.

¹²¹ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 139.

¹²² Lorimer, "Papers," 43.

¹²³ Rose, "Diary," 30 Oct 1917.

¹²⁴ King, *One Woman at War*, 44-45.

Macedonian front in 1961. "The conversation which followed was carried on with much flourishing of hands, pointing and miming" and the meagre assistance of small knowledge of each other's languages. "He was very pleased to made the acquaintance of an English man who had served in Greece. War was a terrible thing. We should be much happier if we all spoke the same language. I doubted this but did not say so."¹²⁵

Creighton described her adventures with both learning Serbian and teaching English amongst her various associates in Macedonia. Like Fitch, her motivation to learn Serbian was tied to both a desire to do her job better and to have a better connection with the people she was working for. Her lessons had a further function of serving as a conduit for social encounters. For example, she described a Serbian military lawyer who accompanied her to her camp "as he wished to see my English Serbian books." He offered her a ride on his horse then left with her phrasebook which was later "returned by an orderly on horseback, & I was asked if I would like a ride."¹²⁶ Similar to sport, which will be discussed in a later chapter, this passage indicates the function that these lessons had: they aided social interactions. Sometimes, these interactions became a bit too close for Creighton, who attempted to maintain her privacy and safety as the sole British women in her village. She considered the wisdom of one Serbian officer's request to teach him English: "Tho' I quite like him it may become a repetition of the Italians at Sokulevo, with only me & no mess tent, so I think it rather dangerous. Happily the heat has kept Lt Polli off."¹²⁷ Despite the danger of attracting him as an unwanted suitor, Creighton agreed to give lessons but found the arrangement had an unexpected element. She wrote,

I hope my English lesson to the little Serb officer on the opposite spur will not always mean I have to eat an omelet in the middle of the morning. I go to him so that I can make the lesson as long or short as I like, but this is rather an undesired addition.¹²⁸

"How universal is the dislike of the French": A common enemy

In this memoir, Fitch described, "a very pathetic meeting" with an Austrian medical officer dying of typhus. He told the Austrian he was English and gave him a piece of bread. The officer responded that he once had a love of England but lost it when the ship he was on was torpedoed by the Allies and no effort was made to help survivors.

I was able to tell him that I also had been there, that the British Admiral had asked permission to pick up survivors, and that the French C.-in-C. had refused. He said he

¹²⁵ "To Colonial Hill," Mosquito, n.137 (1962), p.3-6 in Davidge, "Papers."

¹²⁶ Creighton, "Papers," 13 and 17 Jul 1917.

¹²⁷ Creighton, "Papers," 31 Jul 1917.

¹²⁸ Creighton, "Papers," 31 Jul 1917.

was very glad to know that before he died; one of his great faiths had been restored. The meeting was the most extraordinary confidence of my career.¹²⁹

The British may have condescended to and judged the local population, but they *detested* the French. As Fitch observed, "They are really extraordinarily unpopular."¹³⁰ This animosity was most likely based on the contemporary cultural and political rivalry between the two nations, but also resulted from the British perception of French behaviour on the Balkan front. The Italians suffered similar judgments. Creighton reported a conversation with a Serbian officer who "obviously has a poor opinion of the Italians — as to the way they have treated the Serbs, their conduct during the war & their fighting capacities."¹³¹ But they were not as present as the French, so criticisms were rare.

Positive interactions with the French generally involved food. Knott wrote that he looked forward to exchanging bully beef with French soldiers, "there's [sic] being a change from our salty stuff."¹³² French food in general was a welcome change for many Britons: Bonner wrote that she shared meals with French sisters "so of course jolly nice, beautifully cooked & served outside."¹³³ For Creighton, lunch at French aviators camp involved "a great deal of food."¹³⁴ However, the British were superior when it came to making tea. Lorimer and her companion, en route back to Britain, reportedly demonstrated their sophisticated tea-making system on the deck of their ship. Lorimer wrote, "A nice French officer was appalled at our proceedings and was sure we should set ourselves and the whole place on fire, but we are much too experienced travellers by now to do any such stupid thing."¹³⁵ French propensity for food was sometimes detrimental to their health; Fitch wrote, on the retreat, "We heard that the French Mission had suffered badly from frostbite; they *would* sit down and make tea in the snow."¹³⁶

For the most part, British observations of and interactions with the French were overwhelmingly negative. Fitch described witnessing an accident where a "Greek was knocked over by a French Motor & killed just in front of me; horrible sight which made me feel very sick & very fierce against the French and their furious driving."¹³⁷ The French were criticized for pilfering from the local population and for not helping refugees evacuate

¹²⁹ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 209.

¹³⁰ Fitch, "Papers," 31 Jan 1917.

¹³¹ Creighton, "Papers," 1 Oct 17; see also 21 Jul 1917. For other examples, see Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 251, 280 and 298.

¹³² Knott, "Papers," 9 Dec 1915.

¹³³ Bonner, "Papers," 25 Sep 1917.

¹³⁴ Creighton, "Papers," 1 Apr 1917.

¹³⁵ Lorimer, "Papers," 95.

¹³⁶ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 223.

¹³⁷ Fitch, "Papers," 13 Nov 1916.

during the fire in Salonika.¹³⁸ They were accused, along with the Russians, of looting wine shops and getting drunk.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Fitch reported, "The French lorries appeared to be full of pretty girls, and some ugly stories got about."¹⁴⁰ Many complained about the filthy state of French or formerly French dressing stations and ships.¹⁴¹ Creighton, on discovering she was aboard a Franco-Serbian ship, decided that fact "partly accounted for its dirt and fleas."¹⁴² Drunkenness and pilfering were generally excused when committed by British soldiers and unforgivable when committed by the French; hygiene was a distinctive British quality. As Inglis wrote when she described the SWH taking over a Serbian hospital, they "cleaned, and cleaned, and cleaned. That is a Briton's job all over the world." French dirt contrasted with British hygiene.¹⁴³

"I don't think very kindly of the French soldiers hereabouts," Creighton wrote.¹⁴⁴ Her main complaints against the French were regarding their ideas of sexual leniency. She wrote, "The French general in chief is known to be useless... Morals known to be loose."¹⁴⁵ For a single woman living on her own in the hills of Macedonia, with no one but French officers in surrounding camps for company, it was a problem. Creighton recounted one instance in veiled terms:

before I had shut up my tent for the night there appeared a young French officer at the door.... not knowing what he wanted [I] refused to let him come in. He told me his name Jean Leclerc, his father & uncle both generals; & he turned out all that the French are supposed to be. I explained the English point of view, which pained him, but he was a gentleman, after French ideas.¹⁴⁶

Though she thought she had educated him on her standards, he appeared the next evening, "ostensibly to get some cards he had left the night before....I stood with a table between us... till he chose to go, probably 1 hr, talking rubbish."¹⁴⁷ Creighton was more annoyed than threatened by the Frenchman's attentions, as evidenced by her tone. Her self-confidence afforded her the ability both to endure the unenviable isolation and to express a more nuanced view of the French. She formed an ambivalent relationship with the French commandant of a neighbouring camp, a "strange individual with a leer."¹⁴⁸ Though Creighton described her relationship with the commandant with a healthy detachment, it is clear from the numerous mentions in her diary that the French camp was an essential part

¹³⁸ Creighton, "Papers," 4 Sep and 29 Aug 1917.

¹³⁹ Creighton, "Papers," 24 Aug 1917.

¹⁴⁰ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 278.

¹⁴¹ Knott, "Papers," 21 Nov 1915; A M Lees, "Papers," IWM 99/76/1, 29 Jul 1915.

¹⁴² Creighton, "Papers," 17 Oct 1917.

¹⁴³ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 169.

¹⁴⁴ Creighton, "Papers," 4 Sep 1917.

¹⁴⁵ Creighton, "Papers," 18 Apr 1917.

¹⁴⁶ Creighton, "Papers," 5 Apr 1917.

¹⁴⁷ Creighton, "Papers," 6 Apr 1917.

¹⁴⁸ Creighton, "Papers," 2 May 1917.

of her social life during the summer of 1917. She played bridge with them nearly every evening ("My coming makes the fourth."¹⁴⁹) and was taught to ride and fish by her French companions.¹⁵⁰ Creighton wrote, "I am told I am a bon comrade by the commandant.... As Miss Sterling says the commandant is a scream."¹⁵¹ When she learned they were leaving, Creighton wrote stoically, "It has advantages, as the old man is too rude & jealous."¹⁵² But she would miss her French neighbours, for their company as well as for "the horses & fishing rods ... also the communique and the bridge..."¹⁵³ Though Gallic characteristics made the French less-than ideal companions for Creighton, they were an acceptable substitute when her own compatriots were too far away to socialise with on a daily basis.

One of the most widespread complaints against the French was their handling of military affairs and their perceived lack of support for the Serbs.¹⁵⁴ British affinity for the Serbs may have encouraged the lack of French sympathy. Criticism of French treatment of the Serbs implied British benevolence. When Fitch arranged for the training of Serbs on British ships, he wrote, "We are glad to have got the training of these men & the Serbs are delighted the French aren't doing it."¹⁵⁵ This rivalry dated back to the beginning of the war in Belgrade, where, as Fitch wrote, the Serbian staff "met us with open arms" whereas the French and Russian units in Belgrade were less enthusiastic about British command.¹⁵⁶ Creighton's position as the sole aid worker in a Macedonian village full of Allied officials gave her a more nuanced perspective. She had a more or less easy association with a wide variety of these officials, who confided in her, and she described in her diary the intricacies of inter-Allied relations from many points of view. As she wrote, "Outwardly commandant [French] and engineer [Serb] are best of friends; but each tell me what they think of the other."¹⁵⁷ She observed, "It is sad how universal is the dislike of the French our men had little good to say of them & thought them poor fighters. The Serbs, however, are universally popular, & they only wish we have been allowed to fight side by side." She had been told that the French prevented this "out of jealousy."¹⁵⁸

A lot of the French criticism came in the aftermath of a failed French-lead attack on Monastir.¹⁵⁹ Fitch wrote that the Serbs had supported the French in the attack, "Who say

¹⁴⁹ Creighton, "Papers," 6 May 1917.

¹⁵⁰ Creighton, "Papers," 7 and 15 May 1917.

¹⁵¹ Creighton, "Papers," 4 and 5 May 1917.

¹⁵² Creighton, "Papers," 6 Jul 1917.

¹⁵³ Creighton, "Papers," 8 Jul 1917.

¹⁵⁴ Fitch, "Papers," 28 Jan and 13 Mar 1917.

¹⁵⁵ Fitch, "Papers," 5 Oct 1916.

¹⁵⁶ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 133.

¹⁵⁷ Creighton, "Papers," 24 Apr 1917.

¹⁵⁸ Creighton, "Papers," 8 Apr 1917.

¹⁵⁹ Present-day Bitola in Macedonia.

they cannot do everything!!; one wonders what they have done. The Serbians very bored about it."¹⁶⁰ Creighton recorded the Serbian and Italian criticism of the French for their failure and Monastir with claims that they were "lazy and incapable."¹⁶¹ Later, she met with a French-speaking and sympathetic Serbian colonel who "says it is only the French in jobs in the rear who are not liked, as they are mainly civilians & if officers have swelled heads. The soldiers in the trenches get on very well together...." According to him, the French should not be blamed for Monastir fiasco as they did not have enough men to push on.¹⁶² She also befriended a French commandant, who told her the French troops could not push through Monastir as they had come from the Dardenelles and were ill and tired.¹⁶³

Creighton met with an American journalist, who, like Creighton, interacted with a wide variety of nationalities and negotiated their various loyalties. He presented a plausible explanation for why the French were so despised.

He said he had been pro-ally from the beginning, & had worked hard to get the Americans to understand things, & the English & French to understand one other.... Out here misunderstandings were worse, as things were more difficult, & there were so many different nationalities. Also the French general was no diplomat. The English & Italians got on well, & the English & Serbs; but it was always difficult to tolerate the top dog nation. Salonica was now humming with recriminations after the failure of the attack.¹⁶⁴

However much the British may have criticized the lack of support for the Serbs from the French, the vast majority of troops on the Balkan front were French. Because of this, they headed up the inter-Allied force, and this leadership left them susceptible to criticism, from the Serbs but especially from the Brits.¹⁶⁵ Because this thesis focuses on the British perspective, it gives a different perspective. However, popular memory and in both countries focused on the greater French contribution. As Pavlowitch wrote, "The French had rescued the Serbian army and brought it back to life. They had formed an emotional link with soldiers and refugees who looked to them as saviours and friends".¹⁶⁶

Negative French qualities served to highlight positive British ones. Where the French were untrustworthy, unsavoury, unclean and unsupportive of the Serbs, the British were unimpeachable in their behaviour, hygienic and had a special relationship with their Serbian allies and friends. This perception of British traits as compared to others on the Balkan front served to reinforce positive national identification. Britons also exhibited many

¹⁶⁰ Fitch, "Papers," 23 Mar 1917.

¹⁶¹ Creighton, "Papers," 25 Mar 1917.

¹⁶² Creighton, "Papers," 1 Jul 1917.

¹⁶³ Creighton, "Papers," 7 May 1917.

¹⁶⁴ Creighton, "Papers," 2 Jun 1917.

¹⁶⁵ For a discussion of this, see David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Britain, France and the Balkans in the First World War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

¹⁶⁶ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans, 1804-1945* (Longman, 1999), 215-216.

negative traits themselves - such as drunkenness, "pilfering" (looting), and unsavoury behaviour. Yet British excesses were excused or subsumed into a positive stereotype while others' behaviour became part of the negative stereotype. Some observers criticized British participation in drunkenness and looting, and attempted to distance such behaviour as "un-British." Others legitimized behaviour as part of the altered morality of wartime, relating behavioural transgressions with a charming or endearing tone. The examples above focus on positive traits of Britishness not shared by other Allies, and negative traits of otherness not shared by Britons. This enabled the British to maintain their positive self-perception. The "Balkan" traits of the local population reinforced ideas of British civility. The French were more European, and therefore civilized, and their negative traits were shared to some extent by the British. Yet French and British troops were in Salonika to act as a prop to the Serbian army, and their special relationship with the Serbs enabled the British to establish their superiority over the French in their own minds.

Goldsworthy argues that, on an imaginary map of Europe, both Britain and the Balkans are on the boundaries. The British perceive the Balkans as "project[ing] a strong desire to be seen as European", yet the values of 'Europeaness' – observed from Britain – are "regarded with suspicion" by anti-Europeans.¹⁶⁷ However, on the Macedonian front, the British and Serbs found common ground, at least from the British perspective, by despising the "European" French and Italians. The narrative of Britishness being "different from and often symbolically superior to" Europeaness in Balkanist literature consigns the Balkans to being part of the threatening European "other,"¹⁶⁸ yet during the Great War, British relationships with the Balkans made the *Europeans* the other.

Rather than being a time of questioning and disillusionment, the Great War maintained a consistent sense of nationality and identity. Being abroad gave Britons a chance to reflect on their identity in comparison to other nationalities. They relied on established stereotypes of the peoples they encountered – many of them negative – and a narrative of superiority in order to reinforce positive Britishness, and used their interactions with other nationalities to reinforce largely positive British traits. Most of these traits have remained part of the British stereotype. The war experience did not change British identity; it defined it, clarifying it, and put it into context. Despite the traumas of war and displacement, ideas of Britishness remained surprisingly consistent. The interactions with other nationalities threw this Britishness into sharp relief, and rather than undermining it, served to reinforce it. Focusing on these positive aspects of Britishness allowed Balkan

¹⁶⁷ Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, 10.

¹⁶⁸ Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, 10.

front participants to build upon a sense of patriotism. By doing so, they were able to create a consistence of identity for themselves which helped them through the new encounters and experiences of wartime.

Chapter Two: "You seem such a happy family!": Connections and community

Part I: "Dancing, music, and a little love-making": Connections on the Balkan front

Socialite and volunteer nurse turned ambulance driver Elsie Corbett found ample social opportunities upon her arrival in Salonika. Even before disembarking, the cousin of her friend Kathleen Dillion

turned up in a small sailing boat and took her and me and Stewart off for the day. We lunched sumptuously at the White Tower and then toured the Bay, till we chanced upon the T.B. commanded by Stewart's cousin, so we boarded her for tea, and then back to our own ship.

Once ashore, an "Ayrshire neighbour turned up" and Corbett told him news of a son born while he was away.¹ Corbett's account demonstrates the many ways British people utilized and exploited their existing connections in order to form a community on the Balkan front as well as forming new and lasting friendships in the intense conditions of the war: Corbett met Dillion in 1915. They worked together for the duration of the war and remained lifelong friends and partners. Corbett's prewar acquaintances and friends, such as the Ayrshire neighbour, formed an important part of her wartime associates. The friends and relations of new connections, such as the cousins of her fellow chauffeurs, were assimilated into her social life.

Looking at interpersonal relationships reveals the extent to which Britons depended upon their prewar lives in their new settings. Social circles from Britain were recreated on the Balkan front, particularly between the middle and upper class volunteers and their social equivalents among the officer class of the army. These associations were quickly expanded as people exploited both direct and indirect connections. The British also used their cultural habits as ways to entertain themselves and to make new connections. Cafes, concert parties, at homes and sports days were all excellent places to meet like-minded Britons. These associations were a way of asserting normalcy despite the conditions on the front and represent the importance of continuity with prewar lives for individuals.

Prewar connections were essential for social life on the front. Not only were they an emotional reminder of home, they served as the basis for social networks, as people were introduced through mutual friends. As the war drew on, wartime connections became established friendships and had a similar function to home connections: they were emotionally important and helped to establish social opportunities. Moreover, Britons in

¹ Elsie Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia 1915-1919: A Personal Diary of Experiences* (Banbury, Oxon: Cheney & Sons, 1964), 63.

the Salonika theatre considered these relationships as more than just for the duration – a concern for long-lasting personal and professional relationships was evident.

Not all connections were positive. There were plenty of disagreements amongst the British on the Balkan front and there was plenty of dysfunction within the units. There may have been efforts to suppress reports of tensions for the sake of propaganda and appearance in official and journalistic contemporary accounts, but no such effort was made in individual accounts. As much as the various units and organisations would have liked to present a united front in public, the interests of the war effort were not enough to make people suppress their ordinary differences with one another.

Each of these types of relationships indicates ways that the British used their prewar existence to inform their wartime sociality. This chapter reveals how the British relied on their past experiences and culture in order to forge connections, continue relationships, and deal with interpersonal disharmony. These same attitudes informed their views of one another, and their views of themselves, in terms of standards of propriety, appearance, and behaviour. The war was a major life change for all participants. But the change in circumstances, even if it did cause a change in priorities, did not necessarily indicate a change in attitude. People maintained their needs for friendship and romance, and their concern for both physical and social appearance. These concerns informed wartime connections. The war effort may have dominated their daily actions, but in many cases it was not enough to overcome personal differences – or indeed, may have contributed towards them.

Concern for reputation and appearance of respectability affected relationships, as people felt pressure to publicly gloss over disagreements and differences for the sake of appearing "one big happy family." A concern for reputation further influenced relationships, particularly between the sexes. In wartime situations where standardized social behaviour was sometimes impossible, people renegotiated their perception of propriety, focused their efforts on prioritizing some aspects of hygiene, or went to lengths to avoid detection for what they defiantly portrayed as innocent activities. The second section of this chapter addresses the concern for reputation by looking at the way that people maintained, put on the appearance of maintaining, or renegotiated recognized or conventional standards of behaviour. A concern for propriety, or at least the appearance of such, effected relations between the sexes. Sources show how, even when circumstances allowed for or forced a change in behaviour, the discourse of the text indicates that shifting behaviour did not indicate shifting standards, as people negotiated the narrative of their experience to maintain their ideas of standards and to justify any deviation in practice.

"Good friendships begun and stoutly forged beneath Serbian skies": Friendships and inter-unit relationships



Lieutenant General Sir Bryan Mahon with Mrs Harley, Captain Tyler R.N. (H.M.S. Agammemnon) and Isabel Emslie (Hutton) watching an aeroplane, Salonika, April 1916 © IWM (Q 31933)

Corbett was not the only one to run into old friends in the new atmosphere of Salonika. Accounts of life on the Balkan front often include encounters with friends or acquaintances from prewar lives.² Moore hoped to meet an old friend who was also on the front. He wrote to his family, "There is just the possibility you know! I have heard of any number of cases of fellows meeting each other like that."³ Fedden ran into a "relation of friends of mine" en route to Salonika. It was a useful connection, as she found that home friends were more acceptable to her matron than friends met while abroad.⁴ The meeting of old friends on the front was also a useful means of communication when letters failed to arrive from home.⁵ These prewar friendships served as an important connection to home. In a world where "home" and "the front" were separated by a large physical and mental space, running into an old acquaintance, with the message from home – whether literal or merely suggestive, served to shorten the distance and lessen the space.

The British used existing social connections to make new friends and acquaintances. Having more of these connections increased the opportunity to take part in social events, an important aspect of daily life. While sometimes people were introduced by a mutual

² H J E Burtenshaw, "Papers," IWM 01/35/1, 23 Feb, 3 May and 5 Jun 1918; R Gwinnell, "Papers," IWM 01/38/1, 125; O C M Haines, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf, 29 Aug 1916, 227.

³ L G Moore, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 12814, 61.

⁴ Marquerite Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters: Salonika* (London: Grant Richards, 1921), 76.

⁵ R J Bailey, "Papers," IWM 92/36/1, 16 Mar 1916 and 17 Feb 1917.

friend, more often than not having Britishness in common was enough to forge a friendship between two people, especially between officers and nurses.⁶ Preece described his social opportunities after being reposted to a base position in Salonika. He wrote, "I went out to tea at a hospital to-day & met some very jolly sisters – the first girls I have talked to since landing – now, being base-wallah, I shall probably divide my time between drinking beer & mild flirtation."⁷ Helen Bonner wrote a perplexed letter to her mother, suspicious about a friend of her brother's, stationed in Salonika, who had written to her, presumably to strike up a friendship. She queried, "who is he?"⁸ Bonner's correspondent was using the same method that many employed in order to establish or expand their social circle by utilizing prewar or "home" connections. Bonner's letter to her mother was a way of legitimizing this "home" connection on her side, a sort of character reference. Fedden described one outing in her memoir and mentioned that she had met her escort "in a curious way" — while in Rusty Back's (also known as Orosdi Back's, a Salonika institution, a store catering to British and French needs⁹), she had mistaken him for someone she had met on the boat. "'Please do it again, Sister,' said the young man. I found this young boy was very lonely and friendless, so gave him the name of my hospital and told him to call for tea when nearby." Six weeks later he was admitted ill, asking for her, and they became friends.¹⁰ There are a few instances of men and women, on discovering a mutual name or other familial link, inventing a blood relationship that, while fictional, lent legitimacy to an otherwise unsanctioned friendship. Fitch wrote that, when a British hospital unit arrived in Belgrade in 1915, "A nurse was produced with the same name as myself, and though we could prove no blood relationship we became official 'cousins' right away."¹¹ King wrote to her father, "I've got a 'cousin' in the regiment, you don't know him, Daddy dear, & I've only known him about three weeks, but he's such a jolly boy..." She had met him at a lunch, when he had

bewailed his luck that he had no relations out here, & had about exhausted the tale of a cousin in the fleet (his C.O. only gives his officers leave to see relations, apparently) I suggested a Scottish Women cousin might be of help. His people were French up to three generations ago, & you know I had a French great-grandmother, so of course the relationship was quite easily established.¹²

⁶ Burtenshaw, "Papers," 19 and 29 May 1918; H R Preece, "Diary," IWM 04/4/1, 20 Apr 1918.

⁷ H R Preece, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 12717, 22 Apr 1918.

⁸ H D Bonner, "Papers," IWM 07/31/1, 25 Oct 1917.

⁹ "The Balkan News," 4 Nov 1915, 4 edition.

¹⁰ Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters*, 103.

¹¹ Henry Malden Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth: A Naval Journal*. (London: Macmillan, 1937), 148.

¹² Hazel King, ed., *One Woman at War: Letters of Olive King, 1915-1920* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987), 148.

King and her "cousin" went on to have many adventures together, including lunches at the White Tower, dance parties, and even an illicit moonlit sailing expedition.¹³

These wartime friendships served to relieve the ennui of day to day life, and expanded horizons beyond one's daily connections. With extra-curricular friendships came invitations to teas, dinners, dances, concerts or other entertaining events, whether officially organised or otherwise. Such connections were also professionally useful. It is therefore unsurprising that these friendships were cultivated and maintained.

For some, running into an old colleague from earlier in the war had the same comforting effect as running into a friend from home.¹⁴ There are many examples of this in instances where those who worked in Serbia during 1915 later joined the Macedonian front where their former acquaintances took on a special significance; this is discussed in detail in chapter four. King, while setting up canteens around Serbia in 1918, tried to meet up with her friend "Jock" (Emslie). When she was unsuccessful she wrote to her father, "I was awfully disappointed not to see her."¹⁵ Later, when they did encounter one another, King wrote wistfully, "My dear little pal Jock was there. I haven't seen her for about 18 months."¹⁶ King and Emslie became friends while part of the same SWH hospital in France, Ghevgegi, and Salonika. They continued to associate long after King left the SWH, and the emotional importance she attached to this earlier wartime connection is clear from King's tone. Prewar and family connections served as a reminder of home. Early wartime connections had a similar effect and indicate the extent to which people integrated their war experiences with the memories of a time before the war.

Not everyone was fortunate enough to have such positive friendships built in to their job. Creighton complained about the other members of her unit and of "feeling cut off from the world" in her Macedonian outpost. She mused, "the Narryskin hospital is my nearest centre now, & I thought it better not to call considering what she is, & other circumstances, tho' I should quite like to know the doctors there, of whom I have met one, & they me I am told."¹⁷ This cryptic insinuation (the head of the hospital was rumoured to have loose morals) was indicative of the kind of attitude that sometimes hampered, but did not prevent, inter-unit relationships. Snobbery kept units apart, as hinted by Lorimer, who wrote that she felt "awfully superior passing the other two units in the second class dining car!" – her own unit had first class berths on the ship. (According to Lorimer, this was "the

¹³ King, *One Woman at War*, 24, 33 and 43.

¹⁴ L Creighton, "Papers," IWM 92/22/1, 10 and 12 Oct 1917; H E Brooks, "Papers," IWM 03/30/1, 6 Jul 1917.

¹⁵ King, *One Woman at War*, 140.

¹⁶ King, *One Woman at War*, 169.

¹⁷ Creighton, "Papers," 30 Apr and 12 Aug 1917.

result of having an American administrator.") She continued, "It was quite amusing at tea to look round and see all the other units... None of the men of the other units can touch ours."¹⁸ However, these boundaries were artificial, and, more importantly, completely ineffective. Incidents of snobbery were rare. Units and individuals were quick to form allegiances: partly through necessity but mostly through a desire for and a genuine sense of camaraderie. The British were especially prone to befriend one another, but many also fraternized with their other allies, as seen in the previous chapter.

In some cases, isolated and starved of news, Britons relied on visitors for updates from afar and for socialising. On her arrival in Serbia, Holland wrote that members of Lady Paget's staff were on the platform to watch the Kragujevac train go through Skopje station. "They said that this was the only excitement they had and they always came when off duty to look out for English people and get the latest news from home."¹⁹ They were also willing to help each other, giving food to other Britons who found themselves in unfortunate circumstances,²⁰ assisting new arrivals they encountered, or lending members to other units who found themselves short-staffed.²¹

Salonika had many social opportunities, with nurses being taken to tea by officers, concert parties, at homes, and the like. Fitch described the residence he shared with Troubridge, where he entertained not only "a *mélange* of British, Serbian, French and Italian officers, prominent Greeks, Consular officials" but also "nurses when they could get leave, and we had some wonderful nights."²² Macedonian holidays were another phenomenon, with people from Salonika and other parts of the front, making short breaks in the hills. Rose described visitors to the SWH in Ostrovo, both from other parts of Macedonia and from Salonika: RAMC "boys" and officers, Serbian officers, members of other relief organisations and other SWH units "(sheer joy riding)" – in other words, not on official business. Some visitors stayed for meals or entertainment, others took Rose along on their joyrides. Visitors from Salonika invited her down to return the hospitality.²³ Fitch described a Christmas spent with Harley's ambulance unit when it was stationed at Dobroveni. They passed a week visiting the battlefields, watching an air raid, and associating with the various British people in the area. They spent Christmas day itself ("A glorious sunny day") at a local Greek church attending "a special English service in the Serbian language by a Serb

¹⁸ E C Lorimer, "Papers," IWM 76/192/1, 9-10; See also King, *One Woman at War*, 133.

¹⁹ G Holland, "Papers," IWM 88/26/1, 158.

²⁰ T Butler, "Papers," IWM 88/46/1, 9 Oct 1915; M Ingram, "Papers," IWM 86/48/1, 10 May 1915.

²¹ Kathleen Courtney, "Papers," IWM PP/MCR/C3 & P96 January 2, 1915; Ingram, "Papers," 16 May and 21 Jul 1915.

²² Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 263.

²³ Jean K Rose, "Diary," IWM 78/4/1, 4, 15, and 30 Nov, 22 Dec 1917, 3 Mar, 14 and 28 Apr 1918.

priest." That afternoon Fitch and his liaison officer companions borrowed horses and took six of the women riding. This was followed by a "big open-air dinner and fancy-dress dance at night – Yule logs burning and whole carcasses on the fire. Much Serbian dancing and music – and a little love-making. A splendid day."²⁴ Fitch's holiday is a perfect example of how inter-unit relations could add enjoyment to wartime experiences by recreating companionship similar to that of prewar lives.

Creighton, whose nearest associates were the SWH, socialised with both the ambulance and dressing station, and the hospital at Ostrovo. As an outside party, she was privy to gossip, which she faithfully recorded in her diary along with her own, sometimes petty, observations.²⁵ She first went to the SWH to have a burn treated, writing, "I was very kindly treated & asked to stay to tea & told to come again, but the doctor is a quaint old party without manners."²⁶ The following day she returned, writing "A nice chaffeuse brought me back. She had been in Mrs Harley's unit, & said she was a fine woman, but impossible to work with. That she was sure Mrs H. had met the end she would have liked, & was probably looking happily on at her own funeral."²⁷ Thus began a long summer of socialising.²⁸ Creighton's account echoes those of others. After one invitation to tea, she wrote: "One of the women there, unable to find a companion to go to the Serbian front asked me to go with her. But I cannot get off for a day. It seems a regular expedition to be taken to the Serbian trenches & guns."²⁹ She heard news about the war and gossiped with the doctors about their shared patients, and hosted holiday-makers.³⁰ Her encounters with the SWH and other British in Macedonia revealed the extent to which Britons relied on each other for entertainment as well as the extent to which they bickered amongst themselves. Creighton's account fit neatly in with others from that same area, an indication that the British were able to form a community that, to a large extent, transcended organisational boundaries. This community was an important aspect of the British experience on the Balkan front.

Emslie, describing her various associates on the Balkan front, wrote

It would be interminable to name all the interesting personalities in the army, navy, and medical world who gathered together in Macedonia during the campaign. The Salonika army, in all its units and departments, was just like one big family striving for the

²⁴ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 260-262.

²⁵ Creighton, "Papers," 7, 12, 18, 21 Jul, 24 Aug 1917.

²⁶ Creighton, "Papers," 30 Apr 1917.

²⁷ Creighton, "Papers," 1 May 1917. This wording echoes Corbett's own account of the incident: Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 94-95.

²⁸ Creighton, "Papers," 3, 15 May, 26 Jun, 10, 17, 29 Jul, 9 Sept 1917.

²⁹ Creighton, "Papers," 29 Jun 1917.

³⁰ Creighton, "Papers," 30 May, 4 Jun, 6 and 28 Jul 1917.

common good and helping one another as best they could. There were no petty jealousies.³¹

As evident below, the rivalries between Britons were mainly intra-unit, amongst those who worked together. In inter-unit relations, most of the energy was reserved for friendships, and in this case, gossip about one's disliked colleagues may have actually aided friendships with outsiders. Many of these friendships outlasted the war. Their importance is clear – inter-unit connections had an essential part to play in creating British society on the Balkan front. Obligations to both help and entertain one another formed the basis for much social and professional interaction. Disagreements serve as a reminder of the day-to-day reality of their lives. An excerpt from the bulletin of the British Serbian Units Branch of the British Legion emphasized the importance of these friendships: "... still more valuable are our recollections of good friendships begun and stoutly forged beneath Serbian skies, friendships which must not be allowed to languish from neglect, now that we are back in England."³² It was not just British friendships that others felt inspired to maintain after the war. A tourist guide to "Jugoslavia" in a pamphlet distributed to veterans of the campaign advised British travellers to "avoid Belgrade, which, however, can be very jolly if one has friends there."³³ Dr James Berry felt it was essential for Britain and Serbia to maintain their friendships as both countries had much to gain from the other.³⁴ Aside from the life-long friendships and relationships already mentioned that began with a sojourn in Serbia or Macedonia, there are many instances of associates continuing to call on one another long after the war has finished.³⁵ Relationships were yet another example of how the British relied on their prewar lives and used familiarity to deal with wartime experiences.

"One has to be careful if one is going to work with people afterwards": Intra-unit relationships

Social relationships were highly prized, carried a great deal of emotional currency, and were voluntary. For most, their daily connections were more or less limited to, or at least dominated by, the members of their units. Working quite intensely and closely together, surrounded by the trials of wartime situations and a pressurized environment, created strong friendships. The combination of highly stressful situations and strong,

³¹ Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928), 125.

³² James Purves-Stewart "Serbian Memories," 7-8 in Bonner, "Papers."

³³ "Tourist guide to Jugoslavia," in Bonner, "Papers."

³⁴ James Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit in Serbia* (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1916), 289.

³⁵ King, *One Woman at War*, 215 and 216. See also Vera Holme's correspondence from the 1930s and 1940s which include letters from Flora Sandes, Milan Yovitchitch, Isabel Emslie Hutton, and others. Vera (Jack) Holme, "Papers," Folder 3: "Foreign work and travel," Women's Library 7VJH.

sometimes opposing personalities also frequently created an enmity which, while generally hidden in contemporary published sources, comes across strongly in archival sources.

It was not uncommon for intra-unit friendships to form at the very beginning of a journey. As mentioned earlier, Corbett and Dillion met on their first voyage out to Serbia, and remained friends for the rest of their lives. Enlisting at Somerset House with colleagues from his office, Hennessey described a "classic example" of two men in his unit. "A friendship was established which, to my knowledge, stood the test of 4 years of war in 'B' company, and is firm to-day over 50 years later."³⁶ Cliques formed quickly in the long, empty days while staff members were at sea, en route to their posts. Ingram described other members of her unit in long letters to her family; with some she got on well, but she was not so kind about others:

Miss Dickinson is very nervous considering she's a hunting woman aged 51(I gleaned that last fact from her passport)... next time give me my own fam. as travelling companions. Nell who always professes to be nervous is a couple of lions compared with her. Is this libellous O legal pup?³⁷

Gossiping freely about members of one's unit was one tactic to keep families at home entertained with amusing letters. Ingram's descriptions were intended as a way to relate to her family, as she clearly placed them within a context that the slightly nervous sister and the lawyer sister evidently understood. It is unsurprising that people like Ingram would have engaged in such an activity while on a long, uneventful voyage. It is possible that negative traits were exaggerated to enliven the story. However, letter writers went to an effort to ensure that their snippy remarks were read by familiar eyes only and did not reach a wider audience. Creighton took a dislike to the other members of her unit almost immediately, writing on embarking that "...several [people] looked promising. I was soon undeceived."³⁸ Placing herself on the outside of both the "clique" that had instantly formed, and those who opposed it, she reported with amusement that one member of staff was "touchy" and at Southampton "the 3 men of the party [were] already sore at the way the party was conducted."³⁹ Fortunately for Creighton, her relief work separated her from the rest of her unit; she spent the rest of her time in Macedonia forging friendships with people in other units and complaining about her organisation at every given opportunity.⁴⁰

For most, the bonds they shared with others in their unit were the source of touching and enduring relationships. Haines wrote, "Everyone here seems so kind, I never

³⁶ C R Hennessey, "Papers," IWM 03/31/1, 2.

³⁷ Ingram, "Papers," 7 May 1915. See also 4 and 8 May 1915.

³⁸ Creighton, "Papers," 9 Oct 1916.

³⁹ Creighton, "Papers," 16 Oct 1916.

⁴⁰ Creighton, "Papers," 9, 12, 17, 19 and 28 April, 1 Jun, 25 Aug, 4 and 8 Oct 1917.

knew they thought such a lot of me. Am quite at home with everyone here now."⁴¹ He later described one of his colleagues: "We get on A-1 together: & share our joys & sorrows together."⁴² His friend wrote a letter to his mother, saying, "After a year I can say with truth that I know him pretty intimately, he is a fine chap, the same cheery young fellow that I knew during my first months in the Army."⁴³ King wrote about her canteen assistant, "Stear is simply invaluable, I don't know how we would manage without her... She is a splendid girl, most loyal & unselfish, besides being clever & reliable. I am very fond of her."⁴⁴ Hennessey wrote "There is no doubt that one can cope with things under very adverse conditions when one has the old familiar faces about him."⁴⁵ The bonds were so great that many wrote with affection about the friends they missed while separated from their units. Bailey wrote that, while camp life agreed with him, "I've got a hankering to get back amongst the chaps I've knocked about with for two years."⁴⁶ Final goodbyes were even harder. Over a year after he wrote the first letter mentioned above, Bailey wrote, "In fact, the old clan is scattered; some are dead, others wounded..."⁴⁷ Brooks echoed this sentiment when he wrote "Finally left the old Battn. Only youngsters & a few old hands left."⁴⁸ Lorimer, at the end of her sojourn in Salonika, catalogued at length her emotions towards various colleagues on parting with them. She had a sad goodbye with the nurses, who had been part of

the old original Unit and we had had many good times together and it was sad to feel it was all breaking up more especially as the finish was not entirely satisfactory. ...I love them all, especially Piper, and am very proud of my countrywomen, all such wonderfully capable women.⁴⁹

This attachment to ideas of an "old" or "original" units indicates the importance of initial connections as prioritized relationships. The oldest connections, such as those from home, or the first friendships formed when coming abroad, were the most important. As the war drew on, experience served as a replacement for the emotional impact of a home connection, and initial war connections became de facto primary association, to supplement home connections.

⁴¹ Haines, "Letters," 10 Jun 1917, 312-313.

⁴² Haines, "Letters," n.d. but postmarked 19 Aug 1917, 32.

⁴³ Letter from W. G. Henderson to the mother of Haines, "Letters," 27 Feb 1916, 346.

⁴⁴ King, *One Woman at War*, 148-149, 160

⁴⁵ Hennessey, "Papers," 141. See also 136.

⁴⁶ Bailey, "Papers," 5 and 26 Oct 1916 and 1 Jan 1917. See also G W Phinister, "Papers," IWM 84/1/1, 23 Aug 1917.

⁴⁷ Bailey, "Papers," 15 Nov 1917.

⁴⁸ Brooks, "Papers," 13 Mar 1919.

⁴⁹ Lorimer, "Papers," 82.

While the emotional security brought about by these connections was generally positive, newcomers found it difficult to find their own group. Rose complained of the difficulties she had in breaking into the tightly knit groups of friends that had already formed by the time she joined the staff at Ostrovo. She wrote, "thinking of writing an 'Agony adv. ' Expeditioners: Will any village expedition willing to increase its numbers, or any lonely soul looking for another, please communicate with the tenant of Tent no. 3 Rue de Ravine."⁵⁰ Nevertheless, she was soon making four at bridge and gossiping with the rest of the staff.⁵¹ When she left, her colleagues threw four leaving parties for her and the most loyal disobeyed orders from the Matron to see her off on the train.⁵²

Lorimer described Euston station in April 1915: "At first it looked as if the whole world was made up of nurses and orderlies bound for Serbia. We had quite a crowd at the station to see us off."⁵³ Her first impressions set the tone of her experience in Serbia – the superiority of their first class reservations, their unit's popularity, and their relationship with one another as a unit. Lorimer set about attempting to establish connections, not only with her own unit, but with everyone else on board who was heading to Serbia. "I like all the men of the party very much – I have had private interviews with nearly all I think."⁵⁴ She described her activities on the voyage, which mostly consisted of talking to other members of the unit, describing them in detail in her diary.⁵⁵ Lorimer reported, "Mrs Troubridge was amazingly indiscreet, talking of all the squabbles and fights on the Committee before us all."⁵⁶ Her administrator's lack of discretion fit in well with Lorimer's diary, which recounts the gossip and squabbles of her unit. Lorimer's hospital staff was beset with cliques and factions, and while some were friendly, others were less so.

This antipathy became open dislike when the chaos of the Serbian retreat in 1915 brought down civil barriers and threw them into one dangerous situation after another. Where disputes occurred, this was often connected to a desire to appear to have acted in the correct manner, which perhaps explains the personal nature the arguments took. Both Lorimer and Butler, one of her chief opponents, left records of these disputes. The main disagreement occurred in Belgrade in 1915 when, under bombardment, members of the hospital argued over whether they should retreat, or hold their ground and care for the wounded. About the argument, Lorimer wrote, "Dr Sharpe hasn't come out of it very well

⁵⁰ Rose, "Diary," 2 Nov 1917; 31 Oct, 4 Nov 1917. See also D Hay, "Papers," IWM 78/36/1, 27.

⁵¹ Rose, "Diary," 29 Apr 1917.

⁵² Rose, "Diary," 2 May 1918.

⁵³ Lorimer, "Papers," 9.

⁵⁴ Lorimer, "Papers," 12.

⁵⁵ Lorimer, "Papers," 10-15.

⁵⁶ Lorimer, "Papers," 5.

and did his best to make us give up the idea after the others had gone and I'm afraid I had rather a scene with him, but in the end all we nurses stood firm with Mrs Moore and Shellens to back us and we carried the point."⁵⁷ Butler's account is fragmented, but phrases such as "frenzy of obstinacy" indicate his tone.⁵⁸ After several days of bombardment, the hospital was preparing to evacuate ("It was just perfectly sickening but there seemed nothing else to be done") when they received orders from Troubridge telling them to "stand fast."⁵⁹ According to Butler "Miss Lorimer (the worst of all) had received... [?] edge of [Sharpe's] temper, for which I was glad."⁶⁰ But Lorimer was unperturbed, writing, "Dr Sharpe was furious... and really I think he has shown up very badly all through this crisis."⁶¹ After several days of bombardment, the head of the American Red Cross hospital in Belgrade, Dr Ryan, arrived at the naval hospital and, according to Butler, said "some very sharp words & gave us peremptory orders, saying that the Americans would accept all responsibility for us. At last the women, led by Miss Lor[imer] were convinced against their will, & we prepared for departure in earnest."⁶² Lorimer was more combative against both Ryan and Sharpe in her account, writing, "I saw Dr Ryan come bursting in like a shell in a great state of excitement and Sharpe met him with evident relief... Ryan – damn him for a self seeking American – practically ordered us out as American consul in charge of the civil population."⁶³ As they began their long escape from Belgrade, Butler wrote,

We overtook Miss P[iper] & L[orimer] who seemed very dissatisfied, & the latter a trifle hysterical—she was bitter about the retreat. Ho, of all illogical sentiments. Reproached us for not fighting... I felt singularly calm & collected, & not inclined to romance even mentally. Though once or twice when I looked back on the fire... in an increasing line over Belgrade, I thought of Aeneas leaving Troy.⁶⁴

Butler contrasted Lorimer's hysterics with his own singular calmness, yet his analogy revealed that he, too, felt the drama of the situation. Lorimer's account reveals her genuine distress over abandoning the hospital and their patients, as well as her concern for authority and for their unit's appearance of bravery:

I hope I may never pass through four hours again of such black rage and shame as I felt as we all turned out into the dark streets scurrying along with bags in our hands and rugs round our shoulders and shells bursting every few minutes in the close vicinity. I walked along with dear Piper and she and I went quietly over the situation and came to the conclusion... that we had made a most awful mistake – disobeying orders, showing

⁵⁷ Lorimer, "Papers," 55.

⁵⁸ Butler, "Papers," 8 Oct 1915.

⁵⁹ Lorimer, "Papers," 56.

⁶⁰ Butler, "Papers," 8 Oct 1915.

⁶¹ Lorimer, "Papers," 56.

⁶² Butler, "Papers," 8 Oct 1915.

⁶³ Lorimer, "Papers," 57.

⁶⁴ Butler, "Papers," 8 Oct 1915.

panic and generally deserting our post at the very moment when we were most needed."⁶⁵

This antagonism and dual perspective continued throughout the retreat.⁶⁶ A similar debacle occurred when the hospital staff evacuated from Skopje, again without orders from the Admiral. Lorimer remarked,

Now what has happened none of us know – Sharpe is undoubtedly panicky [sic] but he swears the order to leave did not originate from him. Well, then who gave it? Anyway now we look like perfect fools dashing off in this undignified way which looks suspiciously like funk... Oh it's all just sickening.⁶⁷

Troubridge was furious, writing, "If Skopje has into fallen enemy hands I am glad they have got safely away, but if not then I am truly sorry they left as it seems they had no orders to do so... [I] much fear Sharpe has lost his head again." Troubridge was especially upset because the Serbian army had planned to give the hospital a special medal "for staying in Belgrade to the bitter end (which was entirely my doing)" but after leaving without orders "all talk of their special medal was gone and finished with."⁶⁸ Later that same day, after news of the fall of Skopje, Troubridge wrote "I am glad that this shows our hospital was right to move..."⁶⁹ His dramatic statement seems to indicate that he cared more about the reputation of his hospital than about the military situation. Fitch added yet another perspective to the events, describing the hospital's evacuation from Skopje as "good news" and adding, "That relieves my mind on one score."⁷⁰ Evidently he was more concerned about the safety of his fiancée than her particular reputation for bravery.

This incident, as seen from multiple perspectives, reveals the extent to which the British, as a community, were concerned about their reputations. Both Lorimer and Butler kept fragmented records of the rest of their war experiences, but described their experiences of the retreat in depth. Their antagonism was an important part of how they formed their own narrative and their arguments reveal their priorities: for Lorimer, a concern for their patients, but also a concern for the appearance of bravery.⁷¹ Butler was understandably eager to remove himself from the line of fire. His annoyance with Lorimer and the self-assuredness of his account, which seems to have been written in the immediate aftermath of the retreat, could have masked the panic he must have been feeling.

⁶⁵ Lorimer, "Papers," 57-58.

⁶⁶ Butler, "Papers," 9-16 Oct 1915; and Lorimer, "Papers," 67.

⁶⁷ Lorimer, "Papers," 78.

⁶⁸ Charles Troubridge, "Journal," reproduced in Charles Fryer, *The Destruction of Serbia in 1915*, East European Monographs (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1997), 140.

⁶⁹ Troubridge, "Journal," 141.

⁷⁰ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 196.

⁷¹ For another example see Ingram, "Papers," 7 May 1915.

Diaries contain bitter complaints of backbiting, letters carried gossip both harmless and malicious, and cross-clique bickering is widely evident in archival sources.⁷² Ingram, presumably concerned about the ramifications of her indiscreetness, wrote to her family,

Mr. Berry is quite rabid on the subject of advertisement, so whatever you do, never let any letters of mine get into print and if you do ever have any letters of mine typed to send round to the fam. would you mind putting "For private circulation only" at the top and the bottom? I know so many people that the Berrys know, that things might very easily get back to them again, and if I say anything personal about members of the unit that one wouldn't like them to hear again, it would be just as well to cut it out; one has to be careful if one is going to work with people afterwards.⁷³

Rose reported the various power struggles between the commanding officer of the camp, the administrator, and the matron.⁷⁴ When the latter left the hospital, the untrained nurses, Rose reported, were "not giving expression to any terms of regret."⁷⁵ For her part, Rose seemed to keep a toe in both camps. The beleaguered CO confided in Rose her reluctance to give over any authority to her rivals, despite being ill with malaria. Rose wrote, "Agreed to do wards, but not administrative work for her."⁷⁶ Only the Matron was on less sympathetic terms with Rose, forbidding her colleagues from seeing her off. Rose complained of her unit, "Saturday night, & nobody turned up for dancing or games — 2nd time there has been this depressing lack of initiative in the camp."⁷⁷ Rose was amused by the rivalries and gossip within her unit, but depressed by her colleagues' reluctance to socialise. Working as a doctor, professional disagreements would have been a part of her ordinary life. Recreation was also part of her life, and the absence of the latter made a much more negative impression on her than the presence of the former. Her complaints about the politics of the workplace, while frequently made, only became bitter when they had an effect on other aspects of life.

Disagreements and resentment over discipline and power struggles within units were also common. It is unsurprising that conflicts erupted when strong personalities butted heads in the stressful conditions of war. Janet Watson, in *Fighting Different Wars*, describes the conflicts between trained nurses ("sisters") and volunteer nurses who usually came from a higher class than their working colleagues. Women doctors and trained nurses were struggling for professional recognition within medicine and society as a whole, and many of them considered the large scale presence of untrained hospital workers (VADs) as undermining their cause. According to Watson, "This threat, combined with different class

⁷² Holland, "Papers," 186.

⁷³ Ingram, "Papers," 16 May 1915.

⁷⁴ Rose, "Diary," 11, 20, and 27 Nov 1917 and 31 Jan 1918.

⁷⁵ Rose, "Diary," 12 Dec 1917.

⁷⁶ Rose, "Diary," 29 Apr 1917.

⁷⁷ Rose, "Diary," 17 Dec 1917.

backgrounds and ideas about work and service, led to significant conflicts in the wards."⁷⁸ These included disagreements over work and time off, recognition, and propriety. There were daily struggles between nurses and VADs, but many of the recorded conflicts are between hospital workers and their "matron," a role for which joy-killing seems to have been a pre-requisite. Fedden complained,

Matron was extremely kind to the patients, ...but her sense of discipline regarding the sisters was a little overstrained. ...it was hard on those, the great majority, who could be trusted. It is cramping for grown women to be shepherded as though they were at school again!⁷⁹

Her words were echoed by Olive King, who while working as a driver as part of the SWH complained that Harley tried "to keep the camp like a boarding-school."⁸⁰ King was relieved to escape from under Harley's control and work directly for the Serbian army transport, as she felt that the rules and regulations imposed by Harley interfered with the productivity of the unit.⁸¹ The drivers working under Harley in her transport column had similar complaints, as revealed by Elsie Corbett's memoir, published in 1960, long after the spectre of keeping up appearances of the SWH as a "happy family" had faded. They rebelled against Harley's desire to sanction every move of the drivers.⁸² Corbett admitted, "whatever virtues our Unit may have had, meekness was not among them. I was very sorry indeed for the puzzled Scottish Delegation confronted by everybody's incoherent indignation, and I was very much surprised that they did not round on *us*." Peace in the unit was patched up enough to continue "until our six-months contracts were up."⁸³ At that time, "the Harleys [Katherine Harley & her daughter, Edith] were off.... to do relief work in Monastir."⁸⁴ Corbett reflected rather smugly that it was Harley who had to leave the unit due to the crisis, "not our rebellious selves."⁸⁵ But she and the other "rebellious" members of the unit felt guilty when, two months later, they heard that Harley has been killed during a bombardment in Monastir. Corbett wrote,

She was a gallant old lady, and I think she had had her own way all her life, even to the manner of her dying. She had an impressive funeral at Salonica, but after anxious discussion we thought it better not to go. If it had not been for our 'rebellions' she would have been safely with our Unit still.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 60-61.

⁷⁹ Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters*, 75.

⁸⁰ King, *One Woman at War*, 34.

⁸¹ King, *One Woman at War*, 32.

⁸² Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 70, 73, 82.

⁸³ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 82.

⁸⁴ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 92.

⁸⁵ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 70.

⁸⁶ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 95.

Although Corbett attributed the Harleys' leaving solely to the conflicts within the unit, according to most other accounts, Harley had gone to Monastir of her own free will and for altruistic reasons. Undoubtedly, this is because the members of SWH in Macedonia would have worked hard to keep quiet the scandals among their units in order to protect their reputation. Emslie, more than forty years later, wrote that: "Mrs Harley had gone [to Monastir] to work among the women and children, feeling that in this way she could be most useful to the Serbs."⁸⁷ It is unlikely that Emslie did not know the real reason for Mrs Harley's removal to Monastir, as she was a senior member of the SWH and was soon commanding the hospital at Ostrovo. It is possible that she still wished, after all those years had passed, to protect the reputation of the older lady. Unfortunately, there is a gap in King's surviving letters from 1917 spanning the time immediately after Harley's death, which means that almost certainly King's reaction has been lost. However, King remained good friends with Harley's youngest daughter, Edith.⁸⁸ King had often criticized Harley in her letters to her sister and father. There is, therefore, no reason to doubt King's sincerity when she both professed her affection for the matron and chafed under the latter's "boarding-school" rules.

This incident illustrates how different participants may have remembered their war experiences differently, and how they sometimes had other motivations, other than strictly representing what they perceived as the "truth" while writing their memoirs. They attempted to justify their own actions, or protect the reputations of themselves or others. But it also reveals the extent to which the lives of those in Macedonia, particularly in organisations like the SWH, were intertwined. This is the kind of inclusive atmosphere that prevailed at the Balkan front; it is no wonder that many people felt isolated when they returned home, and kept in touch with the friends they had made during the campaign. Both the community on the Balkan front and continuity from prewar lives were important to the British, and some had trouble adjusting to their postwar lives without these factors.

Intra-unit quibbles could not be silenced, despite efforts. The squabbles amongst the British in 1915's Serbia were an open secret – so much so that a Times article from December 1915 recapping the work of the units mentioned these "difficulties."⁸⁹ Yet the SWH archival collection is an excellent record of the personnel disputes within the

⁸⁷ Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor in War and Peace* (London: Heinemann, 1960), 155-156.

⁸⁸ King, *One Woman at War*, 50, 53 and 75.

⁸⁹ "Our Hospitals in Serbia: Record of Devoted Work: Fate of the Units," *The Times*, 28 Dec 1915, in M Blackstock, "Papers," IWM 84/4/1.

organisation, especially in Serbia in 1915.⁹⁰ These details make a fascinating antidote to the SWH's golden reputation both during and after the war, and to the united front they attempted to present in contemporary media. According to the official story, Elsie Inglis went to Serbia in early 1915 because Dr Soltau, the head of the main SWH hospital, was ill with diphtheria.⁹¹ Yet Inglis' own correspondence reveals she was needed because "the unit was so out of hand that it was impossible to get an order carried out! The Committee need not trouble any more on that score however!"⁹² she reassured them. Inglis, a formidable lady, experienced doctor, and suffragist, arrived in Kragujevac and immediately started disciplinary action.⁹³ She had been met in Salonika by transport officer William Smith, who "gave me a very depressing account of affairs." According to Inglis, "one of the worst things" was that members of staff had complained to an outside authority, who "had called a meeting of our doctors and nurses, and that all sorts of complaints and stories had been ventilated at this meeting... On arrival I looked into things more thoroughly, and there is no doubt that there has been a great want of discipline in the Unit."⁹⁴ Inglis' letters to the committee are full of staff grievances, especially regarding Dr Wakefield and Evelina Haverfield. Wakefield, according to Inglis, was the main source of trouble with the original unit; she had refused to support the CO and others had followed her example. Wakefield became ill and a nuisance to the SWH committee as well as the members of staff in Serbia. "Dr Wakefield told me, in a curious interview I had with her, that the Unit as a whole think I am well-meaning! She meant it for impertinence, but I was densely blind, and laughed and said that was 'damning with faint praise.'"⁹⁵ Haverfield, on the other hand, was Inglis' choice to bring with her to Serbia. She wrote, "I don't know what the Committee will say to my last confession" due to Haverfield's reputation of "uncertain temper."⁹⁶ Inglis' gamble did not pay off, and due to the quarrelling with other members of staff she was forced to move Haverfield to a different camp. Inglis attempted to justify Haverfield to the SWH committee, arguing that her personality had provided the unit with what the other leaders had lacked. She added, "Mrs Haverfield was heart-broken at being moved... but I

⁹⁰ "Records of the Scottish Women's Hospitals," Mitchell Library, Large Trunk, Folder 3, Soltau to Inglis, 10 Feb 1915. See also Tin 13, "Serbian Units; Correspondence of Dr Elsie M Inglis," Resolution, 27 Jul 1915.

⁹¹ Eva Shaw McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 98.

⁹² "Records of the SWH," Tin 13, "Serbian Units; Correspondence of Inglis," Letter from Inglis, 1 Jun 1915.

⁹³ "Records of the SWH," Tin 13, "Serbian Units; Correspondence of Inglis," Letter from Inglis, 8 Jun 1915.

⁹⁴ "Records of the SWH," Tin 13, "Serbian Units; Correspondence of Inglis," Letter from Inglis marked confidential for the committee, 11 Mar 1915.

⁹⁵ "Records of the SWH," Tin 13, "Serbian Units; Correspondence of Inglis," Letter from Inglis, 8 Jun 1915.

⁹⁶ "Records of the SWH," Tin 13, "Serbian Units; Correspondence of Inglis," Inglis to Mair, 28 Apr 1915.

hope the lesson will be good for her! She must learn to be more conciliatory!"⁹⁷ Haverfield continued with both her voluntary work and her difficult personality through the war. King, while organising canteens throughout Serbia in 1918, complained "Mrs H. seems to have caused no end of trouble & made a lot of mischief, & I intend writing ...suggesting she should be asked to resign."⁹⁸

Inglis also felt compelled to deny rumours about the SWH in case they reached the committee's ears. She "den[ie]d absolutely" that those in Hutchison's camp were underfed,⁹⁹ and intriguingly, wrote: "There is just one thing – which is hardly important – but you may get bothering stories – if you hear that the Scottish Sisters flirt, say they don't! and next time I can send a letter home by hand, I'll explain."¹⁰⁰ Inglis was very concerned with preserving the reputation of the SWH, an organisation that was her brainchild, which she had helped to found, and to which she dedicated the last years of her life. She enforced the uniform, despite its unpopularity, in an effort to both increase the recognition of the organisation, and their respectability.¹⁰¹ This emphasis on reputation is another indication of the importance of community amongst the British.

In spite of their evident troubles, the official history of the SWH presents an efficient, dedicated, and harmonious organisation. The true reasons behind many of these events and decisions were glossed over or not mentioned at all. Letters from Paget reveal his concern that a "feeling of unrest and discontent has been growing up amongst the personnel of the British Units in Serbia."¹⁰² As the outcome of a conference in July, Paget telegraphed:

Although it appears that there are still some cases of hostilities amongst the personnel of the various units a notable change of feeling has come about as a while which I can only attribute to elimination of some of the least amenable elements units agreed to stay in Serbia for the time being in light of possible renewal of fighting.¹⁰³

In the SWH history, the conference was recast as a consideration of the military position.¹⁰⁴ In another report to the committee, Inglis wrote that she encountered the head of another unit who poured out his woes with regard to the dissensions in his Unit. He wound up by saying,

⁹⁷ "Records of the SWH," Large Trunk, Folder 6, Letter from Inglis, 22 Aug 1915. See also Folder 2, Haverfield to Mair, 7 and 14 Aug 1915.

⁹⁸ King, *One Woman at War*, 134.

⁹⁹ "Records of the SWH," Tin 13, "Serbian Units; Correspondence of Inglis," Inglis to Mair, 15 Aug 1915.

¹⁰⁰ "Records of the SWH," Tin 13, "Serbian Units; Correspondence of Inglis," Inglis to Mair, 22 Jun 1915.

¹⁰¹ "Records of the SWH," Tin 13, "Serbian Units; Correspondence of Inglis," Inglis to Mair, 1 Jun and 18 Aug 1915.

¹⁰² "Records of the SWH," Tin 13, "Copies of letters sent to Edinburgh from 2nd Serbian Unit," Ralph Paget to Hutchison, 29 Jun 1915.

¹⁰³ "Records of the SWH," Large Trunk, Folder 4, Telegram from Paget, 23 July 1915.

¹⁰⁴ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 116.

"I wish I knew how you manage. You apparently have none of these difficulties. And you are all such a happy family!" so I hid my smile, and only said, "Oh, we've had our difficulties too!" But I did add that if it was a question of managing women, a woman could do it better probably.¹⁰⁵

This anecdote also appears in the SWH history, but in edited form. Rather than admitting that the SWH had their own difficulties, Inglis "looked at" the man "to see if he was laughing. But he wasn't. He was in dead earnest." To the outside world, both the head of the other unit and to the readers of the history, the internal difficulties of the SWH were merely hinted at.¹⁰⁶

The pressures for artificial harmony hid conflicts, but did not prevent them. Generally, connections were stronger than rivalries and friendships formed that lasted lifetimes. While the increased movement and concentration of people led to more mixing, otherwise relationships were fairly similar to friendships and relationships at home. Although the circumstances (work, environment, events) were different, relationships functioned much as they had at home and previous to the war. The British community provided both support for conditions of war and a way of integrating life experiences.

The British on the Balkan front relied on relationships as a way to bridge the chapters of their life: from prewar to wartime, and between different eras of the war, and, to some extent, from wartime back into civilian life. Britons used relationships as a way of normalizing their life during wartime: they exploited their connections for social interaction, they participated in socialising to create a life/work balance and to create a sense of belonging within a new environment. They used connections to further opportunities, both social and professional. Essentially, relationships and connections functioned in much the same way as they do in any other circumstances. Wartime friendships both predated and outlasted the war, providing yet another bridge by which people integrated their wartime experiences into their lives.

¹⁰⁵ "Records of the SWH," Large Trunk, Folder 4, Letter from Inglis, 26 Sep 1915.

¹⁰⁶ For another example, see "Records of the SWH," Tin 11, "Girton and Newnham (2nd French Unit)," Beauchamp to May, 5 Jun 1917.

Part II: "It only takes a little time to lose all sense of decency": Standards of propriety



General Sir Bryan Mahon with officers and a nurse watching a race meeting held at Lembet Camp, Salonika, 1916. © IWM (Q 31716)

"Not a soul knows of our escapade": Supervision

Supervision of interaction between unmarried members of the opposite sex was standard at this time, and men and women were often socially segregated.¹⁰⁷ However, on the Balkan front this was not always possible. Supervision was easily avoided, or provided on an ad hoc, superficial basis.¹⁰⁸ As described previously, fictional blood relationships could be used to legitimize social intercourse between members of the opposite sex.

People had various attitudes towards their dalliances in what they would normally consider to be inappropriate behaviour. Early on in their journey to Serbia, Lorimer described an unsupervised outing with another member of her unit:

Mr Clarke became so nervous as to what Matron would say about us being out alone that he insisted on my getting out before we reached the hotel and slipping in through the Brasserie while he drove to the Hotel to find out the charge! Consequently not a soul knows of our escapade.¹⁰⁹

Later that same day, she was sewing buttons for another orderly – presumably in his room –when Clarke was sent to fetch her for dinner. "Horrible moment! However it passed off

¹⁰⁷ Lorimer, "Papers," 10.

¹⁰⁸ Rose, "Diary," 9 Jan 1918.

¹⁰⁹ Lorimer, "Papers," 24.

all right and now I am peacefully writing up my diary in my bedroom."¹¹⁰ Despite the fact that going out unsupervised was presumably unavoidable if they wished to go ahead with their outing, Lorimer's companion preferred to keep their indiscretion undetected by their superiors. On the other hand, Lorimer's journal reveals her sense of delight in adventure, and she seems to have taken a particular pleasure in recording these episodes that might have seemed scandalous, but in fact were fairly innocent. Still, her concern for her reputation is revealed by her reaction to Clarke finding her in the room of another male member of the group. This superficial concern for the letter of supervision, if not the spirit of it, can be seen throughout Lorimer's account of her time in Serbia.

The requirement of supervision for propriety was not limited to men and women mixing. Same sex groups also engaged in behaviour for which they either garnered disapproval or avoided detection. Fitch wrote about "Poker parties with the American orderlies at the hospital [which] sometimes went on all night." One such party was caught red-handed by the Matron at six a.m., and Fitch was then caught by the Admiral sneaking back into his window.¹¹¹ Administrative leaders often felt the need to prevent or break up such gatherings, which might explain why some were keen to avoid detection for even innocent activities.¹¹² Fedden complained about the unreasonable standards she was expected to adhere to, writing that she had invited a "distinguished professor" to tea in the Red Cross kitchen. "The matron informed me it was against the rules for a patient to be so entertained, but this time she said she would 'look the other way' and not observe the breach."¹¹³ These examples further indicate how complicated social requirements for decency were; and how tricky it was for people to negotiate a balance between what they believed was expected of them, and what they themselves required to live a satisfactory life, and the methods by which they attempted to reach that balance within the new situations created by wartime conditions. Enjoying oneself and maintaining one's reputation were both important, but many risked the latter to ensure the former. This was another indication of the way in which community both familiarised wartime experiences and provided a bridge between these and prewar lives.

¹¹⁰ Lorimer, "Papers," 24.

¹¹¹ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 171-172.

¹¹² Rose, "Diary," 31 Jan 1918.

¹¹³ Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters*, 56.

"Fair goings-on, what!": Romance



Image of the cigarette case given to Olive King by Milan Yovitchitch in 1918. © Australian War Memorial

Overt discussions of romantic behaviour were not common.¹¹⁴ A number of factors might explain this absence. Firstly, the demographic of sources used for this thesis: as discussed in the introduction, they are heavily skewed towards the middle and upper classes, with officers (who were usually older, and therefore more likely to be settled) and women over represented. In some types of documents such as letters to family or friends and contemporary published sources, people would be unlikely to indulge in details of relationships, especially illicit relationships. Even personal diaries could potentially be confiscated by officials. Letters were also censored, usually by a direct supervisor, which would have had an effect on the types of things the writer would include. For some, even the passage of time was not enough to ease the taboo of certain relationships so they are not included even in retrospective memoirs. For example, Corbett never describes her relationship with her life partner, Dillion. It is therefore unsurprising that most incidences of documented romantic relationships are of the officially sanctioned, traditional variety.

There was an element of *joie de vivre* which permeated British social undertakings during peaceful moments. Fitch's description of the social life in Belgrade during the summer of 1915 captures this perfectly. "There was, of course, a lighter side to our lives," Fitch wrote, after a rather blithe depiction of guerrilla warfare practiced against the Austrian navy on the Danube. He described the social scene in Belgrade, where they had tea at the American hospital, sat in cafes, and played football with their Serbian allies.

¹¹⁴ Preece, "Letters," 27 Apr and 5 May 1918; Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters*, 75.

"Meanwhile a British Farmers' Hospital had arrived, and as the typhus waned the nurses had more time on their hands. We took tea with them and showed them the sights of Belgrade." It was through this hospital that he met his "cousin."¹¹⁵ When the naval hospital arrived, "our social life was assured." Fitch continued, "As the heat and burden of work declined, in fact, so did our social activities increase. We had tea fights; we went for riding-picnics; we did our courting in an ancient cemetery overlooking the Danube on moonlight nights."¹¹⁶

Most of the un-chaperoned meetings were the fairly innocuous friendships that spring up between people of similar backgrounds in a strange place, different genders notwithstanding. Lorimer, like many women who volunteered in a medical capacity during the Great War, came from an upper middle class background. As a probationary nurse, she probably had only a little actual training before being shipped off to Serbia. Just as emigration agencies of the Edwardian era emphasized "the importance of selecting the right sort of women",¹¹⁷ the organisations behind such hospital units wanted to attract volunteers who would uphold a standard of propriety and "Britishness" while they were abroad. Applicants had to go through an extensive interview process, although many relied on word of mouth or previous connections to get them places in units for work abroad.¹¹⁸ Not coincidentally, those same connections assured their social life.

Both Lorimer and Fitch shared an eagerness to participate in un-chaperoned activities that would not meet the approval of their superiors, as well as paranoia of being caught out by the ubiquitous "Matron", even when their intentions and actions were fairly innocent. Unfortunately, Lorimer, with an unreliability that is frustratingly typical of wartime diarists, stopped recording in her journal as soon as she began a romance with her future husband. She began a four-month silence with "Major Fitch and Major Kerr joined us to make up a four of bridge" and ended it with "Became engaged to Harry Fitch."¹¹⁹ They must have managed to avoid the detection of the Matron, as Lorimer reported that when she announced her engagement to the rest of the staff of her hospital, they seemed "awfully pleased, and rather surprised."¹²⁰ Conditions of the retreat also meant that, as long as they were together, Fitch and Lorimer could escape for moments of privacy, although

¹¹⁵ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 148.

¹¹⁶ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 149-150. NB: A tea fight seems to have been a kind of tea party.

¹¹⁷ General Baden Powell in 1901 as quoted in Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power* (London: Continuum, 2000), 147.

¹¹⁸ Elsie Corbett for example, went out to Serbia to work in the hospital of the son of her father's friend; she got her SWH appointment, on the other hand, by calling in a personal connection to Elsie Inglis.

¹¹⁹ Lorimer, "Papers," 44.

¹²⁰ Lorimer, "Papers," 48.

this was not always necessary. As Lorimer described in her diary, after being reunited with Fitch, "I was so frightfully glad to see him I just didn't care who saw me kiss him right in the middle of the Hall!"¹²¹ She wrote in a letter to her brother, as she was aboard a ship sailing home,

When we said goodbye when the hospital was sent to [Skopje] his Admiral said to Harry "Why don't you kiss your girl?" & Harry said protestingly "But I did do it sir, before in private!" "Well" said the Admiral "I'll show you how to do it in public!" Where upon he clasped me in his arms before everyone & then Harry & I had to follow suit when I was released. Fair goings-on, what!¹²²

At yet another parting, Lorimer reported with her characteristic humour that "we had a last goodbye and everyone kissed everyone else!"¹²³

Fitch himself was often involved in rather scandalous episodes lacking a proper chaperone, in addition to the many involving his fiancée. Later in the war, while recovering from a bout of fever in a Salonika hospital, he wrote,

One of the young nurses in this hospital was, literally, the finest living model of womanhood I have ever seen. On a hot still night of August, just before sailing for England, she suggested a last bathe under the cliffs about a mile away. Our exit from the compound was a stealthy business, and so unpremeditated that we had no time to seek out our bathing costumes. We swam in the calm, warm waters of the Aegean, clad only as the ancient Greeks were clad, and afterwards we lay on the sand to dry and talked of many things. Then we resumed our uniforms and crept back through the line of sentries to our respective quarters....And that was all.¹²⁴

Although there was no mention of this incident in his diary, he did include it in an account of his war experiences that was intended for an audience. This gives some insight into the mind-set of those who participated in behaviour that may have been considered indecent at the time, while participants considered it merely innocent (or mostly innocent) fun. Their avoidance of detection indicates their complicity in the formality of Edwardian propriety, yet the tone of their narratives defends their belief in the innocence of their own actions. Although he was participating in activities that might have been deemed scandalous and been met with disapproval at the time, Fitch emphasizes with the words "and that was all" that nothing indecent happened.

More scandalous were the romances, or rumours of romances, between British and Serbians (usually British women and Serbian officers, as the only Serbian women in Macedonia were refugees).¹²⁵ An example of this is King, who fell in love with two Serbian men over the course of the war. The first was Captain Milan Yovitchitch "Yovi", the

¹²¹ Lorimer, "Papers," letter to her brother, 25 Oct 1915.

¹²² Lorimer, "Papers," letter to her brother, 25 Oct 1915.

¹²³ Lorimer, "Papers," 67.

¹²⁴ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 276.

¹²⁵ Rose, "Diary," 21 Oct 1917.

Serbian Liaison officer with the British Army in Salonika. Not many details of their relationship are provided in her account, as her younger step-sister, who compiled her letters for publication, gleaned the information from King's diary rather than her letters, but did not replicate the diary. Hazel King mentioned that there was much gossip about Yovitchitch and King, "which she deeply resented."¹²⁶ Their relationship could not have been a secret from Salonika society: even her letters mention countless dinners or parties attended with Yovitchitch, where they would have been seen together in public. Yet King's resentment of the "gossip" about her and Yovitchitch implies that she thought of their relationship as proper, and that she took exception to those who may have been speculating that it was not. After Yovitchitch was posted to London and became interested in someone else, King fell in love with Artsa, one of her fellow drivers in the Serbian Motor Transport. She unsuccessfully begged her father, via letters, for permission to marry Artsa.¹²⁷ King's letter, written after she received her father's denial, said, "I...absolutely understand your point of view... You think that all Serbians are Barbarians, &...Artsa is a fortune hunter," and pleading with him to "try to understand mine a little."¹²⁸ Eventually King resigned herself to being only friends with Artsa, writing, "Don't think I'm hurt about your decision about Artsa, I know you are perfectly right in everything you say."¹²⁹ She resented Yovitchitch, her father and male cousin (from a distance) interfering to exclude Artsa from her plans to open Australian-Serbian canteens, but again, reluctantly agreed, so that her father would agree to allow her to return to Serbia.¹³⁰ As Hazel King observed,

She was thirty-three years old, had been doing a man's work for over four years, and had seen the horrors of war first hand, yet she still believed that she must obey her father and that her male relatives knew what was best for her. It does not seem to have occurred to her to defy their wishes.¹³¹

King adhered to contemporary social standards and did not defy her father's instructions, despite the unconventional nature of many of her life choices, including her work, her living arrangements, her appearance, and her choice of love interests. Her father's decision seems to have stemmed from prejudice against Serbians (Yovitchitch had a British mother,¹³² and King's father seemingly did not find him objectionable, although marriage to Yovitchitch was never an option for King), a perspective that King did not share (despite

¹²⁶ King, *One Woman at War*, 39, 70.

¹²⁷ Probably Arsa, a shorted version of the Serbian name Arsenije.

¹²⁸ King, *One Woman at War*, 81-82.

¹²⁹ King, *One Woman at War*, 104.

¹³⁰ King, *One Woman at War*, 106-108, 114.

¹³¹ King, *One Woman at War*, 108.

¹³² See note on page 51-52.

her own prejudiced views against other nationalities), but one which she appeared to understand.

Not all romances ended happily. Archives are littered with examples of unrequited love. Blackstock, after her return to Blighty, received a letter from a suitor she had rejected.¹³³ Shortly after the rejected suitor penned his missive, R Hill, a former patient, wrote to Blackstock, describing the unfortunate man as "eating his heart out over your departure".¹³⁴ In a series of letters spanning several years, Blackstock and Hill continue their friendship via correspondence, and references to Blackstock's former suitor became a running joke between them.¹³⁵ In what appears to be the final letter, he wrote that he was about to be married. "Are you still on that ministering Angel stunt, or have you 'done the damage' too? Guess that boy of yours is too patient!"¹³⁶ The failed romance did not seem to be important to Blackstock; on the contrary, Hill's teasing of her seems to indicate that it was shared knowledge that aided Blackstock and Hill's friendship. Bailey recorded a tale of unrequited love over the course of several years in a series of letters to his younger sister. He wrote:

You're right about me being left behind in "Affaires de coeur" — I'm afraid I'm not cut out for a ladies' man, don't know what to say to 'em and am getting too old to learn. Perhaps some day a masterful female person will take me in hand and drag me to the halter— altar, I mean... You say, "What about Nurse?" Well, she's a Red Cross nurse now and I often hear, at length, from her. She's a very good sort and cheery. She sent me a "swastika", hoping it would make me bullet-proof, I suppose. Anyway, it hasn't had much chance yet. So I sent her a little silver crucifix I found in that smashed town in France. (Now call me a mean blighter for not sending it to you.) Anyway, I'm wondering what I'm going to do about this birthday of yours...¹³⁷

It seems clear from this letter that Bailey is determined to resist all attempts at enforced romance. Moreover, his sister means a great deal more to him than "Nurse", with the turn to focus on Mal's birthday, and the lighthearted guilt that he hasn't sent the souvenir to his sister, rather than his suitress. In another letter he wrote:

Have recently received a letter from Nurse, accompanied by a photo of her doing the "He luvs me, he luvs me not" stunt with a nobby bit of grass. I wonder what the oracle disclosed, Anyway, Nuss is alright, although apt to be romantic at times. She writes to me regularly and I don't suppose I've replied for 3 months. Must drop her a line for old time's sake. She's nursing wounded somewhere in Fulham. Anyway, I must point out to her that I am utterly and entirely unworthy of such luv as hers, but am willing to be an uncle or second cousin to her.¹³⁸

¹³³ Blackstock "Papers," letter from John W Meyer, 14 Nov 1917.

¹³⁴ Blackstock "Papers," letter from R Hill, 29 Nov 1917.

¹³⁵ Blackstock, "Papers," letters from R Hill, 2 Feb and 17 Mar 1918.

¹³⁶ Blackstock, "Papers," letter from R Hill, n.d.

¹³⁷ Bailey, "Papers," 24 Apr 1916.

¹³⁸ Bailey, "Papers," 1 Oct 1916.

This, combined with the other letters complaining about Nurse's demands for attention and her determination to weave a "nice little war Romance,"¹³⁹ revealed that Bailey resented being forced into the stereotypical war hero to play the foil to her own part in the war narrative. As he emphasized to his sister with a tongue in cheek manner, but a repeated insistence that indicated the vehemence of this feeling, Bailey did not see himself as the war hero. Perhaps he resented her for reminding him of the fact that he so rarely saw action (the swastika not having had a chance to prove its value as a talisman) or perhaps he was annoyed that she had bought so readily into the national story of the war hero that she ignored the fact that his experiences did not fit in with that of "Tommy"; furthermore, she appears to have made no effort to discover what the war was actually like for him. This, more than the three years separation, was the real reason why Bailey could not bring himself to answer Nurse's letters. In a further letter to his sister, presumably after he had handed "Nurse" the "frozen mitt"¹⁴⁰, Bailey wrote, "you've apparently got the same views on the subject [romance] as I have."¹⁴¹ Later, he appears to warn his sister off getting involved with returning soldiers, labelling them as "chaps a little insane".¹⁴² Here, the real purpose of the Nurse saga unfolded: he used the story as a way to communicate with his sister. Through the story he expressed his frustrations with the disconnect felt between the perceived legitimate soldier's experience and his own. He also used his lack of patience with romance as a way to relate to his sister, who appeared to share it, and he used his authority on the insanity of Salonika soldiers both as a way to excuse his own lack of success in romance and to make a light-hearted, brotherly warning. The important person was not Nurse, the object of the story, but Mal, the audience. Nurse was merely a conduit to shorten the distance between Bailey and his sister, whom he also presumably had not seen for a number of years. Both Nurse and Mal represent a connection to the home front for Bailey, but Nurse was a negative reminder that his war experience did not fit in with that which was expected of soldiers. However, he was able to use his relationship with Nurse as a way to both express his frustration with his lack of soldier-hero status, and to remind his sister of the bonds and similarities they shared. It is a fascinating example of how one soldier used letter writing and storytelling as a way to ease the distance, both emotional and

¹³⁹ Bailey, "Papers," 24 Jul 1916.

¹⁴⁰ Bailey, "Papers," 24 Jul 1916.

¹⁴¹ Bailey, "Papers," 15 Nov 1917.

¹⁴² Bailey, "Papers," 23 Dec 1917.

physical, between himself and his loved ones at the home front, ironic because on the surface, he seems to be merely complaining about this distance.¹⁴³

"We were very close to nature": Hygiene and privacy



Officer of the 12th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders getting a hair cut in a camp near Salonika, 1916. © IWM (Q 31632)

Even more than relations between the sexes and ideas of decency, standards of hygiene and privacy were challenged by wartime conditions. Towards the end of 1915, the Serbian army was forced into retreat, together with the hundreds of foreign volunteers in northern Serbia. Things they had taken for granted, such as privacy, transport, baths, and toilets – not to mention food and shelter — were in short supply, and their reaction to these privations is revealing.¹⁴⁴ The complete and almost immediate disintegration of the circumstances in which these people found themselves is revealing about their priorities when it came to propriety. For instance, on the voyage to Serbia, Lorimer wrote that the passengers were told to wear clothes to bed in case of torpedoes, lest the German submarines catch them in their pyjamas.¹⁴⁵ After the bombardment of Belgrade forced the hospital to retreat to where the naval mission was located, Lorimer described a scene that makes a remarkable contrast:

I drank so much wine that I wouldn't be a bit sure that I saw straight after it, but we were all so tired and we did so want to sleep... I put on Harry's British warm and slept otherwise in a pair of Major Elliott's pyjamas! Westie was clothed in a nightshirt of Yovitchitch's and the rest had their own night gear.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ For an antidote to Bailey's story, see Sellors' long-distance relationship: J Sellors, "Paper," IWM 87/10/1, 13, 33 and 46.

¹⁴⁴ Lorimer, "Papers," 41.

¹⁴⁵ Lorimer, "Papers," 12.

¹⁴⁶ Lorimer, "Papers," 63-64.

Another night on the retreat, Lorimer described a game of bridge that the naval officers played in the nurse's room:

as Blencoe said it only takes a little time to lose all sense of decency for Stokes, Blencoe, Piper and myself were all in bed during the game... and I was sound asleep on my mattress on the floor before they left. There was one awkward contretemps when a marine turned up with some message and that silly Dods instead of holding him in conversation in the passage let him come right up to the door, so no doubt by now our reputations are worth nothing at the barracks!¹⁴⁷

Lorimer related the sleeping conditions on the journey to Skopje: "we four women" in a compartment with two men, one a doctor and the other an ill MP who was a member of their unit, "and the rest pour souls slept in the corridor sitting on bags and luggage as best they could....Oh, it was a pretty awful night!"¹⁴⁸ She was referring to her comfort level, and the fact that they sat in the train for six hours before it moved, rather than being forced to share her sleeping quarters with men.

On a separate route of the retreat from his fiancée, Fitch found himself rather reluctantly in charge of a group of women nurses and a doctor (although he did admit that he found "the nurses a great acquisition in the way of making tea for us &c").¹⁴⁹ Fitch rigorously divided them into two groups for sleeping arrangements: one group being "men" and the other being "ladies and officers."¹⁵⁰ He exhibits chivalry typical of his time and class, writing that the "Officers gave up our bedding to the nurses."¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Fitch seemed to have been an incorrigible flirt. His devotion to Lorimer notwithstanding, he was quick to befriend or be of service to pretty girls throughout the war.¹⁵² Other groups on the retreat reported similar conditions; as discussed in chapter four, the experience was fairly alike for all who made the journey.¹⁵³ In situations where they were lucky to find shelter for the night, qualms about decorum vanished.

Lorimer and her colleagues might have accepted the shared sleeping arrangements with little grumbling, but when it came to privacy for toilet visits or, "seeking seclusion" as she refers to it, they made a best effort despite the difficult conditions. "Westie and Piper and Stokes and I all sought seclusion behind the cafe in the dark while we were waiting and we were all perfectly helpless with laughter at a dog we came on unexpectedly chained up

¹⁴⁷ Lorimer, "Papers," 66.

¹⁴⁸ Lorimer, "Papers," 75.

¹⁴⁹ H M Fitch, "Papers," IWM 76/191/1, 14 Nov 1915; Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 202.

¹⁵⁰ Fitch, "Papers," 8 to 22 Nov 1915; Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 205. For another example see Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters*, 38.

¹⁵¹ Fitch, "Papers," 10 Nov 1915; Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 204.

¹⁵² Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 226, 288 – 289.

¹⁵³ E Bertram, "Papers" IWM P348; A M Lees, "Papers," IWM 99/76/1, 19 Oct 1915; Butler, "Papers," 9 Oct 1915.

behind who strongly objected to our conduct!"¹⁵⁴ She also described "we women... fl[inging] ourselves on the mercy of a nice woman in a little cottage" and thus experiencing her first Turkish-style toilet, "a dreadful little place with a hole in the floor but better than nothing!... I shall never forget the sight of Stokes with her skirts held above her knees and a sou-wester fixed under her chin by a broad elastic!"¹⁵⁵ Fitch described a similar situation:

There was, of course, no privacy and we were very close to nature. A ridiculous situation occurred when the mist lifted for a few minutes and disclosed the fact that the elderly lady doctor and I had both chosen the same wall behind which to conduct our private affairs. The circumstance was tactfully ignored.¹⁵⁶

On the retreat, lack of hygiene facilities meant that they had to take advantage of what they had, and appreciated it all the more for it.¹⁵⁷ Insufficient hygiene arrangements were one hardship shared by those embarking on the retreat and soldiers who were posted in the front lines on the Macedonian front.¹⁵⁸ In the safety and comfort (by comparison to the retreat) of the Salonika front, Britons once again adopted a concern for privacy and segregation.¹⁵⁹

"The greatest imaginable blessing"¹⁶⁰: Changing appearance



Miss Kitty Fraser (Corporal E. Dillon) and Aladdin (Sgt. C. H. D. Pratt), members of a Field Ambulance Concert Party, Salonika, February, 1917. © IWM (Q 32769)

¹⁵⁴ Lorimer, "Papers," 61.

¹⁵⁵ Lorimer, "Papers," 61-62.

¹⁵⁶ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 209.

¹⁵⁷ Holland, "Papers," 65 and 190; Fitch, "Papers," 7 Nov 1915.

¹⁵⁸ F Marshall, "Papers," IWM 07/3/1, 2; L G Moore, "Diary," IWM Con Shelf 12814, 8 Feb 1917; Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters*, 70.

¹⁵⁹ Creighton, "Papers," 24 Jul 1917, Rose, "Diary," 21 Oct 17 and 21 Apr 1918; Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters*, 84-85.

¹⁶⁰ Olive King on her short hair: King, *One Woman at War*, 32.

Appearance was another area challenged by wartime conditions, especially for women. Some of the most common—and strongly resisted—changes in women's appearances during the war included short hair and the wearing of uniforms. Much work has been done on women's uniforms, particularly the debate about women in khaki.¹⁶¹ Jenny Gould argues that resistance to non-traditional wartime roles for women had its roots in socially accepted views about what were appropriate activities for women to do.¹⁶² According to Gould, many civilians found the wearing of khaki by women war workers reprehensible, as it called a comparison between them and the "legitimate" wearers of the "King's uniform"—men on active service, particularly those who had been wounded. One critic complained, "clothes exercise an enormous influence on the mind" and uniforms caused women to behave ridiculously.¹⁶³ Being in uniform played an important role in how women thought of themselves. Emslie described a hat she bought to boost her confidence when she told the Chairman of the Board of her hospital that she was leaving to do war work abroad. She remembered, "I wore it on this one occasion, for I was in uniform a few days later."¹⁶⁴ Rose was also eager to present a respectable image, both in and out of her SWH uniform. She requested her mother to send her one of her blouses, but worried that "the other ones have rather low necks so I might ask Meg to buy a silk one for me."¹⁶⁵ On July 20, 1916 Ishobel Ross was waiting in London to embark for Salonika with the SWH American unit — so called because most of the funding for the unit had been raised in America. She wrote in her diary, "went round the shops by myself and felt thankful that I am in uniform and am not allowed 'Dainties', or I should have gone home with a very light pocket."¹⁶⁶ Being in uniform was synonymous with being in service and contributing to the war effort, "doing their bit": the equivalent of the male army uniform. King and Emslie, on the voyage to Salonika, made friends with the three women who had been out to Serbia previously, who were nurses with Lady Paget's Skopje hospital. King and Emslie ('Kingie' and 'Jock' to each other¹⁶⁷) called them "the Khaki Girls."¹⁶⁸ This was also when they met Flora Sandes. Emslie described Sandes as "A tall handsome woman with short grey hair

¹⁶¹ Kate Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War* (London: Coronet, 2004); Angela Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British HomeFront in the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (1994), 332-333.

¹⁶² Jenny Gould, "Women's Military Services in First World War Britain," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 117.

¹⁶³ Gould, "Women's Military Services in First World War Britain," 119.

¹⁶⁴ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 17.

¹⁶⁵ Jean K Rose, "Letters," IWM 78/4/1, 15 Oct 1917.

¹⁶⁶ Ishobel Ross, *Little Grey Partridge* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 4.

¹⁶⁷ Their nicknames are first mentioned Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 55 and King, *One Woman at War*, 27.

¹⁶⁸ King, *One Woman at War*, 12.

and a faultless khaki coat and skirt."¹⁶⁹ Her masculine appearance — complete with khaki and short hair — was depicted in a positive light. The short hair of all four women was a cause of envy and, later, emulation. The inscription at the beginning of *Little Grey Partridge* explains the title in an excerpt from an article on the SWH in Serbia in the *Manchester Guardian*, 1916. The Serbs, "admiring their trim grey uniforms and rapid walk, call them affectionately the 'little grey partridges'."¹⁷⁰

Hair cutting played an important role in women's accounts of their war experiences on every front.¹⁷¹ Short hair was common on the Balkan front, where the work was rigorous and the environment harsh. Emslie wrote in her diary, "All [the 'Khaki Girls'] have short hair, which is the envy of our unit, all of whom are still unshorn."¹⁷² While waiting in Salonika bay, Emslie wrote that she "cut the hair of nearly all the unit."¹⁷³ Although most of Emslie's unit had been doing war work in the south of France for six months or longer, it was when they were sent to Salonika that they felt the need to cut their hair. King only confessed to her father in far away Australia that she had cut her hair nearly a year after she — or, more likely, her friend "Jock" (Emslie) — had done it. She admitted, "that's why I've never sent you any snapshots since I've been here." She continued, "it's lovely not having anything blowing in your eyes [while] driving. As soon as it was done I couldn't imagine why I'd never done it before. There are about half a dozen of us with short hair, & we fairly gloat over the others."¹⁷⁴ But for King, the change would not be permanent. She wrote about her hair, "It doesn't wear ribbons now, it gets cut every two or three weeks, but will when it's growing, & I get back to civilised life."¹⁷⁵ A few letters later, she wrote to her father, who evidently did not approve, "You'll be glad to hear I haven't had my hair cut for four months, so its [sic] getting quite long."¹⁷⁶ But in the midst of summer she could not stand the heat of longer hair and lapsed, chopping it all off again.¹⁷⁷ The uncertainty of the war's duration made her nervous that she would "be landed suddenly back in Blighty, just after I've had a close crop!"¹⁷⁸ For King, short hair was convenient for wartime, but not

¹⁶⁹ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 37.

¹⁷⁰ Ross, *Little Grey Partridge*, 1.

¹⁷¹ Examples for the western front: G. E. Mitton, *The Cellar-house of Perryse: a tale of uncommon things from the journals and letters of the Baroness T'Serclaes and Mairi Chisholm* (London: A. & C. Black, 1917), 200; Helen Zenna Smith, *Not So Quiet* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1989), 14.

¹⁷² Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 37

¹⁷³ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 43.

¹⁷⁴ King, *One Woman at War*, 32.

¹⁷⁵ King, *One Woman at War*, 32.

¹⁷⁶ King, *One Woman at War*, 43.

¹⁷⁷ King, *One Woman at War*, 51

¹⁷⁸ King, *One Woman at War*, 43.

something she intended to keep up once she was back in "civilisation"—certainly not once she learned of her father's disapproval. Askew wrote,

I am glad that there were hardly any among the women of our unit who had their hair cut short before proceeding into Serbia. There were so many others who did, and who seemed to consider it necessary also to unsex themselves as far as they could possibly contrive to do so.¹⁷⁹

Yet for most of the women, it was not a necessity to "unsex themselves" that drove them to cut their hair, but rather a hygienic measure and a matter of convenience. By cutting their hair, women were able to work without worrying about lice or keeping their long hair clean. If the Serbs disapproved (as Askew insinuated), they did not express it. Instead, Corbett was forced to wonder what the Serbs "really thought" of women like her.¹⁸⁰ Askew wrote that his wife's "great trouble in the latter part of the retreat was her inability to purchase hairpins. Even in Scutari these very necessary adjuncts of feminine toilet were apparently quite unobtainable."¹⁸¹ It is ironic that Askew expected to be able to buy hairpins where even basic food was scarce, and that Alice would not have needed hair pins if she, too, had cut her hair short.

Women also "unsexed themselves" by the use of masculine language— words such as "manly", "boyish", or similar comparisons—to depict themselves or others. When they first met, Emslie described King as

a very smart little girl chauffeur... who looked like a boy... She looked very trim and abbreviated, and made us painfully aware of our long skirts. She made us ashamed of ourselves too, for while we helplessly gaped for a porter, she shouldered our kit-bags and tossed them... into the well of her "bus".¹⁸²

Even with her long hair, King resembled a boy, but her strength and efficiency (and shorter skirts), according to Emslie's portrayal, were to be envied. For her part, Emslie was comfortable representing herself as an uninitiated and somewhat helpless female. With the gift of hindsight, she knew that she would thrive under the challenges of the campaigning life ahead of her, and become more like King—or, more like a "boy."

It was also not an uncommon occurrence for women to be literally mistaken for men. Fitch recounted one example:

At Vodena, on the way up, we stayed the night. When I got out of our car, stiff and rather surly, I found a Serbian lorry and driver at the door of an inn. The driver was in British A.S.C. uniform and I asked him whether the inn was clean.

"Clean enough for you I should think," he replied.

¹⁷⁹ Alice & Claude Askew, *The Stricken Land: Serbia as We Saw It* (London: E. Nash, 1916), 34.

¹⁸⁰ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 101.

¹⁸¹ Askew, *Stricken Land*, 197.

¹⁸² Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 22.

"Come down out of that," I said, "and don't ever dare to talk to an officer like that again."

He clambered slowly out of the lorry.

"Now," I said, "is this inn clean?"

"You asked me that before," he replied. "I said it's clean enough for you."

Then he grinned and I saw a small set of perfect teeth.

"You're a woman," I said with conviction.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"I knew by your teeth," I said, "and because you were damned impertinent. If you are going to wear that uniform, you must behave like a soldier."¹⁸³

Despite his insistence that women were unsuitable for military service, he admired their "martial spirit." On this occasion, Fitch objected not to the woman driver being in a man's uniform, but to her speaking to him in a manner unsuitable for a superior officer. As someone who often defied both authority and the conventions of society (not to mention appreciating a good joke), he was undoubtedly amused by the driver's cheek. The incident obviously made an impression on him: like his skinny-dipping escapade, it was not recorded in his diary, but reproduced in this later memoir. Another was related in Sandes' autobiography, in which she tells how she, dressed in her Serbian army uniform, accompanied some of her fellow officers to a brothel while on leave in Tunisia.

I kept it up for a while, though the captain was almost helpless with laughter. But when [the "café girl"] kissed me I could not help turning my head away, and that, of course, made her suspicious. Then she tumbled to it and they were all much amused, and plied me with questions about my life in the army.¹⁸⁴

She also played a practical joke on her friends by dressing up — as a woman. "For a moment no one recognized me... Then there was a howl of laughter."¹⁸⁵ Despite the humour in these situations, for Sandes it was a difficult dilemma of identity. "I could never be quite sure when I was supposed to behave as a 'lady' and a guest, and when as a plain sergeant, for sometimes I was treated as one, and sometimes as the other."¹⁸⁶ King shared similar predicaments. She wrote to her father,

I hate being a driver & a guest at the same time. It's such a nuisance having to wear clean clothes, & you are in constant dread of a puncture or anything going wrong & making you turn up a pig. If they would only realise how much one prefers being treated absolutely as a chauffeur & nothing else it would be so much easier... I don't mind how long I wait in the car, but to have to go inside & be bright & entertaining in a mixture of Serb, French & German, is really very trying.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 257-8.

¹⁸⁴ Flora Sandes, *The Autobiography of a Woman Soldier: A Brief Record of Adventure with the Serbian Army, 1916-1919* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1927), 85-86.

¹⁸⁵ Sandes, *The Autobiography of a Woman Soldier*, 84.

¹⁸⁶ Sandes, *The Autobiography of a Woman Soldier*, 82.

¹⁸⁷ King, *One Woman at War*, 64.

This passage from King's letters reveals the struggle that many women had reconciling their wartime roles with the pressures of femininity, one of the ways in which they failed to normalise their wartime experience.

Men dressing as women as part of a concert party was generally accepted, but women dressing in uniform was met with disapproval and confusion, and women dressing as men was even more risqué.¹⁸⁸ The phenomenon of cross-dressing female impersonators was commonly remarked upon in sources, most of whom were tolerant and un-phased. As Fedden wrote, "These concert parties were a perpetual delight. There was something so breezy about their playing, and they usually had a 'principal girl' as pretty as paint and outfitted, down to filmy petticoats and silk stockings, in a way many a woman might envy."¹⁸⁹ Corbett recalled being stopped by a driver in British motor transport, asking if she had a spare corset, as he was supposed to play a "femile" in one of these revues, and he had lost his "styes".¹⁹⁰ Laugesen addresses female impersonators in her work on soldiers' entertainments, arguing that they "came to represent home and an idealized femininity for the audience, and thus reinforced traditional gender roles. In the all-male world of the military, the female impersonation act allowed men to reassert their masculinity in relation to women."¹⁹¹ It seems more likely that men were interested in asserting, not traditional gender roles and their masculinity, but normality. The civilising effects of women were often noted by men in their war writings, perhaps notably Sellors in the context of entertainments (see the following chapter). The presence of women was more significant for representing the familiar social makeup of home than because men did not know how to function as men without women. Moreover, the war was not exclusively an all-male environment, particularly on the Balkan front. Fedden and Corbett's comments reveal a different role the female impersonators may have played – as a reminder of traditional gender roles for *both* sexes – the familiarity of femininity. Although female impersonators represented a brand of femininity that was unattainable for women of the front, Corbett and Fedden observed the female impersonators with admiration and resignation, imagining that their departure from traditional femininity was only temporary (even if perhaps it was not). For these men and women (and men in drag), traditional gender roles represented not conservatism, but familiarity. Thus, traditional expressions of femininity and masculinity were important, but also relatively negotiable.

¹⁸⁸ Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters*, 81.

¹⁸⁹ Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters*, 87.

¹⁹⁰ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 99-100.

¹⁹¹ Amanda Laugesen, "More than a Luxury: Australian Soldiers as Entertainers and Audiences in the First World War," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 6, no. 3 (August 1, 2013): 235.

Corbett and Dillion were amazed when a general asked them to share his table on their voyage home for leave because "our Salonica tailor had not been a success and we had not been near a hairdresser for over a year."¹⁹² People certainly did not prioritize their appearance, but they were aware that they were not keeping to their prewar standards and, in certain situations, they regretted this fact.¹⁹³

Despite the comparative freedom of the front, or perhaps because of it, they felt a need to impose propriety on themselves and each other. As the military situation and therefore immediate material circumstances deteriorated, clinging to ideas of propriety might seem like a skewed sense of priorities. But in fact the disintegration of conditions coincided with either a lessened importance of propriety, a physical inability to keep up to the usual standards, or both. What they maintained and what changes they accepted is revealing as to the real priorities of decency. People like Lorimer and Fitch were able to let go of their societal taboo against mixed gendered sleeping arrangements, and traditional Edwardian ideas about propriety when it came to relationships between men and women, because they knew it did not fundamentally change these relationships. However, lack of privacy during toilet visits and clean clothing were a genuine sacrifice. In the harshest circumstances Britons were able to recognize the irrelevance of Edwardian standards of propriety and appearance while at the same time clinging to their own personal standards of hygiene and privacy.

Despite the conditions of wartime, personal connections and communality amongst the British remained consistent. People relied on prewar lives to inform their wartime connections, ensuring continuity. Where connections were newly forged by the conditions of war, Britons used their prewar knowledge to inform their approach, which explains why personal differences were not suppressed in the interest of the war effort. Likewise, Britons upheld their prewar values in spite of the changed circumstances of wartime. Although standards were adjusted to allow for the conditions, concern for reputations, propriety, and privacy were upheld.

¹⁹² Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 102.

¹⁹³ Lorimer, "Papers," 60 and 70.

Chapter Three: "War seems further off than ever": Everyday life on the Balkan front



British troops dancing with each other at an open air performance by a French marine band in Salonika. © IWM (Q 32011)

Leisure activities, communication, and consumption patterns also played an important role in daily life, although these were all affected by the environment and limitations of war. How the British adapted their habits to suit their new surroundings reveals both how they managed to create a community amongst themselves that was based on community at home, and how they used familiar aspects of life to negotiate the unfamiliarity of wartime experience.

Amongst the sense of frustration, disillusionment, excitement and small joys of life on the Balkan front, a strong sense of community came forth. The British community created an atmosphere rich in a variety of activities, both exotic and familiar. This chapter examines the community and the ways in which it was formed and portrayed, both subtly and explicitly, through the language of ordinary life. People from different walks of life and corners of the empire, who came to the Balkans to play different roles, described life on the Balkan front using tone and language that were remarkably similar. Whatever their differences, their records spoke together to create a cohesive picture of life on the Balkan front.

British people dealt with the differences from life at home in ways that helped to build a communal identity and emphasized their connections with their individual and collective pasts. They imported habits, customs, and consumption patterns from home. Where this was not realistically possible, they adapted what was available locally to make it more familiar. Where both of these tactics failed, they commiserated together about the lack of familiarity. (Of course, not every difference was lamented, and some people took

great pleasure in the things that were exotic or even enjoyably different – this will be explored later on.) The first two of these impulses demonstrate a connection to home and to their communal past. The third demonstrates how the absence of that connection bonded together those who experienced it. Aspects of life – both ordinary and extraordinary – were used to build a communal identity, in a way that emphasized Britons' connections with their pasts. Thus, these everyday activities helped Britons to live their wartime experiences in the context of their prewar lives and selves. According to Winter, "Popular culture gave voice to the reassuringly familiar images and memory of "Blighty" – the Urdu word for "home" borrowed from British India – in a disturbingly alien world." Thus, participating in popular culture became a powerful "makeshift strateg[y] of coping with the war".¹

"Cricket after tea": Recreation



A game of cricket being played by British troops in Salonika.

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The replication of patterns of recreation was an obvious and fairly accomplishable way for Britons in the Balkans to import their culture and to make themselves feel at home. Although certain leisure activities required equipment, the British once again demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in improvising.

Admiral Troubridge chose Henry Fitch to be his secretary because Fitch was good at games, which Troubridge took as a good sign that he would be "fit and hardy" enough to "rough it out in Serbia."² "And I had been hoping that it was my brains!" Fitch lamented.

¹ Jay Winter, "Popular Culture in Wartime Britain," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, by Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 333.

² Henry Malden Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth: A Naval Journal*. (London: Macmillan, 1937), 126.

"But, after that, who shall say that games do not help a career?"³ Games were in fact essential to both his career and his mental and physical well being while on the Balkan front. In the enviable position of liaison officer, he took his duties very seriously and could be found out nearly every evening of the week, dining, attending the theatre, drinking in various clubs and often playing bridge. He recorded his losses and winnings, his emotional highs and lows, the information he gathered from associating with various members of the Allied effort, and the points he gained by playing the more subtle game of diplomacy. Fitch was a proud Englishman; he was a liaison officer between his 'beloved' navy and the household of the Crown Prince of Serbia. He had been posted on the Balkan front for most of the war and had grown to love Serbia; the vagaries of his international allegiances were previously discussed in chapter one. Here, however, it is interesting to note how the practice of recreation permeated his quotidian reality. This experience is shared, perhaps to a lesser extent, but nonetheless, by nearly everyone on the Balkan front. At the time of the war, diary keeping or "writing up" was a common habit; printed annual diaries were used to retrospectively recount in the allotted space for each day the activities which consumed it. The details recorded in these diaries provide insight into the leisure activities of those on the Balkan front.

Games were perhaps the foremost positive activity, organised or unorganised, which occupied those on the Balkan front. Throughout the sources are mentions of football matches, brigade sports, gymkhanas and informal games.⁴ Football matches made up an important part of the relaxation on Christmas day and other holidays.⁵ Spectator sports provided opportunities for social networking, with many meeting new friends at sporting picnics.⁶ Preece wrote in an entry that seems oddly incongruous in a diary of war, "Training again and games. Men are getting very keen & fit. Cricket after tea improving steadily."⁷ Even war activities, such as sniping, took on an innocence and detachment from the war when they became sporting competitions.⁸ The popularity of football during the Great War has received a lot of attention, particularly the famous Christmas truce of 1914 and the stories of soldiers kicking footballs "over the top" on the first day of the Somme. Winter

³ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 127.

⁴ H J E Burtenshaw, "Papers," IWM 01/35/1, 20 Jan 1917 and 3 Jan 1918; O C M Haines, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 3245, 17 May 1917, 306; C R Hennessey, "Papers," IWM 03/31/1, 118; H E Brooks, "Papers," IWM 03/30/1, 1 Apr 1919; R W F Johnston, "Papers," IWM 82/38/1, 48; J Sellors, "Papers," IWM 87/10/1, 29; E M Stuart, "Papers," IWM 05/55/1, 17 Oct 1917, 13 Feb, 2 Mar, and 14 and 24 Nov 1918; Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 270-271, 275, 287.

⁵ J V Cope, "Papers," IWM P346, n.d., letter from W Couvier; H R Preece, "Diary," IWM 04/4/1 25 Dec 1917.

⁶ Hazel King, ed., *One Woman at War: Letters of Olive King, 1915-1920* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987), 29; Preece, "Diary," 27 Mar 1918.

⁷ Preece, "Diary," 3 May 1918.

⁸ Stuart, "Papers," 2 Oct 1917.

has noted how football "symbolized a certain lightheartedness, a defiance of circumstances, as well as adhesion to a collection code of sportsmanlike behavior."⁹ As discussed in chapter one, sportsmanship was an important aspect of British identity. Playing sport was a way to uphold ordinary life and ideals of national identity.

The mention of sporting activities between more gruesome aspects of warfare reveals the importance such activities had in order to keep a balanced perspective and a resolved, if not positive, attitude. Preece recorded the following sequence of events: one man was "blown to pieces" during enemy shelling; another was wounded. The next day he wrote, "Felt rather sick & tired... Poole died last night & Cpl Williams latter [sic] of fever. Played hockey in afternoon & read."¹⁰ Later he "sat on a court martial for a sergeant allowing a man under his charge to drown." In the same entry, he wrote, "Rounders and Football."¹¹ As Jean Rose, a doctor with the SWH in Ostrovo wrote, "All minds are at present occupied with the inter-platoon football competition and preparing for some Battalion Sports that are shortly to take place. War seems further off than ever."¹² Sports were more than a distraction from the realities of war – they were a part of a prewar existence, and for many served as an essential reminder of their humanity and the continuation of life.

Other sports included hunting¹³ and fishing,¹⁴ which had the added advantage of adding to the meagre food available, as discussed later in the chapter. The equipment for these sports was difficult to come by, so these activities were limited to the fortunate. Swimming (or "bathing"), however, was free and could be enjoyed as long as a body of water was available, and a few even enjoyed the novelty of Turkish baths.¹⁵ Riding was also a popular sport, but one which was limited to those with access to horses.¹⁶ The women from privileged backgrounds who worked as ambulance drivers with the SWH transport unit at Ostrovo befriended Serbian cavalry officers who lent them horses.¹⁷ Serbian and French officers were also not shy about teaching other women who were not so experienced.¹⁸ Creighton wrote

⁹ Winter, "Popular Culture in Wartime Britain," 340.

¹⁰ Preece, "Diary," 5 and 6 Jan 1918.

¹¹ Preece, "Diary," 20 Jan 1918.

¹² Jean K Rose, "Diary," IWM 78/4/1, 16 Mar 1916.

¹³ R J Bailey, "Papers," IWM 92/36/1 & 2027, 15 Nov 1916 and 15 Jan 1917; Preece, "Diary," 11 Jan 1918. Stuart, "Papers," 24 Nov 1918.

¹⁴ L Creighton, "Papers," IWM 92/22/1, 27 May 1917, 30 & 31 May 1917, 22 June 1917; Preece, "Diary," 11 Nov 1917.

¹⁵ Bailey, "Papers," 30 Jul 1917; Burtenshaw, "Papers," 4 Jun 1918; Rose, "Diary," 17 May 1916; W Knott, "Papers," IWM P305, 11 Dec 1916 and 25 Jul 1917. Turkish baths: Brooks, "Papers," 13 Dec 1915; King, *One Woman at War*, 41.

¹⁶ Preece, "Diary," 13 Jan 1918.

¹⁷ Elsie Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia 1915-1919: A Personal Diary of Experiences* (Banbury, Oxon: Cheney & Sons, 1964), 89; Creighton, "Papers," 18 May 1917, 13 and 17 Jul 1917.

¹⁸ Rose, "Diary," 31 Oct 1917.

The commandant, who told me when we first met that his chief pleasures were women & horses, & that he could train horses & teach women to ride them arrived at my camp about 7.30 with his ordinance leading a horse for me on which I was to have my first lesson.... I mounted gaily clad in a man's khaki drill breeches I had bought at Ordnance, & my oldest skirt which I had spent a long time in slitting down back & front & piecing together bits of lining to make it respectable.

She reported a successful lesson followed by tea with her friends at the SWH, and was soon borrowing horses to ride alone.¹⁹



Convalescent patients playing cards at a British Field Hospital in Salonika, 1916. © IWM (Q 31658)

Card and board games were another leisure activity that frequently entertained the British and their allies. They had a variety of advantages over sport: more portable, requiring fewer players, appealing to a greater variety of skill sets. These were the perfect vehicle to facilitate both the alleviation of boredom and the interaction of new friends and associates.²⁰ Moore lamented that there was "only one pack of cards between eighteen of us"; despite this it was one of their main sources of entertainment.²¹ Creighton, isolated from members of her own unit and other British society, described her friendship with the French commandant of a nearby camp who invited her to make a fourth for bridge each evening and to read his official communiqué for news. When he left, she was desolate: "This means the horses & fishing rods go too; also the communicate and the bridge..."²² She later befriended members of a nearby Scottish Women's Hospital who shared her hobby, writing, "I find after playing bridge with the S.W. that I had been playing auction

¹⁹ Creighton, "Papers," 15 May 1917.

²⁰ R A Pedler, "Papers," IWM Con Shelf 4716, 10 Apr 1917; T Butler, "Papers," IWM 88/46/1, 29 Jul 1915, 5, 6 and 10 Oct 1915; L G Moore, "Diary," IWM Con Shelf 12814, 9 and 12 Mar 1917; Preece, "Diary," 11 and 15 Aug 1917.

²¹ L G Moore, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 12814, 24 Feb 1917, 47.

²² Creighton, "Papers," 3 and 8 Jul 1917.

bridge with the French."²³ Rose, who had trouble fitting in with the rest of her SWH unit when she joined, finally made friends by playing bridge with them.²⁴ Fitch, whose legendary bridge playing habit is mentioned at the beginning of this section, met his future wife, Lorimer, when he and a colleague went to her hospital to make up four for bridge.²⁵

Recreation was essential for mental and physical health, helped to maintain a sense of familiarity, and created opportunities for socialisation. The British had a variety of other hobbies that kept them amused and provided benefits similar to sport. Even solitary habits such as reading or drawing had communal aspects, as people shared provisions in an effort to circumvent shortages, discussed their hobbies, or, as in the case with food, sent home requests for supplies. Many were avid readers,²⁶ and even non-readers were inspired by boredom to pick up the habit.²⁷ Reading material was limited, and therefore shared and exchanged widely; camp or canteen libraries were prized institutions.²⁸ Creighton described going to the "S.W." for tea and to change books.²⁹ Preece lamented that all the bookshops in Salonika had burnt down during the fire.³⁰ According to Johnston, "The absence of reading matter was the greatest hardship."³¹ Bailey wrote to his sister, describing his opinions of the books she sent out and their various fates: one was the casualty of a bomb and another was requisitioned as a torch.³² In fact, reading material was one of the most commonly requested supplies to be sent from home. The professionally minded Rose asked for the British Medical Journal, along with the usual books, to be sent to her (as well as a spare pair of spectacles to read them with). She later offered to pay for her brother's subscription to Punch if he agreed to send it on "to this benighted spot."³³

Some turned to writing to amuse themselves,³⁴ others, art.³⁵ Of course, everyone mentioned in this thesis was engaged in some kind of life writing, whether it was diaries, letters, or, retrospectively, memoirs. Bailey, a bonafide artist, wrote that it was his "only hardship" to be without pencils for drawing.³⁶ His talent benefited him in a number of ways: it aided his army career,³⁷ amused the doctor who treated his wound,³⁸ and he hoped

²³ Creighton, "Papers," 17 Jul 1917.

²⁴ Rose, "Diary," 31 Jan 1918.

²⁵ E C Lorimer, "Papers," IWM 76/192/1, 44.

²⁶ Butler, "Papers," 15 Oct and 30 Aug 1917; Preece, "Diary," 20 Aug, 30 Aug, 3 Sept 1917, 5 Jan 1918.

²⁷ Moore, "Letters," 24 Feb 1917, 47.

²⁸ Creighton, "Papers," 28 Apr 1917; Preece, "Diary," 20 Aug 1917.

²⁹ Creighton, "Papers," 29 Jul 1917.

³⁰ Preece, "Diary," 3 Sep 1917.

³¹ Johnston, "Papers," 48.

³² Bailey, "Papers," 15 Nov 1917.

³³ Jean K Rose, "Letters," IWM 78/4/1, 15 Oct and 26 Oct 1917.

³⁴ Preece, "Diary," 9 Aug 1917.

³⁵ Rose, "Diary," 30 Oct 1917.

³⁶ Bailey, "Papers," 18 Feb and 26 Nov 1916.

³⁷ Bailey, "Papers," 13 Jan 1916.

the drawings he did would "keep my hand in for 'Apres la Guerre', when some may come in handy as 'specimens'."³⁹ Recreational activities were useful for maintaining connections with home, and therefore prewar life. The reference to lack of materials for leisure as "hardship" suggests the importance of these activities. And, as indicated by Bailey's concern with preserving his portfolio of war drawing to use as samples for further work, they also represented a potential connection to a future, postwar life.

There was a strong connection between good music and home. Bailey described a music night at a divisional camp, writing, "It was the first decent music I've heard since we left Blightie. I'm going to soak myself in it when I get my leave."⁴⁰ The importance of music is also demonstrated by King and Owen's descriptions of the power of a gramophone.⁴¹ Owen wrote, "The emotions are always very near the surface, especially in the case of men who have all been away from home for a long time, as was the general rule with the Salonica Army." With a gramophone, "Distance is annihilated, quicker than by wireless. Everyone is at once in Leicester Square."⁴² According to Winter, the popularity of music hall songs as played on gramophones at the front "catch the romanticism of much of popular culture, a kind of sentimentality through which the ties between front and home were expressed and reinforced."⁴³ Music was a powerful vehicle through which familiarity was expressed. In this way, music fostered a communal nostalgia of home rather than enjoyment of the present, but it was still a collective experience. Dancing was an innately social occupation. In addition to its social function, dancing sometimes served (through its connection to music) as a vehicle for communal nostalgia.⁴⁴ Its popularity can also be explained by a purely practical benefit. Rose discovered that the fox trot, for which her unit "developed a regular mania", kept her warm on freezing Macedonian nights. "It is better even than bed as a means of getting warm in the evening."⁴⁵

Owen described the entertainment options available in Salonika and nearby. He wrote:

We quite often had excellent concerts in the town, gala affairs in aid of charities, which were attended by the various Allied generals. Between them the Allied Armies could

³⁸ Bailey, "Papers," 12 Sep 1916.

³⁹ Bailey, "Papers," 21 Dec 16.

⁴⁰ Bailey, "Papers," 1 Jan 1917; see also Pedler, "Papers," 26 Feb 1917.

⁴¹ King, *One Woman at War*, 33 and 43.

⁴² H. Collinson Owen, *Salonica and After: The Sideshow That Ended the War*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 251

⁴³ Winter, "Popular Culture in Wartime Britain," 334. The link between gramophones (recorded music) and nostalgia is also addressed in Glenn Watkin's discussion of Sassoon's poem, "Dead Musicians III." Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War* (University of California Press, 2002), 380.

⁴⁴ King, *One Woman at War*, 33

⁴⁵ Rose, "Diary," 2 Nov 1917.

provide sufficient talent to make a program of the highest class. And finally there was the extraordinary development of entertainments within the British Army itself.⁴⁶

These entertainments were usually written and produced entirely by amateurs, borrowing heavily from the popular music songs of the day and improvising costumes from the contents of the mess. Some of the productions were so successful they were invited to tour the front. Of course, being put on by military divisions, all of the parts were played by men.⁴⁷ Collections of documents in the archives contain hundreds of programs from these types of events, saved as keepsakes by people for whom it must have been a bright evening during a very dull space of time. Entertainments (concerts, plays, or variety shows made up of whatever amateur talents a division happened to have) were universally popular.⁴⁸ They provided a creative outlet for both professionals and amateurs,⁴⁹ and allowed units to take pride in their hosting skills.⁵⁰ They had a number of other benefits: they were appreciated thanks to the lack of other recreation,⁵¹ they created opportunities for socialising, and they represented the positive aspect of the adapting British spirit. They often took place on ships en route for Salonika, where they served as both a medium for alleviating boredom and allowing those on board to become acquainted.⁵² They were also frequently arranged in camps and hospitals in Macedonia, where they were important for keeping up morale.⁵³ Sellors described his attendance at one such event:

It was just about time to commence and the hall was crowded with men, when a number of nurses and VAD came in. On sight of them a burst of pleasure was heard all over the room. I myself shared in the feeling of satisfaction. The presence of these neat young women in white head-dresses lent a dignity and in some mysterious way seemed to elevate the tone of the assembly, -- to make one most anxious that nothing vulgar should appear in the review. I am convinced that the sight of a fresh English woman's face among the men is inspiring and most helpful.⁵⁴

As Moore wrote, "These shows all help to keep one merry and pass away time which would otherwise lay heavily on one's hands."⁵⁵ Recent historiography has recognized the

⁴⁶ Owen, *Salonica and After*, 29.

⁴⁷ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 99-100.

⁴⁸ Burtenshaw, "Papers," 8 Mar, 6 May and 10 Jun 1917, 30 Jan 1918; Brooks, "Papers," 12 Feb and 27 June 1918; Moore, "Diary," 10, 13, 17 and 19 Mar 1917; Preece, "Diary," 16 Feb 1918. Rose, "Diary," 25 Dec 1917, 10 Jan and 7 Feb 1918.

⁴⁹ Moore, "Letters," 12 Mar 1917, 49; W G Ostler, "Papers," IWM 73/200/1, Item no 8, 25 Dec 1916; See A S Page, "Papers", IWM 81/21/1 for examples of concert programmes.

⁵⁰ H D Bonner, "Papers," IWM 07/31/1, n.d. Oct 1917.

⁵¹ Moore, "Letters," 2 Aug 1917, 72.

⁵² Rose, "Letters," 9 Oct 1917.

⁵³ Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928), 112-116.

⁵⁴ Sellors, "Papers," 40. Cowman notes similar attitudes amongst tourist soldiers on the western front: "Men who felt constrained by the artificial single-sex atmosphere of service welcomed the chance of enjoying female company in towns." Krista Cowman, "Touring behind the Lines: British Soldiers in French Towns and Cities during the Great War," *Urban History* 41, no. 1 (2014), 116-7.

⁵⁵ Moore, "Letters," 10 Jul 1917, 70.

importance of soldiers' entertainments and studied the effect they had on everyday lives during the war. As demonstrated by Glenn Watkins' reference to soldiers' entertainments in Salonika, this aspect of war culture united experience across all fronts.⁵⁶ Amanda Laugesen looks at the role of Australian entertainers, building on Jay Winter's work which reflects on how mutual enjoyment of popular culture formed an important connection between front and home. As Laugesen wrote, "Popular culture helped them to understand and make sense of the world in the context of war."⁵⁷ Concert parties were more than simply an escape from the grim realities of wartime – although they were indeed welcomed as such. The familiarity of entertainment maintained the connection with home.



Men of the 22nd Divisional Ammunition Column RFA, with their unit mascot 'Ginger', watch other members of their unit wrestling on horseback during a horse show outside Salonika, 20th February 1916. © IWM (Q 31765)

With animal-loving being an apparently innately British trait, people took a natural interest in the animals on the Balkan front and some acquired a variety of interesting pets.⁵⁸ Many units had mascots whose presence added to the sense of homeliness and belonging.⁵⁹ Hennessey described his platoon's mascot "Mick", a black and white terrier that had volunteered by marching alongside them and had been taken "on the strength of the

⁵⁶ Watkins, *Proof Through the Night*, 73.

⁵⁷ Amanda Laugesen, "More than a Luxury: Australian Soldiers as Entertainers and Audiences in the First World War," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 6, no. 3 (August 1, 2013): 231; Winter, "Popular Culture in Wartime Britain," 341.

⁵⁸ Haines, "Letters," 11 Aug 1916, 220 and 10 Jun 1917, 311; Bailey, "Papers," 10 Dec 1915 and 1 Jan 1917; Hennessey, "Papers," 108; Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 101; G J Davidge, "Papers," IWM 96/23/1, 124; King, *One Woman at War*, 43.

⁵⁹ Rose, "Diary," 15 Nov 1917.

Platoon for rations and billeting."⁶⁰ However, after a particularly gruelling march, Hennessey described the difficult decision to rehome their dog.

We thought that Mick, being only a civilian as you might say, was entitled to more comfortable quarters than the Army could provide at this time. So we hunted around and managed to find him a very good home at the neighbouring base camp where, in a Q.M.Stores, his future comfort would be assured.⁶¹

As previously addressed, Britons had trouble adjusting to the condition of many native animals, pitying the feral ones and criticizing native people for their treatment of them.⁶²

Tourism was another example of how the British tended to view their war experiences as a continuation of their lives. People maintained, or attempted to maintain, their habits and interests as much as reasonably possible. British attitudes towards tourist opportunities are a reminder of this. Wartime activities were a significant disruption to the lives of those who served and worked abroad, but not always a negative one. Britons took any available opportunity for tourism, whether it was the chance to visit the ancient ruins of Italy or Greece en route to Salonika, a day trip to interesting sights near where they were stationed, or even merely noticing the exotic and interesting aspects of everyday in an unfamiliar place. In her article on the experiences of British soldiers in French towns and cities during the Great War, Krista Cowman describes how letters from soldiers on the Western front were dominated by "curiosity about unfamiliar scenes, fascination at their difference from home, a desire to explore monuments", understandable because, for many, it was their first time abroad.⁶³ As in Salonika, soldiers' first impressions of France tended to be negative. They mentioned the difficulty of conversing with locals, and according to one officer who censored his men's letters, "'English bread and English beer... and English countryside and the English language' were all considered superior."⁶⁴ According to Cowman, urban outings invited comparisons to English counterparts and "delivered a transient sense of normality by allowing men to re-engage with a familiar landscape of pavements, shops and restaurants, notwithstanding the foreign context."⁶⁵

Descriptions of tourist activities undertaken (or envied) en route to Salonika underline the lack of separation between the ordinary lives and wartime lives of participants. Mabel Ingram wrote to her family on her voyage to Salonika, describing the sights she had seen from the ship.⁶⁶ She wrote, "We had a topping time in Athens: I do so

⁶⁰ Hennessey, "Papers," 132.

⁶¹ Hennessey, "Papers," 141.

⁶² Creighton, "Papers," 4 May, 16 Jun, 27 Aug, 2 Sep 1917; Pedler, "Papers," 24 Jan 1917.

⁶³ Cowman, "Touring behind the Lines," 105-106.

⁶⁴ Cowman, "Touring behind the Lines," 110.

⁶⁵ Cowman, "Touring behind the Lines," 111.

⁶⁶ M Ingram, "Papers," IWM 86/48/1, 8 May 1915.

wish the rest of the fam. could have been there."⁶⁷ The trip gave her the opportunity to sightsee and her longing for familial presence connected this experience with her home life in addition to her war experience. Many men wrote enviously of officers who had been allowed on shore while their ship docked, whereas they had not, or lamented that they were on one particular ship, when another had gone ashore. Burtenshaw complained that, when his ship docked in Malta, "officers allowed on shore, ashore, but not poor Tommy."⁶⁸ Women sometimes relied upon their popularity with the men in order to be invited as escorts. Rose wrote in a letter to her sister, en route to Salonika, that plans for a donkey-riding expedition has been thwarted by their escort ship showing up too late: "So only a small party got off the ship — Miss Seely... & I & a few favoured ones amongst the officers got away for a swim..."⁶⁹ Those who did make it ashore counted themselves fortunate. Tourism was an unexpected bonus of their wartime experiences, and certainly something to write home about. When his ship docked in Alexandria, Brooks wrote, "I was lucky to get ashore. It is a fine city with fine shops."⁷⁰ Lorimer, returning to Britain after the disastrous Serbian retreat, described her trip to Athens in great detail in her diary. She and her travelling campaign disagreed over the expense. Lorimer wrote, "the next stop will be Athens – it remains to be seen whether we've enough money to visit it! If it were myself I should certainly take more than a sporting risk of running short elsewhere for this seems a chance in a thousand but Blencoe is cautious, dear soul."⁷¹ As an interesting contrast to those who thought of their tourist opportunities as lucky benefits to their wartime experiences, Lorimer lamented that the schedule of her journey only allowed a few hours for sightseeing ("just wicked the pace at which we had to do things") and that her mental and physical state after the retreat prevented her from enjoying the expedition as much as she might have otherwise done. She wrote, "I rather wish I weren't so tired in my head anyway just now, I might have taken more in at another time."⁷²

In Macedonia, people took short holidays to other units, went to see villages, or visited the front lines for a change of pace.⁷³ In fact, they took advantage of any excuse for a change of scenery. As Rose wrote, "In this unit we don't believe in joy-rides, as such, but we dearly love to take advantage of 'Business' trips when the cameon [sic] isn't over-

⁶⁷ Ingram, "Papers," 7 May 1915. For other examples of tourism en route see A M Lees, "Papers," IWM 99/76/1, 29 Jul 1915; Brooks, "Papers," 24 Mar and 2 Apr 1917; Rose, "Diary," 7 May 1918.

⁶⁸ Burtenshaw, "Papers," 23 Jan 1917. See also Hennessey, "Papers," 105-106, 14 Jan 1919.

⁶⁹ Rose, "Letters," 9 Oct 1917.

⁷⁰ Brooks, "Papers," 18 Nov 1915.

⁷¹ Lorimer, "Papers," 83.

⁷² Lorimer, "Papers," 84-86.

⁷³ Creighton, "Papers," 29 Jun and 28 Jul 1917; Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 92.

loaded."⁷⁴ Visiting the front was also a popular activity in Belgrade in 1915, when a lull in military action meant it was relatively safe for people to visit the areas damaged by fighting earlier in the war.⁷⁵ Trips to Salonika from upcountry Macedonia inevitably included sightseeing as well, and many people (particularly troops) were eager to volunteer for tasks that would give them this opportunity.⁷⁶

Souvenirs were another common theme within diary entries and letters home. Many soldiers came across interesting objects while digging trenches in the Macedonian wilderness. As Bailey wrote to his family,

In some places where there's been trenching, bones of old battle grounds, bones with ancient armour and helmets and quaint ornaments and pottery have been unearthed. I myself dug up an old Aladin [sic] sort of lamp, beautifully made, but the pick went right through it and smashed it.⁷⁷

Many were also keen to acquire uniquely local items such as hand embroidery.⁷⁸ Other types of souvenirs came from war materials themselves: bits of shells, or casings.⁷⁹ This was not an entirely safe undertaking, as Fitch wrote, "Personally I was out after 'souvenirs' and I got my fingers burned for my pains. It is only the uninitiated who pick up pieces of high-explosive shell just after they have fallen."⁸⁰ Souvenirs connected war participants with those on the home front, as they described in letters what they had encountered, or collected desirables to send home. Souvenirs, as objects, were often handed down through generations and created a physical memory, which helped successive generations to negotiate the wartime experiences of their ancestors.⁸¹ Also, as Cowman points out, Shopping was an opportunity for soldiers to "replicat[e] civilian behaviour in their leisurely browsing."⁸² Like British interactions with space, which will be discussed in chapter five, tourism and souvenirs were cherished as examples of exoticness. They were an indication that while participants did think of their war experiences as a unique time in their lives that they wanted to remember, aspects of it were not so different from unusual occurrences in their prewar lives. Holidays, whether during or before the war, were times when they wanted to explore unusual surroundings or sights and collect unusual objects by which to remember their time. As Cowman argues, "The profound need of war-weary civilians to

⁷⁴ Rose, "Letters," 26 Oct 1917.

⁷⁵ D Hay, "Papers," IWM 78/36/1, 21 Jul 1915, 30. F E Latham, "Papers," IWM 96/34/1, 29 Aug 1915.

⁷⁶ Brooks, "Papers," 28 Dec 1915, 3 Oct, 13 Oct, 11 Nov 1917 and 1 Apr 1919; Preece, "Diary," 7 Sept, 20-21 Nov 1917; Haines, "Letters," 18 July 1916, 208; A H Reynell, "Papers," IWM 77/162/1, 19.

⁷⁷ Bailey, "Papers," 18 Feb 1916; see also 24 Apr 1916.

⁷⁸ Creighton, "Papers," 31 Mar 1917.

⁷⁹ Creighton, "Papers," 16 Apr 1917.

⁸⁰ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 143.

⁸¹ Norman Pearce, "Email Message to Author," July 1, 2005.

⁸² Cowman, "Touring behind the Lines," 112.

access a sense of normality through a nostalgic revisions of the prewar past... is replicated in soldiers' reactions to the cultural life of smaller urban centres."⁸³

Leisure activities had two main functions: the familiar served as reminders and connections with prewar lives, and the exotic were seized opportunities for unusual experiences. Both indicate that participants did not see their wartime existence in isolation from their pre (and eventual post) war lives, but rather attempted to live their lives during the war as they had before.

"The Balkan Noos"⁸⁴: The British daily newspaper



A soldier buys a copy of The Balkan News from a vendor in Salonika, December 1916. © IWM (Q 32643)

The Balkan News was the daily English newspaper produced in Salonika for the BSF and sold in all the surrounding camps. H. Collinson Owen was the journalist responsible for its production. According to him, it was "the first daily newspaper to come into being purely for the needs of an army."⁸⁵ Owen has this to say about his newspaper in his 1919 account of the Salonika campaign:

It may be taken quite for granted that when many years hence the last veterans of the Great War are telling stories to their grandchildren, quite a number will talk about *The Balkan News*.... A newspaper is a living thing, an idea with a soul in it, and the soul of the B.N. was a bright little flame that shone in many a dark place in the Balkans.⁸⁶

The Balkan News is indeed mentioned in most memoirs, and many letters sent home from the front enclosed clippings from the paper and described the native Greek boys who served as paperboys. Bailey wrote to his family, including a specimen newspaper and

⁸³ Cowman, "Touring behind the Lines," 122.

⁸⁴ R Gwinnell, "Papers," IWM 01/38/1, 115.

⁸⁵ Owen, *Salonika and After*, 54.

⁸⁶ Owen, *Salonika and After*, 51.

explaining, "We get the B.N. up here every morning. I'll bet you'd think it strange to see that Johnny Greek dashing around this God forsaken spot with his bundle of papers and his Battle cry, "Baukanooos! Verra good nos 'smornin!'." ⁸⁷ According to Birkett Barker, "The vocabulary of the ['native hooligan'] vendors is (not unnaturally) limited, but they have acquired certain phrases that experience shows them accelerate the sale of their wares." These phrases were "British" and "good news." As a result, Birkett Barker wrote, "he treated us one afternoon to the picturesque cry 'Balkanyees -- good news to-morrow -- Breetish wasship sank!'" ⁸⁸ This unfortunate habit of the newsboys was commonly remarked upon. For those in the outlying camps, The Balkan News was their connection to Salonika and all the happenings there, and therefore their connection to the events that unified the experience of the Balkan campaigners. Balkan News sellers' daily appearance was reassuring; their occasional absence was distressing. ⁸⁹ Perhaps these newsboys were held in some affection in these memories, for they facilitated this connection.

Owen also wrote, "I would suggest that the military authorities give as much attention to supplying the troops with news and newspaper reading as with rations. One is almost as necessary as the other..." ⁹⁰ Those further upcountry did not have the luxury of receiving the Balkan News daily, which meant that when it was received it was even more appreciated. Rose wrote, "Newsboy arrived in camp today, so we have the joy of reading The Balkan News for the [previous two days]; great change to be comparatively up to date." ⁹¹ On leaving Salonika, Birkett Barker noted, "I get a copy of the 'Balkan News' for the last time." ⁹²

The Balkan News, like other aspects of daily life, was part of the fabric of society that linked the British. The importance is clear because of the number of people who have described its function in everyday life. It served not only as a connection to the outside world by bringing war news to the front – often their only source – but also as a builder of community, by reporting on local comings and goings. In addition, the Balkan newsboys became part of an important ritual. Their cries of the headlines in botched English were part of daily life in Salonika camps. The description of them was evocative in many memoirs, especially Owen's, and as revealed by these passages, the Balkan News was an important practical and sentimental aspect of Macedonian life.

⁸⁷ Bailey, "Papers," 16 June 1917.

⁸⁸ H Birkett Barker, "Papers," IWM 73/140/1, 29 Aug 1916, 20.

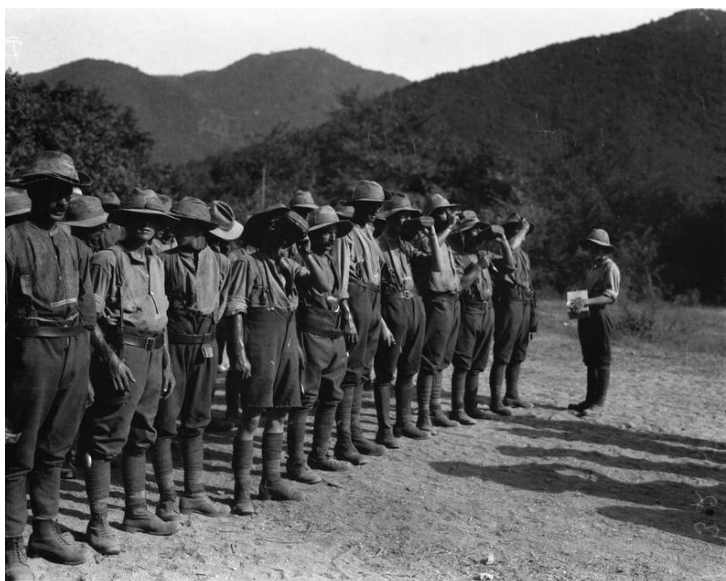
⁸⁹ Burtenshaw, "Papers," 19 Aug 1917; See also Marquerite Fedden, *Sisters' Quarters: Salonika* (London: Grant Richards, 1921), 92.

⁹⁰ Owen, *Salonika and After*, 52.

⁹¹ Rose, "Diary," 6 Nov 1917.

⁹² Birkett Barker, "Papers," 20 Jun 1917.

"This benighted spot"⁹³: Hardships in Macedonia



A quinine parade in Macedonia. © IWM (Q 32159)

Hardships on the Balkan front were not equally suffered; those men of the lower ranks who were stuck in the hills of upcountry Macedonia had more than their share. They rarely experienced the more pleasurable aspects of everyday social life shared by those closer to one another and to the city base of Salonika. However, some hardships were part of life on the Balkan front and were experienced, if not equally, by everyone to some extent. Complaints about Macedonia and Salonika abound in letters. This will be addressed fully in the chapter on space, but despising Macedonia was clearly a common feature of Balkan life that may have served to bond those sharing it.

After years of up-country life with little or no change of scenery, it is unsurprising that people began to feel "fed up" with their surroundings. Bailey wrote in the top of a letter to his sister, for his location: "Salonica! Still Salonica!!"⁹⁴ He longed for a change, writing "any old front would be a relief to this."⁹⁵ Knott described his reaction to rumours of relocation: "I am afraid I have grown rather sceptical about leaving the country for we have been deceived so many times and are still here."⁹⁶ These passages demonstrate the common attitude that some British, especially soldiers, had towards their surroundings. This negative attitude is unsurprising given the hardships they had to endure in them and the fact that a lack of movement suggested a lack of progress in the war.

The extreme isolation experienced by those on the Balkan front was one such hardship. This was one of the most frequently complained about, and keenly felt, negative

⁹³ Rose, "Letters," 26 Oct 1917.

⁹⁴ Bailey, "Papers," 19 Sep and 15 Nov 1917.

⁹⁵ Bailey, "Papers," 17 Aug 1918.

⁹⁶ Knott, "Papers," 24 Aug 1916. See also 30 Aug and 12 Sep 1916; Hennessey, "Papers," 139.

aspects of life in the Balkans. People got little or no news about the war effort on other fronts; they often knew little of what transpired on their own front and were forced to rely on rumours, which were usually disappointingly proven false.⁹⁷ Their correspondence was censored and letters from family and friends arrived with frustrating irregularity due general inefficiency and mail boats sunk by German U-boats. Lack of communication undermined the connection between the home front and the Balkan front. Bailey wrote in a letter to his sister, "Evidently I have been labouring under a misunderstake [sic]. You have written lately. Then it only means that a great literary treasure has been lost in the vastly deep and another foul crime added to the list of the ruthless Hun!"⁹⁸ A month later he wrote,

Among the conglomeration of Good Wishes inside I found a little murmur from yourself, "When am I going to get a letter?" Well, what about me! What about the old Balkan Outcast, Marooned in Macedonia for two and a half years (or is it centuries). Don't I deserve a few crumbs of correspondence?⁹⁹

Isolation elevated the value of communication with home, but also strained relationships, particularly where perceptions of the experience of war on the Balkan front did not match up with reality. Isolation also created a longing for all things British, including other British people. The rarity of contact with home meant that the overseas British (either out of separation, a sense of community, or both) placed a high value on their communications with one another. As seen in chapter two, the British bonded together over shared connections from home. Friends became strangers out of necessity. Moreover, enduring isolation was something that connected Britons by common experience. They exchanged personal and general news; gossip and newspapers were passed along second, third, fourth hand.¹⁰⁰ The infrequent and slow arrival of letters meant that they were greatly appreciated by their recipients. Kathleen Courtney wrote, "One feels... cut off from the world & letters are the one thing that everyone looks out for..."¹⁰¹ Birkett Barker expressed a similar sentiment, writing "It is already easy to understand how welcome letters will be when we have been away from civilization for a few months."¹⁰² Both Courtney and Birkett Barker used inclusive language, such as "everyone" and "we" in texts, emphasizing that the lack of letters was a complaint shared by those around them. The slow arrival of letters was another complaint. Bonner was pleased to receive a consignment of toffee which arrived in "just three weeks".¹⁰³ By contrast, Phinister wrote of receiving a package from home "nearly three months getting here [underline in

⁹⁷ See for example: Moore, "Diary," early Jun 1917; G W Phinister, "Papers," IWM 84/1/1, 2 Jun 1917.

⁹⁸ Bailey, "Papers," 15 Nov 1917.

⁹⁹ Bailey, "Papers," 23 Dec 1917.

¹⁰⁰ Bailey, "Papers," 26 Mar 1919.

¹⁰¹ Kathleen Courtney, "Papers," IWM PP/MCR/C3 & P96, 12 Jan 1915.

¹⁰² Birkett Barker, "Papers," 25 Aug 1916.

¹⁰³ Bonner, "Papers," 19 Oct 1916.

original]".¹⁰⁴ Ingram complained, "one never knows in this benighted country which letters will arrive".¹⁰⁵ Haines complained about the time it took letters to arrive, writing "This is a poor place for correspondence, & especially when your dear letters are long in coming."¹⁰⁶ Moore protested, "we get no news of the outside world."¹⁰⁷ Unsurprisingly, he also placed a high value on letters, writing later that he was "jolly glad" to receive letters and "hear from home at last".¹⁰⁸ Being assigned to the front line, his isolation was perhaps worse than others, as he wrote, "I should very much like to know what is happening to [the letters] -- I know very well that you are writing regularly, and that you have the right address... I ought to tell you that my case is not the only one, for all the other fellows with me are in the same boat."¹⁰⁹ When he did receive letters, they came in a glut and he was unable to answer them satisfactorily, as the censor limited him to writing one short letter a day.¹¹⁰ King also complained about the missing correspondence between her and her family, and the long wait between communications.¹¹¹ She lamented, "Daddy dear, don't you *ever* get my letters? In all your letters you're always 'hoping for one this mail.'"¹¹² Her half-sister, historian Hazel King, who compiled her letters for publication, also frequently remarked on the number that had not survived. Further emphasizing the communal aspect of the lack of news, Haines complained that he was "anxiously awaiting" papers from home.¹¹³ As he wrote, "The newspapers...get pretty well devoured tho' all round."¹¹⁴ Both the suffering of lack of news, and the sharing of news when it did arrive, contributed to the language of inclusion.

Censorship contributed to isolation, a visceral reminder of the war that separated those on the front from their loved ones. In one of Rose's letters, the address she added had been cut off, leaving part of her text on the reverse side missing.¹¹⁵ Authors often self censored letters, sometimes humorously yet ambiguously referring to the things they could not describe. For example, Bailey wrote, "Someone was attacking Johnny on our right or left (I can't tell you which 'cause the Censor's looking)."¹¹⁶ The idea of an official,

¹⁰⁴ Phinister, "Papers," 11 Sep 1917.

¹⁰⁵ Ingram, "Papers," 21 Jul 1915.

¹⁰⁶ Haines, "Letters," 1 Nov 1916, 268.

¹⁰⁷ Moore, "Letters," 24 Feb 1917, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Moore, "Letters," 27 Feb 1917, 48.

¹⁰⁹ Moore, "Letters," 22 Mar 1917, 50.

¹¹⁰ Moore, "Letters," 29 Mar 1917, 51

¹¹¹ King, *One Woman at War*, 70.

¹¹² King, *One Woman at War*, 33.

¹¹³ Haines, "Letters," 10 Jan 1917, 311.

¹¹⁴ Haines, "Letters," 1 Nov 1916, 258.

¹¹⁵ Rose, "Letters," 26 Oct 1917.

¹¹⁶ Bailey, "Papers," 15 Nov 1917. See also Hay, "Papers," 16 Feb 1915, 10.

informational distance between war participants and their loved one at home must have made the physical distance feel all the greater.

Another aspect of isolation, less common but even more destructive, was that felt by people whose posts were on the very outskirts of the front. Creighton, working at a Serbian Relief Fund outpost with only her Serbian orderlies for daily company, complained in her diary:

Mother says she hopes I am not feeling cut off from the world... if it were not for a friend or two I happen to have discovered up here, I should be literally cut off. If anyone of the S.R.F. society thinks about such things at all they suppose you have "picked up" friends, as they do themselves. And most of them live in the region of drifters in. But happily living 5 min off a motoring road & up a hill keeps such away. Also the hot weather.¹¹⁷

By contrast, most people had at least the rest of their own unit to socialise with. Soldiers had the others of their troop for company, yet the remoteness of the front lines meant that, as Moore put it, "things get dull at times."¹¹⁸ Gwinnell complained of the isolation:

It seemed years since I had seen my home. In fact we never saw a house or a civilian, and such a being as a woman only existed in our dreams -- we never saw one in the flesh for years. Occasionally we got a small parcel from home, or a letter from mother, telling us how she prayed for us to be kept safe.¹¹⁹

Moore was more positive, although he also complained of isolation. He wrote to his family, "You asked me if I was near a town. No my dears, I am not, worst luck... I am in the best of health and spirits and hope to remain so. If only we saw a town occasionally... I should be A1."¹²⁰ A lack of leave contributed to isolation. Home leave to Britain was longed for and agonized over, but all too rare.¹²¹

Rather than serving as a bonding factor for British Balkan society as a whole, the isolation experienced by those in the country increased resentment of the so-called Salonika "base-wallahs", or in cases like Creighton's, drove wedges between the members of organisations. Nevertheless, those on the fringes of the front made friends readily and bonded with one another.

Isolation was not the only major hardship suffered by those on the Balkan front. Ironically, given the safety of Macedonia compared to the western front, disease was rife. Most became ill at some point, most commonly by malaria. The universality of the illness is attested to by many sources. Bailey wrote, "The campaign against the coming Malaria

¹¹⁷ Creighton, "Papers," 12 Aug 1917.

¹¹⁸ Moore, "Letters," 24 Feb 1917, 47.

¹¹⁹ Gwinnell, "Papers," 121.

¹²⁰ Moore, "Letters," 2, 16 and 22 May 1917, 57.

¹²¹ Bailey, "Papers," 17 Aug and 19 Sep 1918; Creighton, "Papers," 15 Oct 1917; Brooks, "Papers," 29 Aug 1918; G W Bazley, "Notes from War Diary covering France, Greece, Macedonia, Egypt & Palestine," in S Pounds, "Papers," IWM 76/146/1, 19 Feb 1917.

season has commenced... Luckily I seem pretty proof against these little Macedonian specialties, and there's not many can say it."¹²² Rose also described the malaria precautions set out by her CMO, adding, "Though in the same breath she gave it as her opinion that practically all of the staff would be infected."¹²³ Precautions against malaria included quinine parades, which were as universally unpopular as the purveyors of the disease, the mosquito.¹²⁴ So ubiquitous was this pest that the Salonika Reunion Association named their newsletter after this particular shared aspect of life on the front. This makes it clear that, unwelcome and unpleasant as they were, diseases (especially malaria), were part of the communal experience of the Balkan front and highly evocation of this experience after the war was over.

"The all important topic of grub"



An officer carves the Christmas turkey in the Mess of the 26th Divisional Supply Train (Army Service Corps), Salonika, Christmas Day, 1915. © IWM (Q 31571)

A discussion of food and drink follows logically from a discussion of hardships, as food deprivation was one of the most talked about hardships on the Balkan front. Rachel Duffett, in her chapter, "A War Unimagined," discusses the importance of food for ordinary soldiers, whom she calls "rankers":

Food became something of an obsession for the rankers. The psychological challenges of war played some part in generating a hunger that was not purely calorific; trench life, if it was not terrifying, was generally very dull and, as one soldier said, "the terrible

¹²² Bailey, "Papers," 16 Mar 1918.

¹²³ Rose, "Diary," 13 Apr 1918. See also Ostler, "Papers," Item no 6 Malarial detail sheet; Knott, "Papers," Jun, Jul and Aug 1916, 26 Jan, 16 Apr 1917; Stuart, "Papers," 26 Nov 1917.

¹²⁴ Moore, "Letters," 19 Apr 1917, 55.

monotony of the trenches concentrates all the men's thoughts and desires on food and drink."¹²⁵

Although her research centres on the trenches of the western front, her observations have resonance with the Balkan front, where the lack of sustenance hit hard both physically and culturally. Gwinnell wrote, "In fact all of the time I spent in the Balkans, food was the all important thing.... I repeat that without exception, all the men were desperately hungry nearly the whole time we spent there."¹²⁶ The army and various organisations relied heavily on supplies shipped out from Blighty, rather than catering locally. Partly this was due to an overly bureaucratic organisation;¹²⁷ partly it was because there was not much available locally, especially in the barren hills above Salonika where the local population, frequently displaced by wars, were only functioning on a subsistence level. Submarine warfare complicated shipping rations from England, and by the time supplies reached the end of the line, they often came up short. The situation was especially bad for the rank and file. The food in Salonika, in comparison to the lack of food up country, was a sticking point for many of the troops. Inequality made the situation even more difficult to bear. They complained of the good, fresh, plentiful food available at Salonika "while up the line where one needs good food the issue is barely enough to exist."¹²⁸ Gwinnell, mentioned above, authored by far the most negative memoir used in this thesis. As discussed later, his retrospective memoir is arguably unreliable. According to Gwinnell, the army mishandled the supply of rations — they often spoiled in the sun and had to be burned, while the men went hungry. They called the bully beef "tins of dysentery." He wrote, "This sort of thing was allowed to go on year after year, without the persons responsible making the slightest effort to alter it. But I suppose it wasn't of sufficient importance. Only hungry soldiers watching their rations burn."¹²⁹ Gwinnell's account is often negative to the point of conflicting with others; however, in this case his story is corroborated by sources who also complained about the supply of food. The lack of variation from bully beef is attested to by many. Johnston, another soldier, described being kept on board ship in Salonika harbour, and at one point being reduced to bully beef and biscuits.¹³⁰ Unfortunately it was a preview of things to come as, up the line he reported that curried bully beef was the main dish.¹³¹ The lack of variety, particularly in bully beef, caused hungry soldiers to lose their appetite.

¹²⁵ Rachel Duffett, "A War Unimagined: Food and the Rank and File Soldiers of the First World War," in *British Popular Culture and the First World War*, ed. Jessica Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 62.

¹²⁶ Gwinnell, "Papers," 108.

¹²⁷ Jan and Cora Gordon, *The Luck of Thirteen: Wanderings and Flight through Montenegro and Serbia* (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1916), 43.

¹²⁸ Knott, "Papers," 31 Aug 1917.

¹²⁹ Gwinnell, "Papers," 111; see also 109, 123.

¹³⁰ Johnston, "Papers," 40 and 43.

¹³¹ Johnston, "Papers," 48; Phinister, "Papers," 17 May 1917; Moore, "Diary," 28 Jul 1917.

Bread was perhaps the sorest point of contention, unsurprising given its prominent state in the British diet and its scarceness in upcountry Macedonia. According to Duffett, "The supply of fresh bread, like that of fresh meat, was an area fraught with difficulty, given its limited life, so biscuit was frequently substituted. This was easier to produce and store but was regarded with little enthusiasm by the men."¹³² The army in Macedonia relied on bread brought up from bakers in Salonika, but according to Johnston, men on the front line rarely ate it.¹³³ Gwinnell wrote, "For a month we saw no bread at all." He described the painfully careful distribution of piles of broken biscuits that was the result of a lack of bread and a shortage of rations. He recounted the posturing of one of his fellow soldiers. "I don't take bread nowadays,' Jimmy joked. 'It doesn't suit my complexion.' 'Besides,' he continued 'I've still got one more hole left in my belt not in use.'"¹³⁴ While Duffett described a discrepancy between the food available to the officers and the rankers on the western front,¹³⁵ in Macedonia the division seems to be largely to do with location, with those upcountry faring worse than those in Salonika, regardless of their status. At the SWH hospital in Ostrovo, the food situation was slightly better but the staff went without luxuries. Rose described cakes brought by members of staff who had been down to Salonika. "How, oh how shall we go back to brownish bread partly toasted & spread with margarine or tinned jam!"¹³⁶

Again, the language of the above accounts marked more than the hardship of being short of food. The antidotes never centred on the individual; the focus was always on the collective experience of being hungry or going without desirable food. This was either done explicitly (by the usage of "we"), or implicitly, by relating anecdotes that included others. In some ways, this focus on commonality is unsurprising; eating, a characteristically shared activity, was formalized by communal living. As Duffett wrote,

groups of pals [usually formed through ration receipt] were, for many, the only stable and comforting feature of their existence and, while even these could be transitory, they generally had a greater chance of longevity than one intimate friendship. The groups, subject to army organisational changes and casualties, were initially formed around the need to share food and subsequently bonded by that process. ...recreated an environment similar to that which the men had known at home, where positive emotion and food were inextricably intertwined.¹³⁷

Even in the negative retelling of this hardship the focus on communality remained. Although complaints about the lack of food were marked throughout by the language of

¹³² Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 54.

¹³³ Johnston, "Papers," 49.

¹³⁴ Gwinnell, "Papers," 109.

¹³⁵ Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 65.

¹³⁶ Rose, "Diary," 11 Nov 1917; see also Bonner, "Papers," n.d. Oct 1917.

¹³⁷ Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 64.

inclusion, it applied to a smaller unit, and the jealousy or criticism of those faring better at the base in Salonika was implicit, particularly if, as was the case with Gwinnell and the other soldiers, it was their COs they considered to be responsible for their hunger.

With such meagre rations, troopers were forced to supplement their diet using their own resources. According to Duffett, "where alternative sources of food were more accessible... men enthusiastically avoided army rations."¹³⁸ Scrounging, poaching, and outright theft were rife on the western front, all more or less unofficially sanctioned.

The collusion of the army hierarchy in what was basically theft reflected the altered morality of wartime survival. Niceties of ownership were overwhelmed by the needs of hungry soldiers. This shift in acceptability of certain behaviour was reflected at the individual level as well. Acts that would have been condemned as theft in normal circumstances were condoned, even, admired by the men and referred to as scrounging, which was accepted as making the best of the opportunities that presented themselves rather than the contravention of any moral code of ownership. Stealing from other soldiers, however, remained unacceptable.¹³⁹

Scrounging for the aim of profit rather than to satisfy personal hunger was also objectionable. A strict line was drawn between "'Scrounging' for personal consumption, which was [according to one soldier] 'not morally bad,' and 'flogging' which was thieving and then selling for gain and was regarded as unacceptable."¹⁴⁰ Most pilfering missions were jointly accomplished as petty thieves encouraged and enabled each other, and helped on practical terms. Hennessey described he and his friends eating requisitioned dried figs, "although", he added, "we all felt much internal discomfort afterwards." The figs were

sneaked out of a mess bag being unloaded when a string of figs was spotted peaking out of a bag being hoisted by a slightly deaf soldier. When one string was pulled out another appeared, like a box of tissues, so each man took their share and the bag was nearly empty when it reached the stores tent.¹⁴¹

Hennessey regarded the figs each man took as "their share", indicating his belief of legitimacy. During the botched attempt to aid the Serbian army during their retreat in 1915, Knott related occupying a village populated only by deserted animals. He wrote, "When darkness came many chickens were put out of their misery by 'Tommy'."¹⁴² The humour implies that one could not blame the hungry Tommies for taking advantage of chickens that were going to die anyway. Hennessey, a rum-starved Tommy made the same point in an anecdote recounting the rescue of several bottles of ration rum. He wrote,

Incidentally, I must tell you that in the minds of troops scrounging was not to be confused with stealing although a "purist" might regard them as one and the same thing. But then troops are never purists, and in any case would quickly claim that moral

¹³⁸ Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 53.

¹³⁹ Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 59.

¹⁴⁰ Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 60.

¹⁴¹ Hennessey, "Papers," 106-107.

¹⁴² Knott, "Papers," 9 Nov 1915.

considerations were entirely irrelevant to the situation in which they usually found themselves in time of war.¹⁴³

The thirsty men enlisted the "enthusiastic" help of nearby French cooks. He continued,

It might be supposed that they would have hesitated on moral grounds, but it was clear that the Frenchmen were even more sure than we were that the contemplated operation was a perfectly legitimate one. They expressed their absolute confidence that their co-operation would not go unrewarded, and with our earnest assurance on this point the "Entente Cordiale" was complete.¹⁴⁴

Knott, while on mess duty, wrote that it took three and a half hours to serve meals, as "some patients dodging around to get two servings of meals".¹⁴⁵ In fact, getting ill was probably the best way of getting better food, as many patients expounded upon the positive changes in their diets.¹⁴⁶

Rations could also be supplemented by taking advantage of what was available locally. The need for supplemental food saw the British interacting with locals to buy or barter.¹⁴⁷ Other ways of obtaining food, such as fishing, hunting, and gardening, were also recreational activities.¹⁴⁸ They gave many an opportunity to participate in leisure activities and had the added benefits of sporting and recreation discussed earlier in the chapter. Duffet cites accounts of "officers [who] organised shoots and enjoyed both the opportunity to indulge in a prewar leisure activity and the additions to their diets."¹⁴⁹ Fitch described his hunting expeditions in the Vardar marshes with his Serbian counterparts and Navy companions. He wrote, "Cartridges were rationed because they were difficult to obtain and cost half a franc apiece. The Admiral reduced my allowance if I was not shooting well." He used the game as gifts for diplomats.¹⁵⁰

The lack of fruit and vegetables in army diet was compensated for by buying from locals or growing one's own.¹⁵¹ Growing food was another way of supplementing rations, and, unlike buying from locals, was officially encouraged. The Salonika force was disparagingly nicknamed the "gardeners of Salonika" by the home press, under the assumption that they were doing nothing more than digging (pointless trenches). However, gardening efforts meant that these trenches were soon budding with seedlings of vegetable

¹⁴³ Hennessey, "Papers," 111.

¹⁴⁴ Hennessey, "Papers," 112.

¹⁴⁵ Knott, "Papers," 30 Nov 1915.

¹⁴⁶ Brooks, "Papers," 1-3 Feb 1917; Moore, "Letters," 6 Jul 1917 and Moore, "Diary," 22 Jun 1917; Phinister, "Papers," 23 and 19 Aug 1917; Birkett Barker, "Papers," 28 Oct 1916.

¹⁴⁷ Pedler, "Papers," 26 Feb 1917; Haines, "Letters," 10 Jun 1917, 310.

¹⁴⁸ Moore, "Letters," 6 Jul 1917, 68; Creighton, "Papers," 5 May 1917.

¹⁴⁹ Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 58.

¹⁵⁰ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 264-265.

¹⁵¹ Creighton, "Papers," 2 Aug 1917; Johnston, "Papers," 49; Haines, "Letters," 5 Aug 1916, 212.

plants.¹⁵² Haines wrote that his garden was successful, having received a donation of twelve tomato plants from a Greek.¹⁵³

Relying on the generosity of local hosts was one way of ensuring a good meal; surprisingly there are several instances of people going out of their way to avoid it. Potentially this was because the people most likely to be invited to receive such hospitality already had a steady supply of food, and both the habits and the type of food were so alien to British tastes and sensibilities. Creighton complained of a visit where coffee and a dish of cooked lamb were served "of which I was pressed to partake — fingers the only weapon — but managed to evade doing so. It is impossible to go near a Serb without being given a cup of Turkish coffee."¹⁵⁴ Holland blamed the bread for digestion problems of the British in Serbia.¹⁵⁵ Latham remarked, in Serbia, "We eat so much pork that I am afraid I shall grunt by the time I get home."¹⁵⁶ Food rituals were highly prized as connections with home culture; even those who enjoyed the exoticness of their temporary locale were overwhelmed when presented with foods or food customs that differed from their own, which indicated the importance food held for them as a connection to home.

Canteens were the most legitimate means by which troops could supplement their rations, but they were not always sufficient. Tinned milk, chocolate, and tobacco were popular items. Bailey wrote to his family that, in order to improve the flavour of ration rice, he had purchased tinned milk from the canteen with some of his drachma — he received twenty-five per three weeks' pay. He wrote, "It sounds a lot, but doesn't go very far out here. But then, one doesn't need a lot; a drop of pig's ear now and then, a tin of Nestles to keep the rise down."¹⁵⁷ For Bonner, tinned milk was more of a rarity. She described one meal of blackberries and "tinned milk!!! Some treat — you'd kill anyone here for a tin of milk."¹⁵⁸ She was not the only one who jokingly contemplated homicide for the want of supplies. King wrote to her father, "This is almost the last hot drink I shall ever have, unless I can murder someone & steal their sugar."¹⁵⁹ For Hennessey, the experience of an Expeditionary Force Canteen was so rare that when he was separated from his pack, containing newly purchased tins of cigarettes and chocolate, he "afterwards regarded [it] as one of the big mistakes of my life."¹⁶⁰ Moore was even more unfortunate — the canteen

¹⁵² Brooks, "Papers," n.d. Jan 1918.

¹⁵³ Haines, "Letters," 10 Jun 1917, 312.

¹⁵⁴ Creighton, "Papers," 6 May 1917: see also 20 Aug 1917.

¹⁵⁵ G Holland, "Papers," IWM 88/26/1, 168.

¹⁵⁶ Latham, "Papers," 29 Aug 1915.

¹⁵⁷ Bailey, "Papers," 10 May 1916.

¹⁵⁸ Bonner, "Papers," 25 Sep 1917.

¹⁵⁹ King, *One Woman at War*, 72.

¹⁶⁰ Hennessey, "Papers," 145-148.

usually emptied before he had a chance to buy anything.¹⁶¹ Scarcity sometimes caused an element of resentment and competition, as seen previously in the complaints by front line soldiers of the relative plenty at base while there was a lack of supplies for themselves. Canteens were a good way of supplementing rations, but their supplies did not match demand.

Rather than trusting to the fate of the unreliable canteens, many asked their friends and family to send supplies from home. These shopping lists, very frequently found in letters, were highly indicative of which material goods the British found it difficult to get by without. Common consumable requests were for soup tablets, biscuits or sweets, and tobacco. Bailey wrote home his thanks to his family for sending out cake, which brightened his Christmas, but he later assured them "Don't send any more... eatables or tabloid-drinkables, Dad. I seem to be a recognised fixture here now, and things are quite comfortable, canteens have been erected and the messing is good... Should I get in the rough again, of course, I'll let you know."¹⁶² Haines sent home a request for jam and ginger nut biscuits with a hint of guilt, writing, "But there, I am always worrying you for something."¹⁶³ Moore wrote in his letter of thanks an entire paragraph singing the praises of a long awaited parcel: "you require a course of Army biscuits to fully appreciate a cake like that."¹⁶⁴ However, receiving supplies from home was not always a safe venture. Pedler reported receiving a package of homemade pasties, addressed to him in France and dated four months previous. This example of military post inefficiency became part of his family lore.¹⁶⁵ When Stuart received a tin of butter from a relative that had been en route for fourteen weeks, he wrote to his family:

The less said about the latter the better I think: it has plenty to say for itself.... Perhaps you will thank her for me but ask her to refrain from any more experiments in the packing line as they are apt to give one an awful shock when opening same.¹⁶⁶

As Duffett points out, in addition to the practical importance, discussion and supply of food parcels were an important link between those on the front and their loved ones at home.

For soldiers, parcels offered more than just physical sustenance: they were the point of contact between men and their families and a very tangible reminder of the world that had been left behind.... their practical needs provided an area of shared interest and

¹⁶¹ Moore, "Diary," 7 and 21 Apr 1917.

¹⁶² Bailey, "Papers," 1 Jan and 17 Feb 1917.

¹⁶³ Haines, "Letters," 10 Jun 1917, 227-228.

¹⁶⁴ Moore, "Letters," 19 Apr 1917, 55.

¹⁶⁵ Pedler, "Papers," 15 Mar 17 and page 1 of biographical note.

¹⁶⁶ Stuart, "Papers," 13 Feb 1918.

safe ground for the soldier and his family to discuss that did not touch on the horrors of the war.¹⁶⁷

The practical and emotional considerations explain why food was such a prominent topic in letters between soldiers and their families at home. A good example of this is Moore, whose papers at the Imperial War Museum include both correspondences with his family and a diary he kept at the front. While his letters are full of reassurances about his comfort and show his gratitude for the care packages sent from home, his diary shows more of the story. The brief entries catalogue an increasing frustration with the inadequate diet and lack of provisions.¹⁶⁸ "Grub still jolly short," he complained, blaming the NCOs for "pigging" and "collaring the rations"¹⁶⁹ Later, he wrote in exasperation, "Today's ration 3 ½ biscuits. 1 tin bull beef. 2 mugs tea & about 3oz bacon. Working 12 hours a day on this!!"¹⁷⁰ The next day he received a parcel containing a homemade cake. His letter of thanks is mentioned above; he also wrote in his diary, "They do look after me at home."¹⁷¹ The emotional impact of his family meeting his physical needs at distance is clear from his short yet poignant personal writing. He attempted to protect his family from the knowledge of his discomfort by presenting a falsely positive narrative in his letters while using his diary to record his frustrations. Yet his inclusion of constant reassurances and the receipt of the care packages, indicate that his family did understand, to some extent, what he was going through. His letters are also a good example of one family attempting to negotiate the unfamiliar experience of war by using the familiar experience of food.

Inevitably, the ways in which people supplemented their food rations were community based. "Scrounging" or pilfering involved the implicit consent of any observers, and the involvement of others netted a better result for all. For those unlucky enough to be posted on the front lines, getting ill or wounded had a positive aspect as it meant being evacuated to a hospital at or nearer to the base and accoutrements of society. Obtaining food oneself also involved others: gardening, hunting, and fishing were all communal activities. Even asking for food supplies to be sent from home was a way of connecting those on the Balkan front with the friends and family they had left behind in Blighty. The sharing of food and eating, whether it be through the endurance of ordinary rations, the obtaining of additional consumables through legitimate or illegitimate means, or the generosity made possible by the receipt of a food parcel from home, was hugely important. Duffett cites Ellen Ross' studies of early twentieth century culture which demonstrate the

¹⁶⁷ Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 61.

¹⁶⁸ Moore, "Diary," 28 Jul 1917.

¹⁶⁹ Moore, "Diary," 8, 17 and 18 Feb 1917.

¹⁷⁰ Moore, "Diary," 7 Apr 1917.

¹⁷¹ Moore, "Diary," 19 Apr 1917.

"privileging of food" and the importance of food rituals in social experience.¹⁷² Especially in households of deprivation, food provision was often used as shorthand for affection.

This pattern of behaviour, where affection was fundamentally tied to the satisfaction of basic needs, was later replicated by their sons in the course of their war experience.... Clearly, men experienced a physiological need but there also appeared to have been a spiritual or emotional hunger that was given physical expression in a bodily appetite.... some of their descriptions of hunger have a compulsive element that indicates that it was an emotional void that they were trying to fill, as much as their stomachs.¹⁷³

It is therefore unsurprising the importance that food took on according to diaries, letters, and memories. In addition to its practical necessity, the provision of food allowed war participants to parse their negative and positive experiences, to relate to their loved ones at home on a level that spoke of both their practical and emotional needs, and to interact with their counterparts in a way that fulfilled their needs to give and receive affection, building both a strong sense of community and a strong sensual memory of their wartime experiences.

"Drink is as scarce as it is indispensable"



Officers of the 12th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders issuing beer on New Year's Day 1916. © IWM (Q 31613)

...So explained Birkett Barker when he went into Salonika to secure rations for his troops.¹⁷⁴ Drink was of foremost concern for the majority of participants, and its shortage caused many complaints and a good deal of discomfort. As usual, Salonika was the best of a bad situation, where drink could be obtained as long as one had the ability to pay for it, and as long as one wasn't too picky about what kind of drink it was. The difference

¹⁷² Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 49.

¹⁷³ Duffett, "A War Unimagined," 62.

¹⁷⁴ Birkett Barker, "Papers," 23 Aug 1916.

between what was available locally and what drinkers were used to was frequently bemoaned, particularly when it came to that most precious of substances: beer. Birkett Barker described his first experience of Floca's café.

We had tea at "Floca's"[.] an excellent restaurant run on French lines & were about to depart when we saw at a neighbouring table large glasses of draught lager being quaffed. After a fortnight's abstinence & with the prospect of many months of the like condition we thought this too good to miss & were not disappointed.¹⁷⁵

Outside of Floca's café and similar establishments, beer was rare to be seen, and it was sorely missed.¹⁷⁶ Bailey observed, while censoring letters, "Greece does not seem to impress the men at all & the absence of good honest beer is a very general complaint."¹⁷⁷ Bazley wrote about "A good canteen much appreciated and the Battn gets a few barrels of beer, the first I've seen for 6 months."¹⁷⁸ The lack of beer was not unique to the Balkan front, and letter-writers described local drink to their audiences with their usual humour: sparkling wine in Valetta was "the most awful [something] champagne which was really not worth drinking"¹⁷⁹; a bottle of red wine ("Niet Karoosh" — Russian for "nothing like Blighty Beer")¹⁸⁰; French drinks were "poor stuff, Dad, and my thoughts linger longingly on Johnny [sic] Walker and the honest bitter."¹⁸¹

Anecdotes about beer use the same inclusive language as those about food and other themes discussed in the chapter. Beer had great social value. According to James Nicholls, who studied English beer consumption in his book, *The Politics of Alcohol*, the preference for beer over food for British pub-goers was "not as a mark of their incivility, but as a measure of the importance they attached to beer as both a social lubricant and a source of nutrition."¹⁸² The pub, and therefore beer drinking, was essential, especially for working class people, to either cope with or escape from "issues of life" in a communal rather than solitary environment.¹⁸³ On the Balkan front, where the issues of life *and death* were faced with enforced communality, the beer and pubs that would have familiarized the approach was an unfortunate absence. The lack of beer was something troops could bond over. However, like other hardships, it had a terrible effect on morale. Nicholls reports that during the Second World War, the continued supply of beer was given great importance to

¹⁷⁵ Birkett Barker, "Papers," 29 Aug 1916.

¹⁷⁶ Burtenshaw, "Papers," 11 Jun 1918.

¹⁷⁷ Bailey, "Papers," 26 Aug 1916.

¹⁷⁸ Bazley in Pounds, "Papers," 16 June 1917.

¹⁷⁹ Stuart, "Papers," 11 Nov 1918.

¹⁸⁰ Bailey, "Papers," 26 Mar 1919.

¹⁸¹ Bailey, "Papers," 25 Oct 1915.

¹⁸² James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 187.

¹⁸³ Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol*, 187-188.

keep up morale and "anything like approaching normal life."¹⁸⁴ The emphasis on the Britishness of beer in the passages above also reveals the importance of beer as part of their national identity. Beer was therefore not only missed as essential to identity rituals but a pressing reminder of the distance between the Balkans and Britain.

Rum was the most usual replacement for beer, although it did not appear in frequent or large enough quantities to suit most tastes. Bailey wrote in a letter to his sister that, although he expected a ration of rum to be issued to troops during distressing times or inclement weather, it was more likely to appear in the quiet heat of summer. "Mind you, Win, I'm not grumbling, far from it. A little drop of Coffin Varnish is acceptable any time."¹⁸⁵ Fitch described one of the casualties of the evacuation from Belgrade. "There were 80 gallon jugs of rum in the Barracks and a Chief Petty Officer and I destroyed the lot. I shall never forget the men's faces when I gave my decision and I had not the heart to order *them* to do it."¹⁸⁶ The desire and demand for rum was further evidenced by the story told by Hennessey discussed earlier in this chapter, involving a trans-national alliance conspiring to pilfer a supply of ration rum.¹⁸⁷ In fact, the British propensity for drink is discussed as a reflection of national character in detail in chapter one. The frequency of mentions of the absence of drink in sources is emblematic of just how important a role it played in the everyday lives of the British; its absence took on an everyday role of its own.

As Nichollas argues, "beer has few equals in the pantheon on cultural signifiers of Englishness."¹⁸⁸ British drinks, especially beer, were more than a reminder of home. For the drinker they were an essential part of their day, and their absence did nothing to make them feel at ease in their new, far away from home environment. The British army did not make adequate arrangements for the thirst of their troops, and in its absence beer, like food, took on a larger than life importance. Its substitutes, local wine or liquor and army rum, were inferior replacements (although still drunk and appreciated). They represented a necessary adjustment to the situation, but a temporary and begrudgingly made one. If the grumbling in letters is anything to go by, beer was perhaps the most missed outside of food, and the fact that it can be grouped in the same category as food only further reinforces the necessity of these provisions, above all others. There were certain compromises that were unacceptable – lack of food was one, lack of beer another. Drink was most missed for social aspects. Other drinks were obtainable, but not the beer that most of the men were

¹⁸⁴ Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol*, 188.

¹⁸⁵ Bailey, "Papers," 24 Apr 1916.

¹⁸⁶ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 185-186.

¹⁸⁷ Hennessey, "Papers," 110-112.

¹⁸⁸ Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol*, 3.

accustomed to drinking. Beer equalled normalcy. Visiting Salonika meant drinking beer – just one of the ways in which it was a return to a civilization of sorts.

As Jay Winter noted, "Soldiers did not spin off into a world of their own."¹⁸⁹ Although material circumstances and patterns of consumption drastically changed everyday life for the British on the Balkan front, they relied on leisure patterns and coping mechanisms that created for them a sense of familiarity. Recreation enabled them to engage in familiar activities, ensuring continuity between their prewar and wartime lives. Tourism allowed them to take advantage of the changed circumstances of war while still engaging in a familiar pastime. Britons relied on connections to home and familiar ways of life. A lack of the food, drink, and other consumables contributed to the experience of hardship, particularly for those on the front lines, who had the opportunity to visit Salonika only rarely or never. The lack of provisions threw British life at the front into sharp contrast with life at home, and made life difficult, sometimes dangerously so. But shortages forced British people to identify what was most important to their standard of living, and gave them a chance to exercise their ingenuity in doing without, or coming up with substitutes and supplements. Where connections and familiarity were not possible, Britons relied on the familiar coping mechanism of communal commiseration. Isolation meant that the British community placed an even higher value on their communications with each other. The lack of food was something experienced on a communal level and served an important role in communication between home and front, the familiar need of food being one way loved ones, split apart by war, could continue to relate to one another. The experience of hardships and the communal aspects of supplementation helped to create a sense of community within British society on the front. The communities created by the British helped them to deal with the changes effected on their lives by their wartime situations, which brings their experience full circle. Both the activities that they participated in, and the ways that Britons encountered their self-created community, reveal their continuing connections to their prewar life.

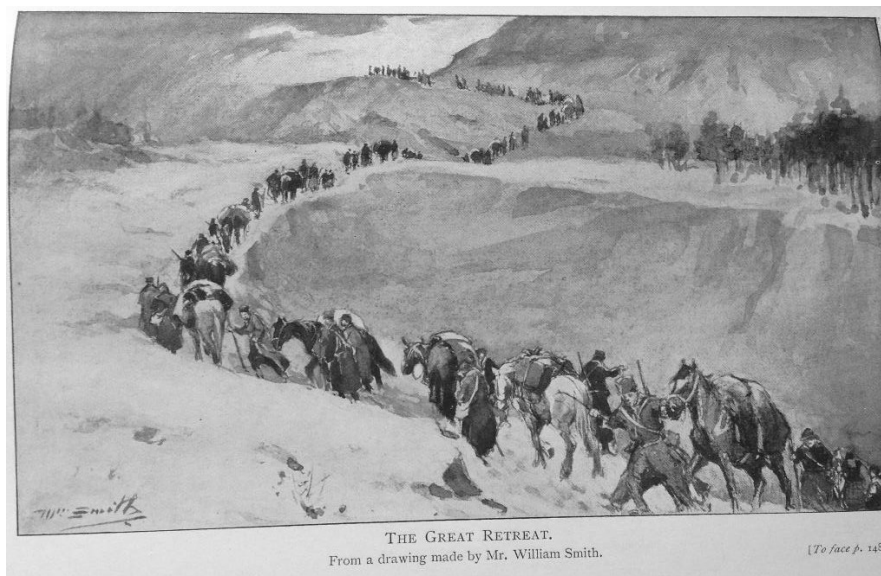
¹⁸⁹ Winter, "Popular Culture in Wartime Britain," 346.

Chapter Four: "All of us who had been on the Serbian front": Events and community identity

Ritualized involvement in aspects of everyday life was part of the common experience on the Balkan front. By observing and recording their experience of everyday life, participants were able to identify themselves as part of the community. The recognition of membership and participation in community by oneself and others contributed to a sense of belonging: a mutual enjoyment of more positive features, and shared commiseration in mutual suffering of less positive features. The importance of community reflects how important aspects of continuity were in wartime experiences. Certain events had a similar effect on the community identity of those on the Balkan front. The key difference was participation, which was exclusive rather than ritualized. Major events which took place over the course of the war's timeframe became signifiers of belonging and community; presence and participation were clear and obvious indicators of a person's status as a member of the community. Depending on the event, attendance at a significant occasion further indicated an individual's status as an elite, longstanding, dedicated or hard-suffering member of the Balkan front community. Thus, attendance at certain events became shorthand currency for an individual's status - a summary of the Balkan front experiences, and a symbol of the legitimacy of that experience. Individual status and the legitimacy of experience reveal the importance of community, which was used as a tool of continuity, creating a familiar social and professional network to frame war experiences.

This chapter is divided into two sections, addressing two different types of events. The first section deals with large scale events, which were largely participatory by nature: the Serbian retreat, the occupation of Serbia by the Central Powers and taking POWs of British medical workers. The second section deals with short well-defined events, which were largely observatory by nature: the downing of a zeppelin over Salonika, Katherine Harley's funeral, Salonika's "great fire", and the armistice.

"A seething mass of folk of every kind": Serbia's "great retreat"



A drawing of the retreat from Serbia made by William Smith, transport officer with the SWH. From Eva Shaw McLaren, The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919).

As mentioned in the introduction, at the end of 1915, Serbia was overrun by a coordinated invasion of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian armies. Rather than surrender, the Serbian army embarked on a retreat that was so severe it is still known as their Golgotha, referring to the site where Jesus was crucified.¹ Every man of military age (including teenagers and boys who were expected to reach military age over the course of the war) attempted to reach the Adriatic. The remaining population either fled, becoming refugees, or remained in their homes to face an uncertain fate under occupying forces. Many died along the way and those who survived were exhausted, starved, frostbitten and disease-ridden. The Allies sent the ragged remains of the Serbian army to Corfu to recuperate, and thence to Salonika, where a British and French joint expeditionary force had tried, and failed, to defend Serbia from the south. Together with representative units from many Allied forces, they made up the Balkan front fighting force.

The British naval mission that had been attached to the Serbian army headquarters in Belgrade also retreated. The British hospital units in Serbia had to either undertake the retreat, or remain in Serbia and be taken prisoner of war. As medical workers rather than combatants, they were afforded protection by the Geneva Convention, but nonetheless their eventual repatriation, and their circumstances until that point were very uncertain. Most did not have the luxury of deciding their own fate. They were either commanded to retreat, caught up in it as the tide of refugees increased, or commanded to stay or overtaken

¹ Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War 1914-1918* (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2007), 145.

by invading armies before they could escape. For those afforded the choice, it was not as easy one: the disastrous retreat, or an unknown future at the hands of the enemy. Despite the decision being outside their control, the fierce debates that took place between those who wanted to stay and those who wished to go were a strong indication of the significance that these events held for the British. Participation in the retreat and prisoner of war status gained special currency as an indication of one's status as a hardwearing, longstanding member of the British community who had dedicated their war efforts to serving Serbia.

During the retreat and within the experiences of those taken prisoner, just as in everyday life, common themes signpost the collective experience, indicating the importance and forming a picture of both the experience overall and the ways it was used to create a sense of community (though not always unified) amongst the British. Firstly and most notably was the horror and scale of the retreat, which all British participants commented upon. There is not room here to do justice to the scope of the disaster,² but a few passages can accurately describe how this terrible experience was a strong bonding factor for the British who suffered through and bore witness to it. As Bertram, a nurse with the Scottish Women's Hospitals, wrote, "I cannot relate some of the sights, they were too awful."³ Holland described "all day all night, and every day train loads of the wretched looking soldiers streamed into Lapovo station, and the roads were an endless procession of fleeing families with oxwagons..."⁴ Lorimer described

a seething mass of folk of every kind from khaki clad Englishmen, soldiers in every variety of uniform standing about in a curious kind of apathy to squabbling crowds of civilians, men, women and children all trying to make for the south with as much of their worldly goods as it was possible to move.⁵

Food was scarce, and with many of the Serbian refugees dying of starvation, it was of utmost concern and importance. According to the Berry account of the retreat, bread could only be had by military order,

and it required prodigious exertions on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon to wrest from the reluctant authorities even a third of their prescribed allowance. For the first time in his life Blease tried to buy bread at a shop and was told there was none to buy.... he will never forget the feeling of helplessness which for a moment seized him when he realised that he was there, in the midst of thousands of hungry people, and the money in his pocket gave him no advantage over the poorest of them all.⁶

² For a good description, see Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War*.

³ E Bertram, "Papers" IWM P348, 11.

⁴ G Holland, "Papers," IWM 88/26/1, 186.

⁵ E C Lorimer, "Papers," IWM 76/192/1, 74.

⁶ James Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit in Serbia* (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1916), 208.

The discovery of Turkish delight and chocolate in shops were lucky highlights of their journey.⁷ When they finally arrived in London, they were "rather tired of rice, which they had eaten, curried or sugared, twice a day for nearly five weeks."⁸

Conditions, especially sleeping arrangements and personal hygiene, were appalling. Berry's account described the various floors the party slept on over the course of the retreat: an office, a village inn "too weary even to complain of the cockroaches with which it was infested" and "a friendly cottage, sleeping thirteen together in one small room, after a dreadful slaughter of bugs."⁹ In Scutari, "decent accommodation was found in a hotel, and for the first time since leaving Kraljevo there was an opportunity for real washing."¹⁰ Towards the end of their ordeal, the Berry account describes "a dramatic encounter with the advance guard of the British Adriatic Mission", sent out to provide relief to the Serbian refugees, but their baggage had been sunk by an Austrian submarine.

It was a grimly humorous experience for those who were fleeing before the enemy to be asked if they could lend any spare underclothing to their countrymen fresh from England. Changes of underclothing, like soap and razors, had long since become superfluties, accepted with indifference and lost without regret.¹¹

Despite the conditions, Britons endeavoured to distract themselves from their surrounds, and to pass the sometimes interminable waits with attempts at recreation. The Berry account describes the dismal wait for transport at San Giovanni. "Most of the English sat in the inn and played cards. An attempt at football laid half the players breathless on their backs after the first goal...", and the weather made outdoor pursuits impossible.¹²

The suffering of the British units themselves was noteworthy, with many describing their condition when they reached London as that of refugees. "We were practically reduced to only our blankets," Bertram wrote.¹³ Their relief at finally returning home was evident. Lorimer, on board a ship bound for England, wrote, "I simply can't say what a relief it is to really feel we are on our way home at last. Ever since the flight from Skopje... I have just felt the one place I wanted to get to was England."¹⁴

Encountering other Britons, whether acquaintances or strangers, was a significant emotional experience and was a fairly common occurrence on the retreat. The passages

⁷ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 215, 217.

⁸ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 224.

⁹ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 215-216.

¹⁰ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 218.

¹¹ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 220.

¹² Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 223.

¹³ Bertram, "Papers," 13.

¹⁴ Lorimer, "Papers," 81.

recorded in their diaries or memoirs use humour, tragedy, and suspense to reveal the emotional impact of these meetings. Bertram wrote in her memoir, "On our way to Priština we were hailed by some of our British Marines from Belgrade. There were about a dozen of them, and they were so delighted to see us... We sat round their fire and had some tea, while they related some of their experiences." She continued, writing dramatically, "I do not know how they fared in the mountains for we never saw them again."¹⁵ Bertram also saw one of her former patients, another British marine, when they reached the coast at Medua.¹⁶ She attempted to portray the gravity of the situations with her fatalistic prose, but others took the conditions with a bit more humour. William Smith, a transport officer with the Scottish Women's Hospitals, described meeting Admiral Troubridge and Colonel Phillips, leaders of the naval mission, in Prizren. They were each, he wrote, "carrying a big tin of biscuits, and a... tin of bully beef under each arm. Both hailed me cheerfully and displayed their good luck."¹⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, the acquisition and sharing of supplies served as a bonding ritual, and this was no different on the retreat, where Britons, when encountering one another, were often in the position to be generous or called upon to help their countrymen in need. Bertram described her meeting with the correspondent for the *Daily Graphic*.

He had lost his orderly and waggon [sic] and was greatly distressed at losing his notes on Serbia, also that he had no way of getting his papers through to England. Two days later we saw him again, he was in a happier frame of mind. He had found his waggon, written up his notes and he presented us with 2 lbs of tea.¹⁸

Lorimer described the relief when she and other members of her unit were provided with food by members of Stobart's hospital who were going home – also on the last train to Salonika before the line was cut by the Bulgarian army. "They were very well supplied with food and were awfully kind giving us huge sandwiches with tongue in them, the only decent food we had had since lunch the day before – about 12 hours."¹⁹

Captain Henry Fitch, of the aforementioned naval mission, found himself at various points leading retreating parties of nurses as well as his own soldiers. He described his relief when familiar help arrived. British Army lorries were, he wrote, "a glorious sight".²⁰ Craigie Lorimer was a volunteer nurse who had been with the British naval hospital in Belgrade, where she met Fitch and became engaged to him. They were separated in the chaos of the retreat, but met by coincidence later on. Soon after, on her

¹⁵ Bertram, "Papers," 4 and 7.

¹⁶ Bertram, "Papers," 4.

¹⁷ Eva Shaw McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 150.

¹⁸ Bertram, "Papers," 7-8.

¹⁹ Lorimer, "Papers," 62.

²⁰ Henry Malden Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth: A Naval Journal*. (London: Macmillan, 1937), 211.

voyage home, Lorimer wrote to her brother, describing her feelings on the event. "I think we were lucky to see each other just for a moment at a time during those days & you can just imagine what it was like meeting unexpectedly in safety further down the line!"²¹ When they reached Scutari, the British units were consolidated and eventually found passage, although some waited there or further along the coast for some weeks. There, they were reunited with some acquaintances, and shared rumours about what had happened to others.²² In such difficult and dangerous conditions, it is easy to see how safely meeting a friend and compatriot, even if only momentarily, would have been an emotionally charged shared experience. Personal connections were always highly valued, but in the dramatic setting of the high mountains between Serbia and Albania, in bitter winter, in the midst of a full scale military and civilian retreat, shared national identity was also a unifying factor.

The encounters with other Britons on the retreat were a reminder of the community they shared, which, however tenuous, remained an important consideration for those involved; so much so that even the experience of the retreat was not enough to override a concern for appearances and reputations. Here, the choice between joining the retreat and staying through the fighting became a point of contention between the authorities and many staffs of hospitals. Lorimer's unit had retreated swiftly, in fits and starts, from Belgrade to Salonika, under the leadership of a Dr Sharpe, whom she described as "panicky" and who appeared to favour flight to waiting for orders from the naval mission, which was technically in charge of the hospital. Debates about the appearance of bravery also played an important role in the decision of whether to retreat or to stay, as will be addressed in the next section.

The retreat exacerbated incompatibility in others, and with emotions and tempers running high it is not surprising that arguments amongst units often occurred. Faced with danger and deprivation, it was easy for some to see if others were making their own way more comfortable (especially at the expense of others) and members of units were particularly critical if their leaders did not appear to be roughing it as much as they were. After losing most of her possessions, Lorimer groused about her leader who had managed to retain most of his. An order came for them to leave yet another temporary stop in hurry

so off I fled with a dress flung on above my combies and stays, a coat on my arm and unlaced boots on my feet leaving all sorts of small possessions of mine behind! I was packed into a cab and Dr Sharpe came in too and in the dim darkness I could just

²¹ Lorimer, "Papers," 63; letter to her brother, 24 Oct 1915.

²² Bertram, "Papers," 12

discern his inevitable trunk being thrust on the box. Whoever else goes without baggage, his always turns up complete!²³

Gertrude Holland wrote angrily that her leader had abandoned her unit in favour of a more glorious, and certainly more comfortable position with the Serbian army. Stobart, on her black horse, famously accompanied the army in their retreat; but members of her SRF hospital felt they had been left to fend for themselves. Stobart formed her field ambulance of twenty members of her unit, leaving the remaining at Kraguievac and Lapovo, as Holland wrote,

under Dr King May who to all intents and purposes was now the head of the unit as we never saw another sign of Mrs Stobart, and she arrived home a few days after we did having had a much easier time than all of us having been with the Serbian officials all the time who were able to considerably lessen the hardships, and also they were never with out [sic] food like we were.²⁴

The deprivation on the retreat was a bonding factor for those who suffered together. As the above passages indicate, retreaters bitterly resented those who they perceived as having a cosier time than them. Nevertheless, the resentment was yet another hardship to serve as a unifying factor; Holland and Lorimer both used inclusive language in the passages criticising their leaders; Holland directly uses "we" to imply she is speaking for the rest of her companions, and Lorimer refers to her unit as "whoever else", creating a diametrical opposition between the members of their party and their non-esteemed leader.

The retreat also solidified relationships between the British and their other allies. Fitch and some of his companions found themselves lucky enough to dine with French pilots in Raška.²⁵ In 1916 Bonner shared a tent with Miss Shakespeare, who had been in the retreat, relating tales of how she had worn out her shoes and was given a pony by a French officer. Bonner later met the same French officer while crossing the channel who said "the SWH are wonderful women, I know 'zem in Kragujevac."²⁶

Such instances of international friendship were common, but the retreat experience rather complicated British-Serbian relationships. Serbs generally felt great fondness for those who they saw as suffering with them through their greatest trials. This affection was returned by the majority of Britons who embarked upon the retreat, but quite a few British sources criticised the Serbian government and army officials for their handling of the retreat. Troubridge and other members of the naval mission were deeply critical of their counterparts in the Serbian army for what they saw as the abandonment of the British

²³ Lorimer, "Papers," 75.

²⁴ Holland, "Papers," 186.

²⁵ H M Fitch, "Papers," IWM 76/191/1, 2 Nov 1915.

²⁶ "Two coincidences about the Balkan Wars," Lucas Reflections, 125 in H D Bonner, "Papers," IWM 07/31/1.

hospital units. Paget expressed frustration that he had been promised sufficient transport for the hospitals and their equipment, yet with the enemy at the gates, such transport was not forthcoming. The hospital staffs were more understanding. Inglis was vigorous in her support of the Serbian officials, expressing her decision to stay with vehemence that led her to butt heads with Paget.

Many others recounted the help they received from Serbian officers and people on the retreat. Bertram's field hospital, when separated from the army, was given two ponies by a Serbian officer.²⁷ The author of the Berry unit account of the retreat wrote,

Nothing could surpass the willingness of the officials and common people in the country districts to make the escape of the English easy... [Their] abstention from violence was beyond praise. It was the most striking example of the Serbian virtues of hospitality and patience in adversity that we received. English people in Serbia have complained of many inconveniences and discomforts. But the memory of these has been obliterated by the single fact that, when the Serbians were perishing in thousands of starvation and exposure, not one English man or woman who started on the great retreat suffered any abuse, or was ever allowed to be in danger of death through want of food.²⁸

Despite this, he blamed the Serbian government for their choice of route which, he argued, was pointlessly optimistic and led to the needless suffering and death of many:

Thousands of people perished who might have been saved had they only studied the maps... The Serbian Government must bear some of the blame. ...This blundering was thoroughly characteristic. Foresight, preparation, and anxiety to prevent the loss of life were never Serbian virtues, and the people and Government in their hour of disaster were almost callous in their neglect of precautions against hardships which they afterwards bore with exemplary patience and fortitude.²⁹

The retreat, though terrible, gave Britons the opportunity to demonstrate their bravery and self-sacrifice, both individually and collectively, and to participate in an event that would grant legitimacy to their status as British participants on the Balkan front.

²⁷ Bertram, "Papers," 9.

²⁸ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 215, 226.

²⁹ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 225.

"It is worth being a prisoner to realise the joy of being free": POWs in occupied Serbia



Dr. Inglis and other members of the SWH in Zurich on their way to repatriation. From Eva Shaw McLaren, The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919).

Those who did not manage to escape Serbia on the treacherous retreat were taken prisoner by the invading German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian armies. They experienced extreme isolation, not only from their colleagues in Serbia and on the retreat, but from the home front as well. Their experience in some ways echoed that of those on the retreat: they suffered similar hardships and danger; the British were often thrown together, sometimes by coincidence and shared responsibility, but also sometimes by force as the armies of the Central Powers grouped their prisoners of war together and prepared them for eventual repatriation. The trauma of their ordeal often served to bond people together, forming both personal and professional connections that lasted throughout the war and beyond, and through the experience, former prisoners of war gained a badge of legitimacy that marked them as true heroines³⁰ of the war. The fate of those who remained in Serbia under occupying forces was a varied one. As discussed above, those in northern Serbia spent the time of the invasion in a confused, disorganised and desperate attempt to both escape the invading forces and continue their relevant work. These frantic moves through the country enabled those who eventually remained behind to taste the effect of the early retreat first-hand. Lees described being evacuated in cattle trucks from their hospital by the Serbian army. They kept cheerful by singing songs, catered for themselves

³⁰ All men of military age who were in Serbia at the time of the invasion retreated with the army rather than risk being taken prisoner for the duration of the war.

in crowded railways stations, put up with inclement weather, and slept wherever they could.³¹ Eventually, they

arrived at Kruševac, the dumping ground of refugees, in the rain and dark. We were taken to a dirty Inn where, after waiting an hour during which time many slept with their heads on the table, we had a meal. We then trooped off to the large Serbian Hosp. where the meal room of the Staff was turned out for us, dirty straw mattresses laid down, and 22 of us slept there as close as we could lie. Peals of laughter went up at intervals during the night when the four dogs jumped on us, or fought. We tied them to the four legs of the table, and then got a little peace. One we called "Boz" (train)³² on account of the sounds he emitted owing to asthma or something. Our luggage was lost. ...At first we could only have the room at night, and we wandered the streets in the day and haunted the dirty café; but later we had the room to ourselves and slept, cooked, lived, washed out clothes there. One day one of our dinner fowls flew out of the window but we caught it.³³

At this point, faced with the choice between occupation and retreat, some of their party took their chances with the mountain and set off on "for home."³⁴

Elsie Corbett, who was with the Red Cross Hospital in Vrnjačka Banja, "a cul-de-sac full of hospitals"³⁵ throughout 1915, wrote about the various units from further north that retreated into Vrnjačka Banja as they evacuated. At the end of October there were "at least seven British Hospital Units in Vrnjačka Banja, including two Scottish Women's Hospitals, and several with curious names like 'The Wounded Allies' and 'The Farmers.'"³⁶ There was no real shortage of food - according to Corbett, their biggest fear was losing the Austrian POW orderlies who had been working in their hospital, who they had come to rely on and had grown attached to. They prepared to flee if they got orders, packed small bags, and heard rumours of which towns had fallen. "Some of the Sisters rather melodramatically prepared hypodermics to administer poison to each other rather than fall into enemy hands... but I could imagine nothing more horrible than having to leave our patients."³⁷ Corbett and her friend Dillion considered joining a party from their hospital who set out for the coast via Montenegro and Albania, led by the Gordons

There was a great deal of rather hysterical discussion, about whether to flee or not to flee; I can't remember exactly how long the stress and strain of this episode lasted, but it was a very trying time; Matron insisting that we were "running away at the first hint

³¹ A M Lees, "Papers," IWM 99/76/1, 19-20 Oct 1915.

³² The Serbian word for train is "voz", but prior to standard transliteration, the "b" and "v" were often confused. A common example is Serbia vs. Servia.

³³ Lees, "Papers," 21 Oct 1915.

³⁴ Lees, "Papers," 5 Nov 1915.

³⁵ Elsie Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia 1915-1919: A Personal Diary of Experiences* (Banbury, Oxon: Cheney & Sons, 1964), 46.

³⁶ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 41.

³⁷ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 41.

of danger" and we almost sure that we would be interned till the end of the war if we didn't get away.³⁸

Paget, who was, as Corbett described, "very much harassed and exhausted by this time" agreed to their plan, but Corbett and Dillion eventually agreed to their matron's request to stay.³⁹ Corbett described the relief she felt being able to answer "yes" when her patients asked her if she was going to stay.⁴⁰ The Berry unit, also in Vrnjačka Banja, were told by Paget that there was no transport means, so only individuals could make the retreat.⁴¹

Although many considerations went into the choice of retreating or staying, in many cases it was simply impossible to retreat because of the lack of transportation. Inglis, in a report to the SWH committee about her hospital's retreat from Kragujevac to Kruševac, described one man who almost died from a haemorrhage – he had to be sent to the military hospital because all the SWH equipment was packed. "All this will make you understand how I came to the conclusion that if we are really to help the Serbs now, we must stick to our posts." Sir Ralph advocated retreating in order to save their expensive equipment, but he soon realized this was impossible.⁴² Inglis also felt that providing for the safe removal of the foreign units was an "added worry to the Serbs... if the committee could have seen Col. Genčić's⁴³ face when I said to him that we were not going to move again, but that they could count on us just where we stood, I think they would have been touched."⁴⁴ Paget and Inglis agreed that individuals who wanted to leave should do so, and a party of about twenty under the leadership of Smith left from Kruševac for the mountains.⁴⁵

After the drama of shuffling around the country and the agonized decision of whether to attempt the retreat or leave their fate in the hands of the enemy, most found their initial experience as POWs underwhelming. In extracts taken from an article in the *Englishwoman* (June 1916) Inglis described the experiences of her unit under German occupation. On November 6 the Germans announced their imminent arrival by bombardment— "We felt that we had had our baptism of fire." By contrast, "Their entry the next morning, 7th November, was almost on the form of an anticlimax. We turned into the principal street to find a German regiment lined up there. The best of the Serbs had

³⁸ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 41-42.

³⁹ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 42.

⁴⁰ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 43.

⁴¹ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 200.

⁴² McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 143.

⁴³ Gentitch in original.

⁴⁴ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 144.

⁴⁵ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 144.

left, white flags were hanging out of the occupied houses, and Kruševac was taken."⁴⁶ When the German troops marched through the town, Lees wrote, they "took no notice of us."⁴⁷ Corbett wrote, "The enemy were behaving admirably... Our Austrian prisoner orderlies were also behaving beautifully, and beyond singing their National Anthem one evening have not celebrated their freedom in any way."⁴⁸ Dr Hutchison wrote an open letter to the SWH committee on November 20, 1915 from Vrnjačka Banja. They were "wonderfully comfortable, in no danger, and although living very simply compared to our life at Valjevo, we have never suffered hunger, as some I know must be doing."⁴⁹ She added, "We have not the smallest thing to complain of in our treatment."⁵⁰ Corbett described Hutchinson's arrival in Vrnjačka Banja, having mistaken Austrians at the station as prisoners, she asked them to help with her equipment anyway, and they did.⁵¹ The Berry unit used a succession of soldiers as replacements for the POWs who had been in the hospital.⁵²

Their continued treatment under the occupying forces was more ambivalent, and varied locally according to the nationality of the occupying troops. For Hutchinson's unit in Vrnjačka Banja, "the enemy... behaved well, and the Scottish Women were allowed to carry on their work." Dr Hutchison refused to give up the equipment "until she had obtained a receipt for it, in order that it might be paid for after the war, according to the provisions of the Geneva Convention."⁵³

No privilege that could be got for the women in her charge was unclaimed, nor [was] any bad treatment that could be averted allowed to continue if "the little General," waving the Geneva Convention in the face of the Austrians, could obtain what was necessary. She once sadly remarked, "The Austrians do not seem to have ever heard of the Geneva Convention!"⁵⁴

Three armed guards were on duty day and night and at first were very surly, but gradually their behaviour improved... We used to borrow their uniforms for charades and tableaux which we got up to pass the evenings, and sometimes they took part in these entertainments themselves, but not when we represented the Kaiser or Emperor Joseph.⁵⁵

However in Kragujevac, the hospital that Inglis and her unit established "was seized with all its equipment, by the Germans two days after their entry. 'Of course they took it,'

⁴⁶ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 166.

⁴⁷ Lees, "Papers," 7 Nov 1915.

⁴⁸ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 47.

⁴⁹ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 161.

⁵⁰ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 162.

⁵¹ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 46.

⁵² Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 231.

⁵³ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 163.

⁵⁴ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 163.

⁵⁵ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 165-166.

said our Serbian Director. 'You had made it so beautiful.'"⁵⁶ Hutchison was enraged that Dr Inglis' unit of over twenty women—including Dr Inglis herself—were forced to eat, sleep, and wash all in one room. Later she "had to suffer the same hardships. Her party of thirty-two being entirely confined to two small rooms during her three month's stay in Kevavara."⁵⁷ The Berry unit in Vrnjačka Banja, although they received excellent treatment by their Hungarian guards who ensured their journey home was as smooth as possible, wrote, "We were always assured that they intended to adhere to the Geneva Convention, but we were surprised to find how little was known of the terms of this Convention by all the Austro-Hungarians with whom we came in contact." There were fears that, because of this ignorance, they would be interred until the end of the war.⁵⁸

Although a lot of communal bonding during the occupation came from the jointly suffered hardships, at first conditions were not much worse than they had been before the occupation. For most POWs the greatest initial adjustment was the absolute isolation. They were cut off from news completely, as illustrated by this letter written by Mabel Ingram, a nurse with the Berry Red Cross hospital Vrnjačka Banja and dated 20th November, 1915. She wrote, "The last letters I have received from home were dated Sept. 28th." Her letter was short, vague, and positive; the Austrians, she wrote "are treating us very well."⁵⁹ As Berry wrote, the isolation was not enough to make up for the fact that their time as POWs was fairly drama-free:

It may be thought that, what with walks and picnics, slavas and visits to friends, as well as the friendly treatment we received from our captors, our period of captivity was more like a pleasant holiday than a painful ordeal; and so from one point of view it was. But there was another side to the picture, and one which was very trying to most members of the Unit. Absence of any news from home, uncertainty about our own fate, whether we might not be retained as prisoners to the end of the war, were causes of much anxiety to most... was not exactly pleasant.⁶⁰

Corbett complained frequently about the isolation she and her colleagues experienced, complaining, "Getting no letters was one of the hardest things to bear."⁶¹ The isolation was also difficult for those in Inglis' SWH unit:

For over five weeks we had no letters or news of any kind from the outside world. That is the most trying thing to bear. Everybody has kept in wonderfully good spirits, and it

⁵⁶ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 166.

⁵⁷ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 164. Kevavara is a bastardized spelling of Kevevara (then in Austria-Hungary, now Kovin, Serbia), the location of a POW camp.

⁵⁸ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 235.

⁵⁹ M Ingram, "Papers," IWM 86/48/1, Telegram 20 Nov 1915.

⁶⁰ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 256.

⁶¹ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 55, 46-47.

didn't seem to occur to any of us to be afraid. We were more concerned over our inability to battle with Serbian mud!"⁶²

Many accounts, including the one above, perhaps in a retroactive attempt to put a positive note on these complaints, counteract the isolation with optimism. Inglis' unit received no news, but refused to believe the German propaganda, instead living on rumour: "and what rumour! The English at Skoplje, the Italians at Požega, and the Russians over the Carpathians—we could not believe that Serbia had been sacrificed for nothing." They were disappointed when they reached Zurich and found everything "much the same as when we had disappeared into the silence."⁶³ Those in the Berry unit took a wider view to war news, writing that while the occupiers were under the impression that they were winning the war; members of the hospital staff "were much relieved to find a very different complexion put upon the case in Switzerland."⁶⁴

As on the retreat, the British, when thrown together, found comfort in their mutual company and strove to help one another. As Corbett described, when Hutchison's unit arrived in Vrnjačka Banja, "We put up several of the Scottish Women and helped them to find accommodation for their Unit, and I liked their nice Scotch voices."⁶⁵ The favour was returned when they were sent to Kruševac, where the Scottish Women's Hospitals and Wounded Allies already were established "and were very kind to us."⁶⁶ Lees' description of her unit during their occupation reflects the experiences of others during the retreat. They looked after their British compatriots: when their fellow SWH colleagues from Dr Inglis' unit arrived, they "gave them what dinner we could... Some of them slept with us and the rest in a cottage Hospt. in the grounds."⁶⁷

They were allowed to continue to work, a fact which brought great solace to many, as it gave them a purpose to jointly pursue.⁶⁸ However, many hospitals had lost their equipment and supplies, and food became scarce, and as patients became well enough, they were evacuated to POW camps in Austria-Hungary. The SWH in Kruševac continued nursing the Serbian soldiers (who were now prisoners of war and being routed to Hungary) in the Serbian military hospital but the conditions were terrible and there was a shortage of supplies and equipment for both staff and patients.⁶⁹ Still, Inglis considered the units left at Kruševac the fortunate ones: "To them fell the honour of caring for the Serbian wounded

⁶² McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 162.

⁶³ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 171.

⁶⁴ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 240.

⁶⁵ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 47.

⁶⁶ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 56.

⁶⁷ Lees, "Papers," 27 Oct 1915.

⁶⁸ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 68-69.

⁶⁹ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 166-170.

through the first three tragic months of the foreign occupation."⁷⁰ In an open letter to the SWH committee, Inglis assured them "The committee must not worry about us. We are well and very busy, and doing the work they sent us out to do."⁷¹ Berry, upset at leaving Serbia, remarked to the Austrian commander who had previously been a POW, "I am thinking of the fate of our prisoners, of the fate of Serbia, and how this is the end of all our work."⁷²

Even in those extraordinary circumstances, the rituals of everyday life and feelings of Britishness and patriotism became an important coping mechanism. These themes have been addressed previously, but the below passages demonstrate the communal importance of identity and everyday rituals as a comforting factor in extraordinary circumstances as well as in everyday life, as previously discussed. Berry wrote,

Various types of character were to be found in our Unit: some felt the situation acutely and oscillated between buoyant hope and deep despair; others were philosophical and were ready to accept even internment for the rest of the war with equanimity. By way of occupying the minds of the Unit and the hours of the evening, the Professor introduced lectures, archaeological, geological and historical, which were delivered both at the Terapia⁷³ and at the villa occupied by the 2nd Farmers.... Sports were also organised between the two missions, but never came off on account of weather or mist; but some matches of rounders were carried out successfully on a field sufficiently remote to avoid the attendance of the whole population of Vrnjse at so unwonted a spectacle.⁷⁴

During the "comparative leisure" of their occupied time, they socialised with the local population, giving English lessons and attending slavas.⁷⁵ According to Corbett, the Serbian Red Cross wished to protect the Units—and as a result there were five in Vrnjačka Banja with very little work. They found other ways to pass their time:

Some of us, rather belatedly, started having regular Serbian lessons. We decided against any attempt at Christmas festivities, but there was a very nice Service at Tirapia. The enterprising Berry Unit, on different nights during this time, produced scenes from "Romeo and Juliet, "Julius Cesar" and "Box and Cox" which we attended.⁷⁶

They also visited old patients and distributed the remaining stores amongst themselves and friends. Members of the SWH amused themselves similarly: "During all the weary weeks...the spirits of the women never failed. They played rounders sometimes in the yard behind the little house where they lived." They enjoyed long walks, though the

⁷⁰ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 165.

⁷¹ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 161.

⁷² Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 241.

⁷³ A hospital building, sometimes spelled Tirapia.

⁷⁴ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 258-260.

⁷⁵ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 252-254. Slavas are a traditional Serbian Orthodox celebration of a family's patron saint's name day.

⁷⁶ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 55-56.

Austrian guard who had to accompany them did not. "After one expedition our guard got so tired that he complained to the captain, though we had only been about six or eight miles."⁷⁷ When Corbett joined them, she and her friend Kathleen went for a walk and were scolded by their head doctor, who said "our own common sense should tell us not to go walking about in a country covered with licentious and enemy soldiery." Corbett sought out Dr Inglis, "whom my father and I already knew," and who told her their unit walked freely—"so [Dr. Banks] reluctantly loosed us, and the licentious soldiery always saluted our Red Crosses most courteously." In addition to their appetite for walks, the prisoners continued to rely on their leisure activities. Corbett played bridge with other Scottish Women she knew from suffragist contacts.⁷⁸ Lees collected as a souvenir a sword left behind by a Serbian officer, but she wrote sadly, it was confiscated later at the border.⁷⁹

On the retreat, food was in short supply, and those under occupation fared but little better. The every present concern for food, as discussed in the previous chapter, was intensified by scarcity, just as (but perhaps even more dramatically than) in Macedonia. Their rations, Lees wrote, were supplemented by "stores of our own which Mrs. Haverfield guarded with a pistol. Thus we had tea, sugar and treacle occasionally but chiefly kept for emergency. We opened a tin of sardines on Sunday mornings so we had about two sardines a week."⁸⁰ According to the SWH official history, there was a serious shortage of food. Haverfield "scoured the country for milk and eggs, and we bought what we could with the Scottish funds, but it was not enough."⁸¹

They celebrated special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas.⁸² These holidays were normally, out of wartime, celebrated with families, but during the war they were celebrated within units. Under occupation, with their own morale and that of the local population to keep up, these occasions took on even greater importance. Berry wrote, "As Christmas approached we felt that, in spite of the present gloom and the uncertain future, it behoved us to do something to show, however feebly, what an English Christmas was like." They had a Christmas tree, fancy dress, carols, presents, coffee and cakes, and singing.

The Christmas dinner was a triumph. It was rumoured beforehand that none of the ordinary ingredients of a plum pudding were to be had, not even the plums. All the same a pudding not unworthy of Buszard was produced, which, if it was slightly lacking in plums, was rich in coins, thimbles, and other keepsakes; while the turkey, with its

⁷⁷ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 164.

⁷⁸ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 57.

⁷⁹ Lees, "Papers," 5 Nov 1915.

⁸⁰ Lees, "Papers," 30 Nov 1915.

⁸¹ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 170.

⁸² Lees, "Papers," 25 Dec 1915.

concomitants, was "*haute cuisine*" indeed! ...Everyone fraternized and was cheerful – Serbian visitors, Serb and Austrian patients, even the Roumanin soldier orderlies."⁸³

For the Hutchison unit, their communal Christmas celebrations were greatly cheering. They managed to obtain traditional food at great cost and marked the dinner with carols and toasts. Inspired, they ventured to show their patriotism, which had a good effect on the unit:

We even ventured for the first time to sing 'God Save the King' under our breath. After this we sang it every night, and it cheered us up wonderfully. We had our British flag with us too. I wound it around my body, under my clothes, when we evacuated our Hospital, so that it should not be trampled upon and insulted.⁸⁴

Food, drink, recreation and celebration all helped to maintain a sense of community and normality during the period of occupation. This is well illustrated by the description of Corbett's birthday, which coincided with the eve of her unit's departure from their makeshift POW camp. She described the festivities:

I celebrated my 23rd birthday and became old enough to go as a VAD to a base hospital in France. We [blew] practically all our hoarded food on a grand lunch party, and then had a crowd of people for indoor sports and games, including a number of Serb officer prisoners. They were much impressed by our games and said they would send their daughters to school in England so that they might become like us.⁸⁵

After several months, the POWs were gradually repatriated via Switzerland. As with other parts of their experience, the similarities of their accounts of the journey are quite remarkable. There was inevitably a long wait at the Belgrade train station, usually overnight.⁸⁶ According to Lees, "the hotel keeper would not get up for us" so they spent the night in the station sitting on their luggage.⁸⁷ Members of Inglis' ever-resourceful SWH party amused themselves by "seeing how long they could walk along a rail of the railway lines without slipping off!"⁸⁸ Travelling from Vrnjačka Banja, the Berry unit changed trains at Kruševac, which was under German rather than Austrian hands. German soldiers refused to help them move their heavy baggage; as a result they missed their connection and had to wait seven hours in the station. Ever optimistic, Berry wrote, "This was a matter of but little moment, as many of our members had never before visited Kruševac, and we were glad of the opportunity of showing them so characteristic a specimen of ancient Serbian architecture as the Royal Palace Chapel of Lazar" and they ran into old colleagues

⁸³ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 245, 259, 261-262.

⁸⁴ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 165.

⁸⁵ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 56.

⁸⁶ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 58.

⁸⁷ Lees, "Papers," 29 Dec 1915.

⁸⁸ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 171-172.

and patients.⁸⁹ In Belgrade they stayed the night in the waiting room. "We spent the night very comfortably in our sleeping bags on the floor and tables, being disturbed only by stray passengers who kept on walking through our improvised dormitory. Our two Hungarians were furious with the Germans for their rudeness."⁹⁰ The Berry unit was very lucky in their benevolent Hungarian guards: the train to Budapest stopped at Belgrade for only a short time, and the German railway officials insisted they did not have enough time, but the guards pressed some Russian prisoners into service, and they managed to load their baggage onto the train during its short stop in Belgrade. "We afterwards heard that another British mission which had passed through Belgrade a week or two before us had been less fortunate and had lost the whole of their luggage at this station."⁹¹ Arrival in Vienna was marked by "wonderful breakfast"⁹² at the American consulate, who was aiding their evacuation.⁹³ Inglis' party, told they could eat as much as they wanted, devoured "plates and plates of ham and eggs, and cups and cups of coffee."⁹⁴

Away from occupied territories, the former prisoners had a chance to marvel at a return to ordinary life. As Lees wrote, "It was just delightful seeing open shops, and clocks, and people leading a normal life."⁹⁵ Berry wrote, taking on the air of a tourist, "Altogether we had spent a most enjoyable and interesting day in the capital of the enemy."⁹⁶ Interest in tourist and recreational activities served as a reminder that, even in the most extraordinary circumstances, people relied on these activities in much the same way as they did in ordinary times, serving as a link between the two. Several reported with sadness the souvenirs they lost when their baggage was examined as they passed through enemy territory. Berry wrote, "a few stray souvenirs such as tops of shells and an old Russian bayonet, the gift of a Hungarian officer, were taken away from us..." With relief, they added that photographs were allowed to pass after examination.⁹⁷

Before crossing over the border to Switzerland, British POWs were kept for several days in a mountain village. With their troubles seemingly behind them and the promise of freedom eminent, these stays took on the air of a holiday camp. Berry described their quarantine period as "a very enjoyable nine days in this beautiful mountain spot, enjoying a

⁸⁹ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 274-275.

⁹⁰ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 278.

⁹¹ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 278-9.

⁹² Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 58.

⁹³ Lees, "Papers," 7 Jan 1916.

⁹⁴ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 171-172.

⁹⁵ Lees, "Papers," 29 Dec 1915.

⁹⁶ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 282.

⁹⁷ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 282-283.

full view of the snowy Alps and being free, within certain limits, to wander about and take long walks into the surrounding country."⁹⁸ Corbett wrote

When Dr. Banks came out of the hotel, he had a look of rapture on his face and said, simply "There are plugs that really pull." More importantly to us, there were snow mountains you could really walk up. Kathleen and I did, at once, and when we innocently returned found there was a hue and cry after us, in case we had walked over the frontier with valuable information.⁹⁹

Switzerland marked an end to their months-long isolation period. At Zurich, the English chaplain gave Corbett and her unit "a sumptuous tea, and also English newspapers, which stunned us with their casualty lists. We had seen none for many months."¹⁰⁰ The Berry unit were "proportionately delighted to hear what had been going on" and were brought up to speed on the previous five months' events by the British consul.¹⁰¹ Lees and her contingent of SWH had similar priorities, when they arrived in Switzerland "where we were FREE. Made a mad dash for a little paper stall as we had seen no paper nor had any letters for about four months. Slept at a dear little simple inn, and walked on air."¹⁰² Freedom was met with appropriate jubilation. Members of the Hutchison party, as they crossed the border into Switzerland, "waved the precious flag out of the windows and shouted, 'God Save the King!'"¹⁰³ Upon her arrival back in Britain, Lees wrote, rather dramatically, "It is worth being a prisoner to realise the joy of being free."¹⁰⁴ Berry's journey ended on a more humorous note: After being fêted through neutral and Allied territory, "at Southampton we were curtly informed by the railway officials that seats in the London train could not be reserved for our party. Then we knew indeed that we were once more in dear Old England!"¹⁰⁵

The relief that former prisoners felt when returning home, even when expressed in a slightly sarcastic manner, indicates the importance they attached to that home and all that it represented. Diaries and letters suggest that ideals of Britishness, and the patriotism they inspired, were motivating factors for British contributions to the war effort. More than that, Britain represented ideas of comfort and home, on which Britons abroad attempted to build their society. Even in the direst circumstances described above, Britishness served to both bond fellow sufferers together, and provided a text with which they could attempt to navigate the unfamiliar and discomfiting situations they found themselves in. The sense

⁹⁸ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 282.

⁹⁹ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 58. See also McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 171-172.

¹⁰⁰ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 59.

¹⁰¹ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 283.

¹⁰² Lees, "Papers," 8 Feb 1916.

¹⁰³ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 165.

¹⁰⁴ Lees, "Papers," 12 Feb 1916.

¹⁰⁵ Berry, *The Story of a Red Cross Unit*, 284.

of relief they felt at returning to Britain, when they could cast off their British label and simply be, is more than a return to normality. The severity of their experience indicated just how powerful these ideas of Britishness were.

Many of those who were in Serbia in 1915 returned to the Balkan front in Greece and Macedonia later in the war. For them, their service to Serbia during a time that was often described in terms such as "her darkest hour" was a great source of pride. Not only did it affirm their dedication to their "gallant ally" "plucky little" Serbia, it also indicated their own pluckiness, and dedication to the war effort even at the expense of their own safety and comfort. Sometimes this courage and dedication was recognized officially. Fitch recounted his pride when the staff of the British naval hospital – of which his wife had been a member – were awarded with Serbian decorations.¹⁰⁶ The portrayal of the British participation of Serbia's retreat – particularly by women – helped cement their reputation for bravery.

Furthermore, the bonds that were formed by the sharing of these earlier war experiences proved important later on. Fitch, in his position as liaison between the British military and the Serbian Crown Prince, described a tour of the Macedonian front where he met "the MacPhails (the lady doctor who was with us in Belgrade) and went over their little civilian hospital."¹⁰⁷ On the same visit to the front, he also wrote,

I looked in at a Serbian Relief Camp and was very pleasantly surprised at meeting Mr Grey and Miss Hoare late of Belgrade (British Farmer's Unit). Brought Grey back to dine with me and had a very interesting talk about old times in Serbia. He knew Craigie quite well.¹⁰⁸

Fitch was instinctively interested in any acquaintance who had been in Belgrade, whether with his unit or another, because of the experiences that they had in common.

These connections also helped to secure jobs. Blackstock was written to by a Greek medical officer she had known in Serbia, urging her to come and work in a hospital in Salonika, assuring her she would not run the risk of being taken prisoner, as she had during the retreat.¹⁰⁹ Corbett "kept in touch with Dr. Elsie Inglis" after their shared time at the POW camp in Serbia, and when a proposed SWH unit to Mesopotamia failed to get government sponsorship, Inglis put Corbett and Dillion in touch with Harley, who took them onto her motor transport column for Salonika.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Fitch, "Papers," 21 Aug 1917.

¹⁰⁷ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 273.

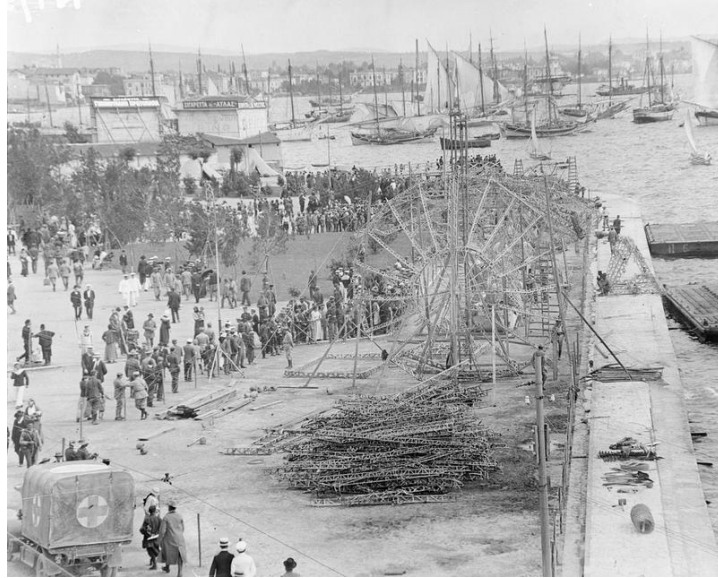
¹⁰⁸ Fitch, "Papers," 16 May 1917.

¹⁰⁹ M Blackstock, "Papers," IWM 84/4/1, 14 Mar 1916.

¹¹⁰ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 60.

These large-scale events had a huge impact in creating a sense of community amongst the British on the Balkan front. But there were other, smaller scale or shorter events, mainly observed rather than participated in, which had a similar effect on community morale.

"We were [there] when the German Zeppelin was brought down": Salonika's Zeppelin



Framework of the Zeppelin LZ.85 being set up on the sea front beside the White Tower in Salonika, May 1916. © IWM (Q 32030)

In an undated memoir of his wartime experiences, Frank Marshall described what was for him the highlight of his sojourn in Salonika. His unit had a month's garrison duties in town, a break from the monotonous life upcountry at the front. He wrote, "We had quite a good time being quartered in Beshnar Gardens, right on the sea front and that is where we were when the first German Zeppelin was brought down."¹¹¹ The shooting down of a zeppelin over the town of Salonika, which took place in May 1916, is mentioned in many different sources. It evidently made a significant impression on those who witnessed it. Other extraordinary events had a similar effect: the four discussed here are: the downing of the zeppelin, the funeral of Katherine Harley, the "great fire" of Salonika, and the declaration of the armistice. Accounts of these events exhibit striking similarities: the content and tone echo one another, and they are marked by inclusive language. The descriptions of communal aspects indict the importance these events had for British society on the Balkan front.

¹¹¹ F Marshall, "Papers," IWM 07/3/1, 2.

The numerous sources which describe the zeppelin attack indicate the viewing of this incident was a communal event, with "the town" being awakened by anti-aircraft guns and the searchlights lighting up the sky so everyone could view the spectacle of the zeppelin being shot down. Isabel Emslie, a doctor with a Scottish Women's Hospital attached to the French army described the same event in much lengthier detail in her diary. She wrote

At 2.30 a.m. I heard Mrs. Harley's voice softly calling "Jock" for, unlike me, she had wakened at the first gun.... We went out and searched the sky, but saw nothing, till presently a veritable hail of incendiary rockets went up from the bay. It was like a firework display, and there were gasps of, "Oh, how beautiful they are!"... The searchlights were busy too, scouring the sky in every direction and darting here and there like will-o-the-wisps, but not for long, for presently they all converged on one point in the sky, and high, high up we saw what looked like a little silver cigar in the centre of this great stream of light.... All the guns started plugging away from the shore and the ships, while we stood and admired open mouthed. The Zepp came lower and lower, but not a bomb did she drop... larger and larger she got and gracefully and slowly she fell. Still in the air she burst into flames, and the whole town rang with cheers, and cheer upon cheer came over from the ships. Then she sank to earth on the Vardar flats on the other side of the bay... And more cheers all around.¹¹²

G Ward Price, a journalist with the Allied armies in Salonika, recounted the zeppelin raid in an exhaustive account in his postwar memoir and history of the campaign. His description is in some ways similar to Emslie's, but being in the town he has a slightly different view. He wrote,

In the small hours ... the town was awakened by the crash of anti- aircraft guns from the hills behind and from the ships in the harbour, and there, floating yellow in the glare of the searchlights over the heart of Salonika, was a Zeppelin, the first the townspeople had set eyes upon. A characteristically silly panic started, the people rushing out of their houses, and scurrying in contrary directions along the streets.

When the zeppelin was shot down, it landed in the marshes at the mouth of the Vardar, where, a moment after it had touched, the Zeppelin burst into flames. A startling, long-drawn-out cheer rang from the silent English and French warships at the sight and echoed through the darkness across the frightened town.¹¹³

Although there are differences in these two accounts, they both attest to the importance that the event held for the British. In Emslie's, the zeppelin bursts into flames while it is in the air; in Price's, it is set alight by the crew after their crash landing. In Price, the town of Salonika is dark and frightened and, presumably silent. In Emslie's the townspeople join in the jubilant celebration of the destruction of the zeppelin. They even

¹¹² Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928), 68.

¹¹³ G. Ward Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 76-77. See also Charles Packer, *Return to Salonika* (London: Cassell, 1964), 20.

disagree on the dates, Emslie reporting the incident on May 4 and Price on May 6. But as Alan Palmer, in his history of the British army in Salonika, wrote "The destruction of a Zeppelin by naval gunners on May 5 in full view of the people of Salonika also raised the spirits of the troops, especially among the British contingents..."¹¹⁴ In each account, the zeppelin downing was witnessed as a community.

The story of the zeppelin did not end with its crash landing. Emslie continued the next day, "Great talk all day of the Zepp and many discussions as to who brought her down... Everybody is trying to make plans to go to see her, but she is in a very difficult position, and one Canadian has already lost his life in trying to get across the marshes to her."¹¹⁵ Price described going to the zeppelin wreck, and this time his story resounded more fully with Emslie's. He wrote

It was a strenuous journey....A Canadian medical officer was even drowned trying to reach the wreck on horseback. One would never have believed it possible that a single Zeppelin would carve up into so many souvenirs as that one did. Amid the harassed protests of its French guard, English officers, sailors, even nurses who had made the muddy and exhausting journey, would hack and twist at the broken framework for days afterwards, yet when later on it was officially cut up and removed, several barge-loads of fragments still remained.¹¹⁶

Despite the perils, pieces of the zeppelin were highly desirable souvenirs. The skeleton was later displayed on Salonika harbour, becoming a popular destination for tourists; one nurse had a photograph of the zeppelin structure amongst her souvenirs of life on the Balkan front.¹¹⁷

Both Emslie and Price considered this event important enough to transcribe long passages of description into their memoirs, which in Emslie's case was written over ten years after this particular event, and they were not the only ones.¹¹⁸ These passages describe a unifying event in this history of Salonika, a show that everyone who was there was present to watch –with the searchlights lighting up the entire bay and, according to Price, blinding the zeppelin crew and thus preventing them from dropping their bombs. Marshall draws attention to the fact that he and his unit were witnesses to this extraordinary event. It is significant that his quote comes from a very short memoir which mostly focuses on disillusionment and exclusion. The time spent on garrison duty is the only positive aspect, the highlight being the zeppelin show.

¹¹⁴ Alan Palmer, *Gardeners of Salonika* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 62.

¹¹⁵ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 68.

¹¹⁶ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 78.

¹¹⁷ Bonner, "Papers."

¹¹⁸ See also O C M Haines, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf, n.d. but May 1916, 181 and W Knott, "Papers," IWM P305, 4 May 1916.

"A great local stir": Katherine Harley's funeral



Funeral of Katharine Harley. Her daughter can be seen with General Sir George Milne, Prince George of Serbia, with a number of Allied officers are in the procession. Salonika, March 1917. © IWM (Q 32783)

Other events had a similar role in uniting the British as watching the zeppelin being shot down and collecting its souvenirs. The funeral of Katharine Harley was another event mentioned frequently in sources. Harley was a suffragist and the sister of Lord French, a British commander on the western front. Her high social, political and professional standing (she was the administrator of one SWH unit, and the head of another SWH transport column) made her very well known within Salonika circles, and popular with high-ranking officials outside her own units. She and her daughter came out to Salonika with a SWH hospital, and later formed a transport column attached to the SWH hospital. She went to Monastir for civil relief work, as described later in this thesis.¹¹⁹ In 1917 Monastir was still being shelled by the Bulgarian army. Harley's bravery and dedication earned her respect and admiration in many circles in Salonika, but she had taken a risk by choosing to operate under fire and in March 1917 she was killed during a bombardment. Fitch reported in his diary on March 8 1917 that "In the forenoon we got the news of Mrs Harley's death at Monastir as result of being hit by shell splinters. Made a painful sensation everywhere..." Emphasizing the personal connection, Fitch continued, "I was particularly sorry as I knew her well (stayed Christmas with her at Dobroveni) & had come to like &

¹¹⁹ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 103.

admire her..."¹²⁰ Fitch took a continuing interest in the planning of Harley's funeral, and the future of her daughter.¹²¹

The "great local stir",¹²² as Fitch described the public reaction to Harley's death, consisted mainly of a public outpouring of grief, and an ostentatious funeral that was arranged by the British Commander-in-Chief. Emslie wrote, "Representatives of all the Allied armies and many civilians took part in it." There was a parade which included "the most distinguished officers in Macedonia", the crown prince of Serbia and staff of the SWH and other hospitals.¹²³ The Serbians were particularly anxious to express their grief and appreciation for the women who had died serving their nation. Fitch described the funeral oration by Lubomir Yovanovitch, Serbian Minister of the interior. His words included "Noble daughter of a great nation, though not a sister of ours by birth, still dear to us as a true sister..."¹²⁴ They also constructed a large memorial which still exists today, in the military cemetery in Salonika.

Despite -- or perhaps because of -- the glorious tragedy, Harley's death and, especially, her funeral, took on great social importance. People such as Fitch and Emslie emphasized their importance by detailing personal connection to Harley. Recognizing her influence and offering admiration was another way to participate in "Salonique" community, Price's reaction is once again marked by the language of inclusion. He wrote, "All of us who had been on the Serbian front knew and respected profoundly the courage and energy of this gallant, white-haired lady."¹²⁵ And her funeral provided another great event by which Salonika participants signposted their wartime experiences. Emslie's description of the participants in the funeral parade read like a who's who guide to the most important people in Salonika. It seemed that Harley's funeral was not just an opportunity to pay honour to the woman herself, but also to participate in the language of inclusion with the most important people of Salonika society. The zeppelin was an explosive victory for the Allied community in Salonika, and Harley's death was a tragedy, yet they had a similar unifying effect.

"A day that will be long remembered": Salonika's great fire

¹²⁰ Fitch, "Papers," 8 Mar 1917; He also wrote in his later memoir "I felt personally grieved, as I knew her well and was fond of her..." Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 269.

¹²¹ Fitch, "Papers," 9 Mar 1917.

¹²² Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 269.

¹²³ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 105-107.

¹²⁴ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 269.

¹²⁵ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 190.



The great fire in Salonika town, 18-21 August 1917: refugees with their salvaged possessions observe the blaze from a place of safety. © IWM (HU 58890)

In August 1917, one of the most famous incidents of the Salonika campaign occurred when fire destroyed much of the city. It became known as the "Great Fire" and while it changed the face of the city permanently, it was also one of the main events that formed the canon of the history of the British on the Balkan front.

One thing remarkably clear from descriptions of the fire is that the British came out of it very well. According to the British accounts, Tommies were everywhere in Salonika during the fire, evacuating refugees, stopping looters, and putting out flames. The British used their good behaviour during the fire to build up their reputations and their own sense of national pride in their participation, as discussed in chapter one. The fire also served as an event to bond together those who witnessed it and participated, much as the previously discussed events. Owen emphasized this when he wrote,

Saturday, August 18th, 1917, is a day that will be long remembered by many thousands of members of the Salonika Force. They may not always be able to recall the date itself, but they will never forget the fire that occurred on it, when nearly a square mile of the city was burned down in a few hours.¹²⁶

Considering the ubiquity of the fire in memoirs, Owen's prophecy seems to have been fulfilled. The superlative descriptions of the fire itself seem to imply that unless one had witnessed it oneself, it could not possibly be imagined. According to Owen, "It was an extraordinary sight, and one which... might have been plucked straight from Biblical times. ...It was an amazing and a sad scene."¹²⁷ The fire was described by Emslie in similar terms:

¹²⁶ H. Collinson Owen, *Salonica and After: The Sideshow That Ended the War*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 90.

¹²⁷ Owen, *Salonica and After*, 92.

...certainly one of the most appalling fires of contemporary history... It was unforgettable; all the pictures of hell that were ever painted fall short of it in fearfulness, and its hungry roar mingled with snarls and hisses and the crash of the falling ruins, was most awe-inspiring.¹²⁸

Price wrote that, "As a spectacle, the conflagration must have equalled Rome burning."¹²⁹ Burtenshaw reported that he could see the flames of the Salonika fire all the way at his hospital on the outskirts of the city.¹³⁰ Bonner, in a letter to her mother from the SWH, wrote, "What a terrible thing the fire was, the flames reached up to the very skies."¹³¹ Considering these descriptions from people in the middle of a war, the fire must have made quite an impression!

Another tragic result of the fire was the disappearance of the favourite places of the British, places they had made familiar and taken on as their own, places which make them feel at home, as was discussed in chapter five. Creighton complained in her diary about post-fire Salonika, "There isn't one decent shop left in the place."¹³² Emslie wrote that the town was "barely recognizable... nothing remained of Venezilos Street or the Bazaar."¹³³ Fitch lamented, "all the hotels, cafés, cinemas and other familiar places were already gutted..."¹³⁴ According to Price,

Floca's, the Odeon, the Splendid Palace, the Rue Venizelos, all of them names that had gradually become as familiar to scores of Englishmen in the Balkans as Giro's, the Empire, the Savoy and the Strand are, on a far different plane, to Londoners, exist today as nothing but charred and smoking ruins. The Salonika Club, which was only saved for a time by being kept practically under water by the converging hydrants of the Fleet from the opposite side of the Quay, was the last building to succumb. It will be missed more than any, for it has the only comfortable chairs in Salonika, and the readiness with which it opened its doors to Allied visitors was very welcome. The loss of the whole of the shopping area will be keenly felt by officers up-country, for whom the town was, however inadequately, the sole source of the conveniences of life. Salonika, formerly the solitary outpost of civilisation in Macedonia, now stands as desolate as any muddy village of the Balkans....¹³⁵

Like most extraordinary events in wartime, the fire was a tragedy and however much participating in the rescue efforts allowed British people to have pride in their work, the destruction of so much of their physical community meant that the fire had a more negative sense than any of the other events, tragic though they might have been. However, the lack of these places was a jointly experienced hardship.

¹²⁸ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 120-121.

¹²⁹ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 88.

¹³⁰ H J E Burtenshaw, "Papers," IWM 01/35/1, 18 Aug 1917.

¹³¹ Bonner, "Papers," letter to mother, 3 Sep 1917.

¹³² L Creighton, "Papers," IWM 92/22/1, 21 Aug 1917; see also Bonner, "Papers," 1 Sep 1917.

¹³³ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 120-121.

¹³⁴ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 277.

¹³⁵ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 87.

"We hardly seemed to realize what it meant": Armistice day

Experiences of and reactions to the armistice are remarkable, and somewhat surprising. The reactions to the armistice on the Balkan front indicated an interesting disconnect with the broader war experience; although it was one of the defining moments in the war, the Balkan front armistice exists almost in parallel with the home & western front. In fact, they had a separate date of their armistice with Bulgaria: 30 September 1918, the first of the Central Powers to capitulate. This was the date that alumni of the Salonika army commemorated as they attempted to carve out a piece for themselves in the national war narrative, which was by the 1920s overwhelmingly focused on a certain perception of the western front experience.¹³⁶ Bailey was on his way back from home leave, stopping momentarily in Italy on 11 November 1918. As he wrote to his father, "We weren't informed suddenly of it, mind you, but it took about 5 days hanging around the bulletin board before we could make sure that Hostilities had ceased. So there was no exuberance among the troops."¹³⁷ Many people expressed disbelief in what they thought was a rumour. Gwinnell reported that "we were told the hostilities would cease at 11 o'clock. Nobody took the slightest notice. We had heard rumours like this before. So no cheering, no shouting, we just plodded on."¹³⁸ Elinor Rendel wrote from Skopje of the armistice: "no one took any interest in the news except ourselves."¹³⁹ Fitch was so ill with malaria and dosed up on quinine that he hardly noticed the capitulation of Bulgaria: "On Armistice Day I was invalided home."¹⁴⁰ Corbett and her transport column did not even know it was the armistice until after the fact; they were too busy advancing to Belgrade with the rest of the Serbian army.¹⁴¹ Packer described a similar reaction to the Bulgarian armistice, which was announced by nurses in the malaria hospital where he was a patient at the time.

There was triumph in their voices; and if their owners expected a similar response from us, then I'm afraid we disappointed them; for though each head turned in their direction, not a word was said by any of us. I will not pretend this unresponsiveness was due to any burning resentment about anything; it simply meant that we saw nothing to feel triumphant about that morning of 30 September.¹⁴²

Relief was the main emotion. A rare dissenter, Ingamells, who was in a convalescent camp near Salonika, described his experience. He wrote,

¹³⁶ Eugene Michail, *The British and the Balkans: Forming Images of Foreign Lands, 1900 - 1945* (London: Continuum, 2011), 67.

¹³⁷ R J Bailey, "Papers," IWM 92/36/1 & 2027, 1 Dec 1918.

¹³⁸ R Gwinnell, "Papers," IWM 01/38/1, 130; see also J Sellors, "Papers," IWM 87/10/1, 68.

¹³⁹ Monica Krippner, *The Quality of Mercy: Women at War Serbia 1915-18* (London: David & Charles, 1980), 206.

¹⁴⁰ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 303.

¹⁴¹ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 170.

¹⁴² Packer, *Return to Salonika*, 149.

about one o'clock we heard the good news of the German armistice. That evening I went with a party into Salonika, drank the health of all the Allies in various cafes and generally made merry. By the noise they were making, however, one would have thought the Greeks had won the war.¹⁴³

Just as with food, drink and society, those in Salonika experienced the best that the Balkan front had to offer. In this case, however, many of those who had benefited from the Salonika experience in other aspects (such as Fitch) were busy with their war work, and elsewhere at the time of the armistice.

Emslie, now operating a SWH hospital in southern Serbia, which had just been retaken from Bulgarian occupation, wrote: "On November 11, 1918, we heard it was Armistice Day, but nobody seemed happy about it, and we hardly seemed to realize what it meant."¹⁴⁴ Things seemed, if anything, to get worse. Food became increasingly scarce, death rates remained high, and the entire region was poverty stricken.¹⁴⁵ This poignant response is symbolic of the overall experience of those on the Balkan front. In many ways, the armistice was their first disillusionment. They were disconnected from the western and home fronts, and could not share in the joy of that victory. Their fighting was already over, their victory (however meaningless in the face of continued suffering, and unappreciated by those not on the Balkan front) won. But the hardships that had for them been some of the defining features of the war – isolation, illness, disease, a critical lack of living standards – were features of a day that should have marked their ending.

Throughout these descriptions, a strong sense of community comes across. These events came to represent an important aspect of the localised history of the Balkan campaign, used as a shorthand currency of credibility amongst participants and as a validation of their involvement. What took place, and the shared experience of it, helped to establish and maintain a strong sense of identity and belonging amongst those on the Balkan front.

Major events functioned as community building in a number of ways. Unlike everyday experiences, these were unique occurrences which instilled them with a sense of exclusivity. The extraordinary nature of these events also meant that they were more clearly defined than aspects of everyday life. Their exclusivity and clear definitions made them all the more powerful as bonding tools. Participants could easily identify what they were a part of and who had also been there. Like every day experiences, they became part of a currency of legitimacy amongst those who participated in or witnessed them. The language

¹⁴³ F. Guy Ingamells, "At Suvla Bay and On the Salonika Front, 1915-1918," in *Other Wars, Other Ways* (Norwich: Salonika Reunion Association, Norfolk & Norwich Branch, 1944), 18.

¹⁴⁴ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 164.

¹⁴⁵ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 165-66.

of inclusion created a commonality to give longstanding members of the Balkan society a sense of pride in participation and indicated status.

Community, created by hardships of war, represented the continuity of British society and served to frame the experiences of war on the Balkan front. By shared experience of these communal events, Britons created a familiar framework by which they could make sense of the hardships they endured and the unusual events they witnessed and participated in. The familiarity of community was necessary in order to parse the unusual conditions of wartime. Communal language and a sense of pride in participation indicated the importance these events had in developing the community of the British on the Balkan front, and the importance that the community had in framing wartime experience.

Chapter Five: "Piccadilly Circus" in Salonika: Reactions to and interactions with the city

Part I: Reaction

"The view from afar was alluring": Impressions of Salonika



View of Salonika harbour © IWM (Q 36288)

In her memoir, Isabel Emslie described her first impressions of Salonika. She wrote, "The view from afar was alluring, the reality less so, yet fascinating because of its vivid, colourful street life. Venizelos Street, the narrow principle artery, and the embankment following the wide sweep of the bay were full of a noisy stream."¹ A surprising number of sources reveal reactions that echo Emslie's. H. Collinson Owen was a journalist who spent most of the war in Salonika editing the small daily paper, *The Balkan News*, which brought to English readers in Salonika and further up the line a curious mix of general war news, local lore, humour and advertisements. According to him "[e]veryone who comes first into the city by sea says instinctively, 'How beautiful!' An hour afterwards, if they have landed, they exclaim, 'Heavens! What a place!'"²

Beauty from afar and chaos in the midst of the city are the dominant themes that emerge from contemporary British descriptions of Salonika. This chapter looks at British reactions to and interactions with the city, examining the themes emerging from the sources, and analysing the relationship between the authors and Salonika. One of the ways this temporary society, formed under the pressures of war, in a strange land, shaped itself

¹ Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor in War and Peace* (London: Heinemann, 1960), 141.

² H. Collinson Owen, *Salonica and After: The Sideshow That Ended the War*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 78.

was by the use of space in the city of Salonika. British reactions to Salonika illustrate the different ways in which they struggled to form their own society within this new space. Edward Said's *Orientalism* has, in many ways, resonance with reactions to Salonika. Orientalism was both idealizing and condescending, and this dualism can be seen in reactions of the British as they struggled to make sense of the environment in which their new society was to take shape. The British relied on a familiar discourse of dealing with the unfamiliar in order to make sense of an exotic environment and place it in a context that both they and their audience (those at home) could understand. Balkanist literature addresses many of the same texts as Said but explores the unique relationships between the west and the Balkans, which were not quite European but not quite Oriental, either. As Goldsworthy writes, "Rather than defining themselves as peripheral, the Balkan nations derive a sense of centrality from a position at a crossroads, offering themselves as European buffers against the East..."³ She also argues that "the Balkans are not where Europe ends, but where the Orient begins its presencing."⁴ This would have been especially true during the Great War, when the Balkans were just – politically – at the end of the process of becoming European. There was still cultural Orientalism to be perceived, particularly by British visitors.

Countless sources echoed Emslie and Owen's first impressions of Salonika. NCO Bazley wrote, "our first view of the towns and minarets of the East was quite pleasing." But, he continued, "The town proved to be a dirty looking place and quite disappointing."⁵ RAMC dental assistant Haines thought that Salonika, viewed from the harbour, was "a very pretty place."⁶ Lieutenant Preece described Salonika as "white and blazing in the sunshine" and with "so many sights new and interesting."⁷ Echoing their sentiments, Private Brooks wrote, "Salonika looked a fine town from the harbour, dotted with white minarets."⁸ Relief worker Kathleen Courtney emphasized the beautiful view of minarets from the harbour, adding that her "impression on landing is a sea of mud and an extraordinary medley of nationalities crowding the streets."⁹ Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody in their narrative history of the British Salonika Force (BSF) commented upon the fact that the initial view

³ Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (London: Hurst and Company, 2013), 9.

⁴ Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, xvii.

⁵ G W Bazley, "Notes from War Diary Covering France, Greece, Macedonia, Egypt & Palestine," in S Pounds, "Papers," IWM 76/146/1, 29 Nov 1916.

⁶ O C M Haines, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 3245, 27 Apr 1916, 174.

⁷ H R Preece, "Diary," IWM 04/4/1, 11 Aug 1917.

⁸ H E Brooks, "Papers," IWM 03/30/1, 26 Nov 1915.

⁹ Kathleen Courtney, "Papers," IWM PP/MCR/C3 & P96, 2 Jan 1915. See also H Birkett Barker, "Papers," IWM 73/140/1, 20 Aug and 27 Sept 1916; W Knott, "Papers," IWM P305, 11 and 13 Oct 1915.

of Salonika seemed to inspire the same reaction in most people, and that they all changed their minds within an hour of landing.¹⁰

Why did such a diverse group of people all have such similar initial reactions to the city and what is significant about their responses? Salonika was new, exciting and exotic. It was also smelly, dirty, hot and crowded. Initial impressions overwhelmingly represent both aspects of this positive/negative false dichotomy. Both its beauty and its chaos are based on difference. Minarets and an Oriental spectacle form the discourse of the initial reaction. What struck the majority of British people arriving in Salonika were the things that were essentially different from what one might find in Britain. Most notable were the many mentions of minarets, but also white buildings and "blazing" sunshine.

Given the prevailing status of Orientalist discourse within Western society, it is unsurprising that it dominated descriptions as the British focused on the cosmopolitan and exotic nature of Salonika. This reaction persisted beyond disembarkation. "The whole of Greece is mysteriously Eastern," nurse Mabel Ingram enthused.¹¹ Upon landing in Salonika, Lorimer wrote,

I feel quite bewildered. I seem suddenly to have been plunged out of the very English little company on board the *Sadieh* right into Port Said or some such queer Eastern place... There seem to be people of every nationality here and every type – real eastern people who might have come out from the Arabian Nights jostling shoulders with western nuts, lazy folk going to sleep along the broad parapet over the sea edge, lemonade sellers in picturesque dirty garments with their big polished brass jars on their backs.... But oh, how I wish I could write down how queer and fascinating and yet repellent this Turko-Greek town is.¹²

Letters and diaries describing Salonika as cosmopolitan are common, like similar reactions to Salonika's first impression discussed above. For example, Hennessey wrote that it was full of "troops of all kinds... French, British, Italian, and Serbian."¹³ Salonika became so much a by-word for cosmopolitan that Preece compared it to Gibraltar¹⁴ and Dr Jean Rose wrote that her multi-national camp was "as cosmopolitan as Salonique."¹⁵ Owen observed that it was in Salonika where "one realised for the first time the real meaning of such words as 'cosmopolitan,' 'polyglot,' and 'crowded.'"¹⁶ Bailey described his first trip to

¹⁰ Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody, *Under the Devil's Eye: Britain's Forgotten Army at Salonika 1915-1918* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), 9.

¹¹ M Ingram, "Papers," IWM 86/48/1, 10 May 1915.

¹² E C Lorimer, "Papers," IWM 76/192/1, 17, 19-20.

¹³ C R Hennessey, "Papers," IWM 03/31/1, 106.

¹⁴ Preece, "Diary," 14 Aug 1916.

¹⁵ Jean K Rose, "Diary," IWM 78/4/1, 28 Mar 1918.

¹⁶ Owen, *Salonica and After*, 21.

Salonika which included the usual entertainments and fascination with the cosmopolitan mixture of cultures:

The town is a curious mixture of Oriental quaintness and European magnificence. Huge buildings that would look well in Regent St. tower out of a clutter of alleys and Bazaars, which swarmed with soldiers presenting the whole Allied Forces. There were French Chinese Troops with their little conical shaped hats, Negroes, Russians, Italians. I went into a cafe chantant where girls did weird dances and a fiddle and [clarinet] supplied excruciating music. The place was crammed with uniforms of every description and the beer was weak and a bob a bottle. I got a seat at a table and was embroiled in a conversation with a French gunner, an Italian Cavalryman and a Russian Infantryman and after an hour's shouting and wild gesticulations, we succeeded in arriving at a few conclusions namely, the music was 'orrible (this was the Italian's sole English vocabulary, but was carried unanimously). Also, with the aid of much pantomime and drawings in beer on the tabletop, we explained out various jobs in the Army. I trained a bottle on the violinist and with an alert look along imaginary sights, said Pop-pop-pop, which brought a comprehending yell from the Frenchman. Ah! Mitraillouse! Oui, Oui! The Russian made a gruesome play at my stomach with his forefinger, and the Italian galloped furiously in his chair and smacked the imaginary flank of an equally imaginary steed.¹⁷

Upon arrival in Salonika, Birkett Barker described his impressions:

The Town is full of soldiers of every [Allied] nationality – Russians, Italians, Serbians, French, British & even – they say – a few Portuguese... The extraordinary mixture of nationalities extends to the civilian element too & as we sat out at a small table in front of the cafe we had a unique panorama of every variation of European clothing. It is of course only a few years since the town was Turkish territory & (among the tradespeople particularly) they appear not to have accompanied the Crescent when it made its compulsory exit.¹⁸

There was a clear and overriding preoccupation of Britons with the difference or "otherness" of Salonika and Salonikans, and especially those with qualities that could have been considered oriental. Although five hundred years of Ottoman rule may have lent the city certain Turkish features, Salonika is not geographically speaking, an oriental city. However, if the orient is an invented concept, this lends a certain flexibility to its physical placement. Ideas such as "east" as well as those such as "Europeaness" are relative. Moreover, contemporary sources perceived Salonika's otherness as Oriental. As Said wrote, the "vision of Orient as spectacle, or *tableau vivant*" is a "motif [that] recurs consistently,"¹⁹ and such spectacle is ever-present in the descriptions of Salonika. Diaries and letters emphasized differences: the Eastern, exotic, oriental, foreign, or mysterious. Bailey wrote, "Salonika itself is a cross between Petticoat Lane and the Bazaar scene in Kismet. There are Mosques, Minarets, trams, Bullock carts, and the most weird mixture of humanity including

¹⁷ R J Bailey, "Papers," IWM 92/36/1 & 2027, 21 Dec 1916.

¹⁸ Birkett Barker, "Papers," 23 and 29 Aug 1916.

¹⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 158.

French, English, German and Greek military."²⁰ The variety and exoticness of nationalities found in Salonika added to its appeal as a spectacle. Reverend Sellors described the eastern costume worn by the citizens. He wrote: "I have been into Salonika three times and enjoyed walking about the streets taking note of the various costumes of the people. Wide baggy trousers, a sash around the waist and a turban are worn by many."²¹ Knott also described the variety of attire on display in Salonika, adding "far superior in smartness is khaki-clad 'Tommies' in smart cut uniform."²² The different costumes ("mostly of the Arabian Nights variety" or "very Musical Comedy-fied"²³), and the sounds of different languages were clearly a novelty for many British. They used the discourse of Orientalism in order to make familiar their experiences – at least to the extent of being able to describe them. For some, it was not enough to merely observe, and the exoticness was absorbed into descriptions of their own thoughts and actions as well. For example, Preece depicted himself as a modern Byron when he described coping with the weary hours fighting the great fire in 1917 by reciting and translating Horace to himself. He described women "weeping and calling" in Greek, he wrote, "for all the world like the distressed heroines of the classic tragedies."²⁴ His actions, as well as those of the "distressed heroines", though strange at first, became familiar through familiar discourse. These men and women may have been describing their experiences as war participants, but they were also following a long tradition of Britons writing about the Balkans. Their tone strongly echoed that of Balkanist literature which depicted the Balkans as romantic, adventurous and (as discussed in chapter one), barbaric.²⁵

One passage in particular exemplifies the Orientalist/Balkanist nature of British interactions with Salonika. Preece described walking with his friend on the seafront "with its little boats tossing in the surf their slender masts tracing glittering arabesques against the sky." The two men

sat back to watch the crowd. It is amazing – Salonica in war time is more cosmopolitan even than Gib[raltar] - here a tall French officer with the medals twinkling & flashing on his breast - there a Greek girl with the dark olive complexion and black eyes of the South - here a stalwart Russian, there a sleek Italian & everywhere British officers.²⁶

²⁰ Bailey, "Papers," 10 Dec 1915.

²¹ J Sellors, "Papers," IWM 87/10/1, 29.

²² Knott, "Papers," 22 Oct 1915.

²³ Bailey, "Papers," 10 and 21 Dec 1916. See also 31 Mar 1916.

²⁴ H R Preece, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 12717, 26 Aug 1917.

²⁵ See for example, Goldsworthy's discussion of Saki's *Wanderer*. Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, 130-133.

²⁶ Preece, "Diary," 14 Aug 1916.

Preece's diary emphasized the picturesque²⁷ (boats tossing in the harbour) and the unusual (the Greek girl's beauty of the "South" and the presence of other nationalities, stereotypical in their difference) to draw out the contrast with the ordinary he described (the ubiquitous British officer). As a result, his narrative bleeds together the familiar and foreign, a common device in comments and observations about the nature of Salonika. Private Reynell employed another trope when he described Salonika as "the city is one where East meets West."²⁸

When Britons emphasized the exotic in their letters home, they did so in order to glamorize their locale, or perhaps to find something positive about an otherwise despised location, but not in a way that would exclude their audience, their loved ones on the home front. They often wrote in a way that attempted to break the distance between the exotic East and the intended reader, with the writer (sometimes with inflated self-importance) acting as liaison between the two worlds. For example, Private Moore wrote to his family, "You must tell Douglas [his nephew] that Ali Baba is here with the 'Forty Thieves' in tow and a few hundred accomplices. Of course they are disguised as peaceable Greek citizens but they can't deceive a really smart man – like me."²⁹ Moore's words indicate an attempt to erase the space between himself and his family, particularly his nephew. In the imaginative universe created by the letter they seemed to be observing the natives *together*, while Moore, with a knowing wink, impressed his nephew with his expert knowledge.

In some ways letters and diaries portray Salonika as if it were an exotic holiday town, always focused on the eastern and everything that could not be seen at home. For Lorimer, landing in Salonika reminded her of a holiday she had previously taken to the East: "Coming off the quay in the late sunset with the sky all brilliant crimson and a haze of golden dust everywhere the real smell of the East came in a thick warm whiff and I could just feel myself suddenly back in Aden."³⁰ As discussed in chapter three, troops availed themselves of opportunities to visit the town and sight-see;³¹ the *Balkan News* published a guidebook for the local British population, facilitating this.³² Men and women wrote about the excitement they witnessed on the streets of Salonika (fire-eating entertainers³³), the souvenirs they could buy in shops or discover digging trenches up country (Byzantium

²⁷ According to Goldsworthy, "Picturesque" was a common adjective "typically used to construe almost single-handedly a colourful 'Balkan' backdrop". Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, 71.

²⁸ A H Reynell, "Papers," IWM 77/162/1, 9.

²⁹ L G Moore, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 12814, 5 Aug 1917.

³⁰ Lorimer, "Papers," 19.

³¹ Brooks, "Papers," 3 Oct 1917.

³² "The Balkan News," 10 Nov 1915, 10 edition.

³³ Birkett Barker, "Papers," 26 Dec 1916.

relics or more gruesome remains from the recent Balkan wars³⁴) and the local celebrities they might spot. Common sightings included the crown prince of Serbia,³⁵ the king of Greece,³⁶ the prime minister Venezilos,³⁷ and "Essad Pasha, the so-called King of Albania"³⁸, as well as other individuals, less savoury but just as thrilling. While in Floca's Café, a friend pointed out to Owen "the feller who assassinated Mahmoud Shefket Pasha":³⁹

Oh, the intense joy of it! I was a little hazy as to how Mahmoud Shefket Pasha had been done to death, but the point was *that I was in Salonika* where notorious and handsome assassins moved about unmolested and sat at the next table. This was romance and adventure if ever there was!... In a week I was pointing him out proudly to newcomers who were duly impressed with my intimate knowledge of the sinister life of the Near East.⁴⁰

It is unsurprising that the British relied on familiar troupes to describe exotic milieux borrowed from a genre that would have informed their perception of the region.⁴¹ All of these descriptions exoticised Salonika, while placing the author firmly in the position of the observer. Salonika was a place where white minarets reflected the brilliant sunshine and where Allied soldiers of every stripe mingled with the local Greek, Jewish and Turkish population; where exciting and exotic things often happened. The writers of letters home sometimes exaggerated these – it may have helped them to cope with the mundane reality of life on the Macedonian front, which was (as shall be discussed later) a stark contrast of heat and ennui.

³⁴ Haines, "Letters," 18 July 1916, 206; G J Davidge, "Papers," IWM 96/23/1, Mosquito, n.160 (1967), 124; Brooks, "Papers," 28 Dec 1915.

³⁵ Knott, "Papers," 31 Oct 1915.

³⁶ Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928), 118.

³⁷ F E Latham, "Papers," IWM 96/34/1, 11 Oct 1916.

³⁸ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 119. She was referring to Essad Pasha Toptani, a leader of Albanian forces who claimed to be the leader of Albania although the country was not unified and independent at the time.

³⁹ Mahmud Shevket Pasha was an Ottoman general; he was also serving as Ottoman prime minister when he was assassinated in Constantinople in 1913. Although it was unlikely his killer was actually in Salonika, it is not surprising that there were rumours about it.

⁴⁰ Owen, *Salonica and After*, 25-26. For mention of spies, see R W F Johnston, "Papers," IWM 82/38/1, 43.

⁴¹ Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, 144.

"The vilest, smelliest and hottest city": Denigration of Salonika



An example of Salonika mud. © IWM (Q 31653)

As exciting and alluring as Salonika may have seemed to the British, especially at first, they were equally disposed to complain about and criticize the city. This idea of European cultural superiority is evident in negative descriptions of Salonika and its environs. These complaints ranged from good natured and humorous to condescending, but an attitude of superiority was implicit.⁴² Arriving via the Moussoul in Salonika bay, Emslie watched British transports unload and scribbled in her diary, "Poor souls! what a place to come to!"⁴³ Dr Jean Rose, experiencing Salonika for the first time in a rain storm that had turned the city into a sea of mud, wrote to her mother "I am glad I am not a fixture down there."⁴⁴ Frequent complaints were made about the mud ("something chronic"⁴⁵), for which the traditional British costume worn by women was entirely unsuitable.⁴⁶ Lorimer complained, "but oh, such mud! I never saw such a liquid sea of it anywhere before! Sea boots would be the only thing to cope with it and if possible no skirts!"⁴⁷ The mud had a terrible effect on the state of the roads⁴⁸ and the resulting smell,

⁴² See for example, H. Sinclair, *Highland Memories in Macedonia: Reprinted from the Balkan News*, vol. 3, The B.S.F. Library (Salonica, 1919), 28.

⁴³ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 43; See also L G Moore, "Diary," IWM Con Shelf 12814, 31 Jan 1917; L Creighton, "Papers," IWM 92/22/1, 8 Oct 1917.

⁴⁴ Jean K Rose, "Letters," IWM 78/4/1, 15 Oct 1917.

⁴⁵ H J E Burtenshaw, "Papers," IWM 01/35/1, 1 Feb 1916.

⁴⁶ Haines, "Letters," 11 Aug 1916, 174. See also Preece, "Diary," 14 Aug 1918; Birkett Barker, "Papers," 21 Dec 1916; Knott, "Papers," 28 Oct 1915.

⁴⁷ Lorimer, "Papers," 77-79.

⁴⁸ Burtenshaw, "Papers," 1 Feb 1916; Haines, "Letters," 11 Aug 1916, 217; Rose, "Letters," 15 and 26 Oct 1917.

was described as "evil" and "really solid".⁴⁹ Holland described Salonika as "the vilest, smelliest and hottest city that I've ever been in, simply overrun with German, Austrian, and Turkish spies... Words fail me when I try to describe the roads."⁵⁰ Most troops also took issue with the variable but extreme weather, especially the heat.⁵¹ As Moore wrote, "I said it was hot didn't I? Well there is no harm in saying it again."⁵² The weather made an appearance in a poem "Beer (A reminiscence of Palestine)": "The memory's still with me of the rain, the snow, the heat, The freezing cold, the mud in damn great pools..."⁵³ Other frequent complaints included the mosquitoes and attendant malaria that made necessary the detested quinine parades, the condescending attitude of those on the home and western front towards the Balkan front, and above all, the lack of action and the resulting boredom.⁵⁴ By 1917, Salonika had become such a despised location that many troops could not wait to leave.⁵⁵ On leaving, Brooks described a view of Salonika that was quite the opposite of the view presented to arrivals; perhaps their experiences had dimmed the exoticness of Salonika, now fire-burned and war-weary. "Embarked... via White Tower Jetty ...our old friend Salonika presented a dull & dismal face as we left the bay. 3 years, 4 months, & 11 days after we landed, but not as many as landed."⁵⁶

British people, in both their initial and long term reactions, emphasized otherness in their descriptions of Salonika. In his section on "Orientalist structure and Restructures," Said describes the intentions of Europeans writing about the Orient and groups them into categories, including "the writer for whom a real or metaphorical trip to the Orient is the fulfilment of some deeply felt and urgent project." The British who travelled to Salonika during the war years did indeed do so as part of a "deeply felt and urgent project"; that project was the war. It may not be the type of project that Said referred to, but his arguments still apply. The resulting texts are therefore, Said argued, "fed and informed by the project".⁵⁷ Behind, above, and intruding upon the living of everyday life, the war was ever present. It and its effects bled into every aspect of the British experience. These texts

⁴⁹ Haines, "Letters," 30 Jun 1916, 204 and C R Hennessey, "Papers," IWM 03/31/1, 106; A M Lees, "Papers," IWM 99/76/1, 5 Sept 1915.

⁵⁰ G Holland, "Papers," IWM 88/26/1, 154 and 162.

⁵¹ Rose, "Letters," 15 and 26 Oct 1917; R Gwinnell, "Papers," IWM 01/38/1, 101 and 123; Haines, "Letters," 12 Jun 1916, 190; Brooks, "Papers," 27 Nov 1915 and 20 July 1916; Knott, "Papers," 28 Oct and 10, 11, 27 and 28 Nov, 16 Dec 1915, 21, 26 and 28 Jan 1917; G W Phinister, "Papers," IWM 84/1/1, 15 May and 5 Jun 1917; R A Pedler, "Papers," IWM Con Shelf 4716, 5 May 1917.

⁵² Moore, "Letters," 10 Jul 1917.

⁵³ Pounds, "Papers," 96.

⁵⁴ Harold Lake, *In Salonica With Our Army* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1918), 267.

⁵⁵ Brooks, "Papers," 11 Mar 1917; Knott, "Papers," 14 Sep 1917; Moore, "Letters," n.d. and 19 Sep 1917; Hennessey, "Papers," 153.

⁵⁶ Brooks, "Papers," 7 Apr 1919.

⁵⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 158.

– the letters and diaries discussed above – were not constructed for the benefit of an Orientalist audience. They were shared, if at all, with friends, family and members of the community who were (it can be presumed) interested in the well-being of the author in the context of the "project" – the war. If the imperative was then on documenting the war, not the exotic east, why did the sources continually rely on these clichés in their descriptions of their new locale? Because, as Said wrote, Orientalism is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient [is]... one of [Europe's] deepest and most recurring images of the Other."⁵⁸ In the early twentieth century, Orientalist discourse was so accepted that contemporary Britons reached for it as they attempted to describe the unfamiliar. Description of their experience in oriental terms would have resonated with many Britons (including both those on the Balkan front and their friends and family at home), both politically and in terms of narrative. Said pointed out that by the end of the nineteenth century, most of the "orient" was part of the British imperial map. Writing about or travelling in the Orient was very much a political exercise. "The territorial imperative was extremely compelling," Said argued.⁵⁹ British campaigners would have understood this as they entered Salonika, fighting or aiding to fight a war for the benefit of British interests. Furthermore, by falling back on a traditional method of coping with the exotic and unknown, the British placed their experience of the Orient in the same context as the traditional Orientalist encounters described by Said. The act of encounter was made familiar by using a well-tested method of description – thereby familiarizing both the encounter and the other itself.

However, what is obvious from the above passages is that using a discourse that emphasized the difference between Salonika and "home" did not serve to make Britons comfortable in their temporary environment. It is therefore not surprising that many of them were so eager to leave Salonika; nor is it surprising that this reaction to Salonika – like the pleasantly fleeting view of Salonika from the harbour – was a short lived one. The British used this method of familiar discourse to make sense of Salonika. Although Orientalism helped the British to negotiate unfamiliar experiences in Salonika, making the other the object of description also excluded the British from dialogue with the other, thus limiting interaction. In addition, by emphasizing the difference of Salonika from home, Britons reminded themselves how far away from home they were. Describing the spectacle of Salonika limited the British to the role of observer and in the observer/ object relationship there was little room for interaction. Describing Salonika using a familiar

⁵⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 1-2.

⁵⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 169.

discourse was insufficient to create a sense of belonging. In order to further familiarize their environment, the British engaged in other practices, comparing their environment to the familiar in order to normalise it, and interacting with the environment in order to familiarise it.

Part II: Interactions

"So much like our country": Britain in Macedonia



English goods sold here. © IWM (Q 32687)

As discussed in chapter three, one way that the British attempted to familiarize their surroundings was by importing aspects of home. These imports took the form of physical objects, or ideas of home that the British attempted to impose upon their new surroundings. A commonplace trend that emerges from the sources is comparing and connecting Salonika (and other parts of the Balkan front) to Britain. Haines, for example, wrote to his family that Macedonia was "just like Wales" and "oh, so much like our country."⁶⁰ To some extent this was simply creating a narrative to which his audience could relate. However, by and large this impulse demonstrates the need these men and women had to both feel at home, and to relate what they were experiencing to home. Where so much was different, the familiar took on new importance: people one knew from home or people who were from the same part of the country, a mound that could by some stretch of the imagination be described as similar to a Yorkshire dale or Scottish loch. Cowman

⁶⁰ Haines, "Letters," 27 Apr, 174, 30 Apr, 175, 30 Jun, 202 and 18 Jul 1916, 206; Rose "Diary," 13 Oct 1917. For the same comparisons to Serbia, see Eva Shaw McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1919), 121; Elsie Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia 1915-1919: A Personal Diary of Experiences* (Banbury, Oxon: Cheney & Sons, 1964), 11; Owen, *Salonica and After*, 75; Lorimer, "Papers," 36.

discusses the similarities that soldiers observed between French urban centres and their own towns, writing that soldiers "may also have been prone to exaggerate similarities with their own prewar urban experiences" in order to create a sense of familiarity.⁶¹ Letter-writers also attempted to bridge the distance by celebrating shared dates of importance. Holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays were important as they served as a common ground between those at home in Britain and those on the front. Reverend Couvier described singing Christmas hymns, "which we realized you were singing at home."⁶²

Relating Macedonia to Britain may have worked to some extent. One soldier described the efforts made by authorities to provide the soldiers with some semblance of a British holiday. Brooks wrote, "Breakfast. Sausages & tomatoes. Dinner, Turkey, potatoes, runner beans, pudding, custard, fruit. Tea, fruit. Fine Sunny day & guns fairly quiet."⁶³ However, no amount of tinned tomatoes in an attempt to recreate the traditional "full English breakfast" could make the average Tommy forget where he was. The guns may have been quiet, but they were still there, a constant reminder of the war. Stressing similarities might have helped to familiarize the landscape, but could also backfire with the differences standing out more clearly than before, leaving the observer with an unsettling sensation of culture shock. As Goldsworthy points out, writers used mentions of the west in proximity to the Balkans in order to emphasise their exoticness, "precisely because the assertions of Balkan 'Europeanness' blend and overlap with deliberately startling 'oriental' images".⁶⁴ Exoticness is emphasized by the concurrent use of the familiar.

These comparisons of Macedonia to Britain stand out. To equate the two landscapes stretches the imagination of the impartial observer, but to the author, such comparisons, like oriental discourse, represent an attempt to negotiate the unfamiliar in familiar terms, both for the author and as an attempt to bridge the distance between the author and the audience – the recipient of his or her letters.

⁶¹ Cowman, "Touring behind the Lines," 122.

⁶² J V Cope, "Papers," IWM P346, n.d., letter from W Couvier.

⁶³ Brooks, "Papers," 25 Dec 1915 and 16 Mar 1917; Birkett Barker, "Papers," 25 Dec 1916; Burtenshaw, "Papers," 25 Dec 1917.

⁶⁴ Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, 204.

"By general consent": Creating a British society



A pavement cafe in central Salonika opposite the Hotel Angleterre. A mixture of British, French and Serbian soldiers occupy the tables and pass by in the street. © IWM (HU 88208)

Connections were the most usual import the British brought with them to Salonika. The bond of friendships was strengthened in unfamiliar circumstances, and if one had a shortage of friends, any connection could be exploited to make new ones. As explored in chapter two, familiar faces, both new and old, were welcome by everyone, and it was the strength of these connections that allowed the British to further familiarize their environment, creating their own society, similar to the one they had left behind. This society produced social rituals, creating more opportunities for friendship and bonding, thus further strengthening the society itself.

The connections between Britons on the Balkan front varied widely. They might have been familial, or they might have been formed in a local village or in a large metropolis like London. Friends from school or university might find themselves reunited in Salonika, as well as those who had previously formed connections through work or a common cause. But in addition to all the connections that were formed in Britain, there were also those forged en route, or on a previous battlefield. It is this particular mix of contexts behind the relations which gave the place (Salonika) its specificity — neither local nor global.⁶⁵

As discussed in chapter two, the interconnectedness of the British in Salonika meant that they quickly formed a society which bore a striking resemblance to the one they had left at home. Social rituals, such as dining, dancing and paying visits prevailed; also

⁶⁵ Doreen B Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), 154.

present were taboos against illicit sex, drinking and rowdy behaviour, and an obsession with propriety. The norms of this newly formed society (heavily borrowed from Britain) were enforced by social pressure, gossip, and hierarchy (both official and unofficial). The various diversions available in, and nearby to, Salonika gave new friends ample opportunities to meet, connect, and share. These included sport and entertainments, both spectator and amateur, with the average Tommy (or "Sister") welcome to participate, as long as they were competent, as discussed in detail in chapter three. Sport varied from the casual to formal leagues competing against each other in tournaments. Football was ever popular, followed by hockey and wrestling, and racing days were organised by entire divisions. Henry Fitch mentioned countless sporting expeditions in his diary, including several co-ed hockey games.⁶⁶ What started as somewhat desperate attempts to ward off boredom added to the construction of a British society in Salonika.

"The only common meeting-place": Salonika places



The White Tower in Salonika. © IWM (Q 51651)

All of these new friendships, liaisons, and reunions needed a common meeting place. It was not long before Salonika, with its multi-ethnic currents flowing and merging throughout the city, had a British element as well. Certain establishments became known for catering to the British population and were popular destinations for both people who lived locally and those who were visiting from camps outside the city or further up the front line. These places were sites of bonding, where social rituals took place and taboos were enforced. The physical place enabled the formation of the more impalpable space. James Purves-Stewart nostalgically recalled the places that were the setting of the happier

⁶⁶ H M Fitch, "Papers," IWM 76/191/1, 17 and 24 Feb, 12 Apr 1917, 8 Feb, 12 Mar and 18 June 1918.

memories of his time in Macedonia: "There were the White Tower, the Cercle Militaire, Floca's al fresco restaurant in Venezilos St, the mosques and minarets scattered around the Appian Way."⁶⁷

Behind a pavement crammed with tables, each of them full of patrons representing every nationality, was Floca's café. There, lemonade ices could be had, and for the very lucky, beer. If there was a British headquarters, it was Floca's cafe, mentioned in practically every diary, memoir, or collection of letters produced by a veteran of the Balkan campaign. It was run by a local Greek, and beloved of all of the Allies, but perhaps most of all by the British. "Floca's, now by general consent the *chic* café of the city," as Owen described it, was where the best of Salonika life "sat jammed elbow to elbow at the round tables and drank tea, coffee or light beer, and ate large quantities of excellent and expensive cakes." Amongst the *mêlée*, one could see "English sisters and nurses," spies, and soldiers and officers of any of the several nationalities that were in Salonika at the time. According to Owen,

Everything that happened in Macedonia (and a good many things that didn't happen) was discussed in Floca's. It was the only common meeting-place, the Forum of the Allied Armies. Secret agents sat there, and spies -- an excellent arrangement for the hunters and the hunted to be in easy touch.

Moreover, he observed, "There was always somebody to see and talk to at Floca's, providing you could squeeze in."⁶⁸ Birkett Barker, after exploring Venizelos St, "had tea at 'Floca's'" where he and his companion were delighted to discover they could order beer, that ever-essential refreshment that was so missed by the troops up country.⁶⁹ Returning to Salonika, Birkett Barker was sure to "renew [his] acquaintances with Floca's restaurant which presents an animated and cosmopolitan scene at tea time."⁷⁰ An article in the *Balkan News* entitled "Old Floca" described Floca's in flowery prose and the diverse drinks available there. Floca's was a handy place to meet "lady friends." The article read, "Ah! yes, mine host studies everybody, including the ministering angels from the hospitals. The capacity for hot tea evinced by the English nursing sister must be catered for, and 'feeve o'clock' would be served at all hours of the day."⁷¹

Floca's, however popular, was just one of the places where British could associate amongst themselves. Owen listed several more. He wrote, "The Odéon, the White Tower,

⁶⁷ James Purves-Stewart "Serbian Memories," 7-8 in H D Bonner, "Papers," IWM 07/31/1.

⁶⁸ Owen, *Salonica and After*, 22-23.

⁶⁹ Birkett Barker, "Papers," 29 Aug 1916.

⁷⁰ Birkett Barker, "Papers," 26 Dec 1916.

⁷¹ *The Balkan News*, 15 May 1917, 194 edition. See also G. Ward Price, "Floca's: The Social Focus of Salonika," *The Times*, March 15, 1916.

the Skating Rink – these are names that will live long in the memories of the men who were in Macedonia."⁷² The White Tower was another particularly popular place, where nurses went to meet their friends for dinner and dancing when they could get town passes off base.⁷³ Olive King, who dined with her friend Isabel Emslie and beau Milan Yovitchitch at the White Tower (but not frequently enough, she complained to her father in letters⁷⁴) probably associated that place with the pleasant evenings she spent there with her friends, just as she associated Mikra bay with the time she spent at the Scottish Women's Hospitals camp as one of their drivers.⁷⁵

One humorous article from the *Balkan News* hints at other activities that took place near the White Tower. The article reported on a meeting of the Salonika Harbour Board. Dredging had, it claimed, "brought to light a huge collection of miscellaneous rubbish from the White Tower direction.... it had consisted chiefly of cigarette ends, champagne corks, scent sachets, hairpins, stay laces,... and long-necked brandy bottles."⁷⁶ There were other such establishments, clubs and restaurants where one could associate with British and like-minded people.⁷⁷ By 1917, a department store called Orosdi Back's had become "the 'Whitelys' of Salonica", quality purveyors of British goods to suit the demands of an expanding expatriate society.⁷⁸ More than anything, this Anglicization of the geography of Salonika served to create a space out of the interactions of the British.

Preece's diary drew a remarkable comparison between the geography of London and his current city, Salonika. He wrote, "S.W. [a friend] & I got off at Piccadilly Circus & walked down Regent's Street." Every person, whether Tommy, officer, or aid worker stopped on their way into Salonika at the intersection known as "Piccadilly Circus" to pick up passengers or get a lift. According to Preece, "everyone travels this way."⁷⁹ In a strange echo of the imperial practice of naming colonial cities after cities in the metropole, British Salonikans named the busiest intersection in their new city after their favourite intersection in the old capital. Ironically, every time Tipperary was played (the Serbs commonly mistook

⁷² Owen, *Salonica and After*, 30.

⁷³ Hazel King, ed., *One Woman at War: Letters of Olive King, 1915-1920* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987), 33; Latham, "Papers," 11 Oct 1916; Bonner, "Papers," Menu from "Restaurant Parc Tour Blanche," 13/26 Mars 1916.

⁷⁴ King, *One Woman at War*, 30, 49.

⁷⁵ King, *One Woman at War*, 38.

⁷⁶ *The Balkan News*, 15 May 1917, 194 edition.

⁷⁷ Preece, "Diary," 4 May 1918; Rose, "Diary," 6 May 1918.

⁷⁸ "The Balkan News," 9 Mar 1917, 129 edition.

⁷⁹ Preece, "Diary," 14 Aug 1917; Birkett Barker, "Papers," 23 Aug and 4 Sept 1916. Salonika was not the only place this happened: Burtenshaw mentioned "Mile End Football Ground, also Hyde Park corner" in Malta. Burtenshaw, "Papers," 27 Jan 1916.

the marching tune for the British national anthem⁸⁰) Britons were singing goodbye to Piccadilly, yet they had their own Piccadilly on their doorstep. Of course, the two Piccadilly Circuses looked nothing alike, so the Tommies and ministering angels who passed through Piccadilly Circus in Salonika were simultaneously reminded of home, and reminded how far away from home they were.

British spaces were a natural result of the creation of British society. These spaces not only served as meeting places for social rituals and bonding, like the rituals themselves they reinforced connections and thus the society that had created them in the first place. They served as sites of importation, whether for cultural customs (afternoon tea) British goods (Whitley's), or names. Applying British names to the map of Salonika, even if unofficially, can be seen as an attempt to further familiarize the city, but it was also deeply ironic.

To conclude, British experience of Salonika can be roughly divided into two categories: reactions and interactions. The British reacted to Salonika's differences. Whether exotic and alluring or foreign and repugnant, Britons employed the well-used lens of Otherness to view their new city and temporary home. As Said argues in *Orientalism*, the discourse of otherness reveals more about the author than it does about the intended object of description. In this case, the use of Orientalist discourse indicated, ironically, an attempt by the British to embrace the unfamiliar (Salonika) through a familiar means. Orientalist discourse was, as Said illustrates, embedded into the Western psyche. However, the familiar discourse focused on exoticising and thus distancing the participant, and this approach did not alleviate the sense of non-belonging for the semi-permanent resident.

British interactions with Salonika can largely be labelled as attempts to familiarize their environment and, where this failed, attempts to create British spaces within the city. The British imported a number of things from home: friendships, gramophones, Christmas dinners and street names. These cultural artefacts, however welcome, were not sufficient to sustain a sense of belonging. Tinned tomatoes tasted different in the Macedonian heat; the illusion of Leicester Square inspired by the gramophone evaporated with the song played out; friendships were tainted by the experiences of war, and the tongue-in-cheek christening of a dusty intersection on the outskirts of Salonika as "Piccadilly Circus" highlighted the deep irony and essential futility of these attempts to make Salonika more like Britain.

⁸⁰ Lorimer, "Papers," 35-36.

The creation of semi-British spaces in Salonika was more successful – if only because the historical, physical and temporal uniqueness of spaces means that they are by default authentic. Although these British spaces became familiar enough to evoke a responding sense of nostalgia, they were strictly a product of their unique position between Britain and Salonika. Like the wartime experiences and circumstances which created them, the spaces were temporary and with the end of the war, they vanished, leaving the residue of memories among the participants.

The British dealt with their new exotic environment in ways that were all based on continuity. They used a familiar narrative to describe the exotic to their audience on the home front and created their own ‘British’ places with islands of familiarity within the exotic. This reliance on familiarity indicates how important continuity was for both individuals and the British community on the Balkan front.

Chapter Six: "To die for someone else's country": Motivation and perception

Britons' attitudes towards their wartime experiences and activities were tied into their motivation and the perceived value of their war work. There were two main groups of British people on the Balkan front: members of the British Salonika Force (BSF) and volunteers serving both the British army and other Allied soldiers. These different roles produced disparate experiences; not only were the circumstances of their work different, the perceived value of their work differed greatly. Frustration with the lack of action on the Balkan front, together with the attitude the home front had towards the operation, meant that soldiers (especially the rank and file who, as demonstrated, had more than their fair share of hardships and fewer positive opportunities) felt disillusioned with the value of their work, and therefore their overall wartime experience. They felt inferior to the "soldier hero" of the western front, particularly as this quickly became the dominant narrative of the war. On the other hand, volunteers whose services were lauded both at home and appreciated by those they were serving took great pride and pleasure both in their positions and in the work they were doing. Volunteers (mostly women) were given the opportunity to act in roles and to be appreciated for their work in a way they had not previously experienced. Although their efforts were considered by themselves and by others to be secondary to the military effort, those in relief work on the Balkan front enjoyed greater appreciation for their work than those in the military. For both soldiers and volunteers, their recognition and motivation contributed to their differences in experience. Yet after the war, the experience of isolation from the typical war experience bonded both soldiers and volunteers together in a common cause.

War work materially changed the daily activities of those involved. Attitudes and motivations towards the war effort and their own part in it were based on the importance of a relationship with the home front and the ideals of the prewar era. Soldiers valued the opinions of those on the home front and were deeply hurt when it turned against them. Volunteers were motivated by service and the lure of adventure, ideals that they often had held before the war.

"Defend them till peace shall reign"¹: Motivation of the BSF

Professional members of the military tended to regard their service in terms of how it would help their career, as well as helping the war effort; in this regard, their motivation

¹ W Knott, "Papers," IWM P305, 18 Nov 1915.

sometimes echoed those of volunteers.² Haines considered himself "fortunate" to be doing mechanical dentistry and arranged to use his wartime experience as part of his qualification.³ Fitch valued his time liaising with the Serbian army both for the career opportunities and for the variation it provided from his prewar work. He wrote, "It was all very interesting and colourful, and so very different from the ordinary naval routine. I thought of the fellows I had left in Scapa Flow and I knew how they envied me; their letters reeked of envy."⁴ These motivations are reflective of those of volunteers: Emslie was able to use her neurological skills by doing laboratory research on malaria. She also performed many types of operations that, in Britain, would have gone to a specialist.⁵ Ingram used her volunteering experience as part of her qualifying course for nursing, and she was also promised a reference from Berry. She joked that it would "probably hinder me in my career rather than help, in which case it shall be conveniently mislaid."⁶

Many wrote poetic or patriotic indications of their individual dedication to the war effort.⁷ For Knott, witnessing the suffering caused by the retreat from Serbia was enough to convince him of the necessity of war.⁸ Bailey's attitude was positive and resolved, but more concerned as time went on. He wrote in 1916, "those German terms were rather nervy, weren't they, but they got their reply at Verdun"⁹ and at the end of the year: "Anyway, here's to 1917, whatever it holds, Peace or War, but let's hope it's peace and good old London with it's [sic] lights on all night."¹⁰ Despite his dedication, he didn't seem to believe that his own efforts would have much to do with the final outcome, writing in summer 1917, "Of course, that's the Front [France] the War will finish on, and let's hope it'll finish before the winter gets on us."¹¹ Haines had a similar humble attitude, writing to his parents to assure them they would see him again using arguments of faith. He wrote, "I am ashamed to say 'we'. What have I done."¹² He also wrote, "tho' myself I cannot see such a speedy finish to this war, I believe it will be a steady but sure victory for us. It's a long long way to Tipperary."¹³ Still later, he assured them, "I am still patient & most hopeful, I realize we have to wait yet, so I am not allowing myself to be ~~dis~~illusioned [strike-through

² R W F Johnston, "Papers," IWM 82/38/1, 41 and 45.

³ O C M Haines, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 3245, 28 Sept 1916, 238 and 25 Jan 1917, 273.

⁴ Henry Malden Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth: A Naval Journal*. (London: Macmillan, 1937), 261-262.

⁵ Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928), 124-125 and 191-2.

⁶ M Ingram, "Papers," IWM 86/48/1, 21 July 1915.

⁷ J V Cope, "Papers," IWM P346, n.d., letter from W Couvier.

⁸ Knott, "Papers," 18 Nov 1915.

⁹ R J Bailey, "Papers," IWM 92/36/1 & 2027, 21 Dec 1916.

¹⁰ Bailey, "Papers," 21 Dec 1916.

¹¹ Bailey, "Papers," 28 Aug and 19 Sept 1917.

¹² Haines, "Letters," n.d., 182.

¹³ Haines, "Letters," 11 Aug 1916, 219.

in original]."¹⁴ Others were less prosaic. Gwinnell retrospectively complained, "Time dragged on. Would this accursed war never end?"¹⁵ For most men, the lack of interest in the war effort – whether in general, or on the Balkan front in particular, could be seen as reflected in their dedication to their work – or lack thereof.¹⁶ While dedication to the war effort was motivation for some, it was frustrating for others who believed that the Balkan front was not contributing to the overall war effort, and thus their individual sacrifices were meaningless.

Conversely, their experiences made many see the futility of war. Gwinnell and Lorimer wrote against war in the context of sympathy for the Serbians – the struggle was described as "useless" and "a hopeless game to play".¹⁷ For others, their disillusionment came as a reaction to witnessing horrors.¹⁸ Disenchantment also came about because of the monotony of their experience, as Knott put it, "spent in drill and useless waste of one's life."¹⁹ This sense of futility of the front echoed in personal narrative, with descriptions of getting back to where one started, having gained little, but lost much.²⁰ Their dedication also depended upon, among other things, their success at their work and within their teams. Butler, not getting along with most of the rest of his unit, related, "My mind was now turned and I began to envy those returning to England." Once he was safely away from the dangers and trials of life at the front and war work, he wrote "I was on the shores of England & our woes past."²¹ Creighton, also at odds with her organisation, and feeling unsupported and ineffectual, told the head of the SRF that "I see no winter's work for me in this country" and resigned.²²

Once again, it was the troops who suffered the most in this regard, as they were often put to work at the most menial labour and hardly ever told of the object of their work, let alone the motivation behind it. Hennessey thought that he and his troops might be more dedicated to their efforts if they knew something about the mission on which they were engaged.²³ Gwinnell related one story where, after digging for four hours following a fifteen mile march, the men were told by a commanding officer that the trenches they had dug were useless as they were too far away from the hills. "Why not shift the hills up to the

¹⁴ Haines, "Letters," 10 Sep 1916, 238.

¹⁵ R Gwinnell, "Papers," IWM 01/38/1, 121.

¹⁶ Knott, "Papers," 3 Jan and 25 Apr 1916.

¹⁷ Gwinnell, "Papers," 105; E C Lorimer, "Papers," IWM 76/192/1, 70.

¹⁸ Knott, "Papers," 31 Oct 1916, 8, 10 and 15 May, 7 June 1917; Ingram, "Papers," 8 May 1915; A H Reynell, "Papers," IWM 77/162/1, 5.

¹⁹ Knott, "Papers," 4 Jan 1917.

²⁰ Gwinnell, "Papers," 130; Knott, "Papers," Dec 1916.

²¹ T Butler, "Papers," IWM 88/46/1, 16 and 28 Oct 1915.

²² L Creighton, "Papers," IWM 92/22/1, 25 Jul 1917.

²³ C R Hennessey, "Papers," IWM 03/31/1, 109 and 126.

trenches, it would be a lot easier', came a voice from the back. 'Find out who that is' came a roar from the Colonel. This never happened, however."²⁴ It was evident that theoretical dedication to the war aims was not enough to overcome the difficult working conditions of the Balkan front, especially for those who did not feel that their individual work was contributing.

"Without accomplishing anything... towards the aims of the war": Recognition of the BSF

Many soldiers were demoralized by a critical and apathetic British public, who ranked the efforts of soldiers on the western front above those on the Balkan front. Even during the war, soldiers on the Macedonian front were aware that their experiences did not live up to what society expected of a Great War soldier. The Balkan front was unpopular amongst the British public, and soldiers had to cope with the fact that their service was not seen as contributing to the war aims. Glory and appreciation were reserved for their comrades on the western front, and many soldiers in Macedonia would have preferred to be in France.

The general lack of action meant that the Balkan front was comparatively safe, a fact which was appreciated by some more than others.²⁵ Hennessey wrote that he considered himself "extremely fortunate" for being sent to Salonika as it meant he missed taking part in the Somme. "I often wonder how many members of the 2nd Battalion owed their lives to the Division being switched to a front which nobody seemed to have heard of."²⁶ It is a revealing fact that there were far more Allied casualties to malaria on the Balkan front than to enemy action. And yet being wounded was considered more honourable, in many ways preferable, to being ill.²⁷ However, the troops sometimes were in actual danger, somehow made worse by the fact that some on the home front did not seem to believe it.²⁸ Bailey revealed this when he complained to his sister, "I'm afraid there's not many of the old originals left, things have been a bit rougher out here than the majority of folks at home seem to think."²⁹

Soldiers internalized notions of worthy work or service, and while some of them may have been glad to be on a relatively safe front at times, this was accompanied by guilt

²⁴ Gwinnell, "Papers," 110.

²⁵ Bailey, "Papers," 15 Nov 1917.

²⁶ Hennessey, "Papers," 103.

²⁷ H D Bonner, "Papers," IWM 07/31/1, 19 Oct 1916.

²⁸ Butler, "Papers," 7 Oct 1915; H J E Burtenshaw, "Papers," IWM 01/35/1, 30 Mar, 14 and 18 Oct 1917; Bailey, "Papers," 1 Dec 1918.

²⁹ Bailey, "Papers," 16 Jun 1917.

for not doing what they saw as their part. Soldiers were sometimes temporarily stationed at base rather than upcountry, and knowing that their comrades in the front lines were having a rougher time had a negative effect on their attitude towards their work: they perceived it as "cushy"³⁰ and themselves as less worthy. Haines related that, while on base in a period of convalescence, "Must take all Sundays off. I feel like some spoiled child. [emphasis in original]"³¹ Bailey described a period of work at base as a sign writer, luxurious compared to his life upcountry. "Needless to say, things are pretty 'cushy' here, particularly as I'm a sort of 'Independent Labour Member', doing no parades and the work, which is all lettering with a dash of rough carpentering, comes kindly to me after the rigours of the past year."³² A few months later he wrote,

Am still at Base and have apparently become recognized as the "Village Carpenter", and am becoming positively bloated with my three months of comparative "Peace and Plenty." Three months and I haven't touched a rifle (except to clean it)... This is "the goods" after having been through the last two years.³³

However he felt "quite ready to go up again and do some more when they see fit to send me."³⁴ Soon he was hankering after new work.³⁵ As he wrote to his sister he had decided to ask to be sent back up the line when he ran into a friend from home. "On telling him of my intentions he fairly chewed my head off, so I have decided to let it rip for a while. Poor old Jack! He was terribly sick at having to come back here. It's not much of a hole to come back to, Mal."³⁶ However in less than six months he was back to old battalion:

Gone are the Good old Carpentering Days, the Days of Buckshee Grub and No Parades. The Bogey of Discipline looms in the offing with his army of Blooming Nuisances, Squad Drills, Fatigues, Inspection of Everything, and all the rest of them... Well, I've had a good long break and can't grouse, besides it'll be good to see some of my old Pals again.³⁷

Bailey obviously took certain pride in his work, both as a sign painter and as a machine gunner.³⁸ His narrative also indicated his concern with the "cushy" life at base, which, while he appreciated it, he felt guilty for experiencing while his "old Pals" were still experiencing hardships up country. His friend's rebuke indicates the stupidity of giving up such a post and therefore the desirability of it. Any shame in being a "base wallah" was

³⁰ G W Phinister, "Papers," IWM 84/1/1, 19 Jun 1917.

³¹ Haines, "Letters," 10 Jun 1917, 312-313.

³² Bailey, "Papers," 5 Oct 1916.

³³ Bailey, "Papers," 26 Nov 1916.

³⁴ Bailey, "Papers," 26 Oct 1916.

³⁵ Bailey, "Papers," 26 Nov 1916.

³⁶ Bailey, "Papers," 12 Jan 1917.

³⁷ Bailey, "Papers," 16 Jun 1917.

³⁸ Bailey, "Papers," 2 Feb and 16 Mar 1918.

more than made up for by the benefits it provided. This compromise between legitimacy versus comfort and safety was also a struggle for Fitch, as he and Admiral Troubridge were forced to abandon an attempt to relocate to Monastir as it was still being shelled, with conflicting feelings of relief and regret.³⁹ Bailey's concerns about his comparative privilege and his frustration with the lack of understanding by those on the home front are reflected in a passage from Moore to his family:

It is rather unfair to me to compare me to Billy (whose surname I have forgotten and whom I have only seen once in my life): you should surely know enough of the Army to understand that the man who does the fighting gets the least privilege, and that the people with the safe jobs get the most. I am in camp some distance from the town and expecting to move off further still now.... I have been through the town exactly twice and then I was on duty. You might note that I am not out here on a pleasure trip: nor am I collecting curiosities. Other people may have time for this but I haven't yet.⁴⁰

Despite the many remarks on the futility of war in general, the belief in the justness of this war went largely unquestioned. The justification for the Macedonian campaign, however, was often called into question. These public debates had a negative effect on morale, as soldiers found themselves sacrificing their time, health, and war experiences for service on a front that was deeply unpopular with their British contemporaries. This attitude is reflected in individual accounts of soldiers when they address the aims of the BSF. Harold Lake agreed that "German influence must be banished for all time from the Balkan peninsula."⁴¹ However, a chapter in his account titled "What are we doing here" mainly addressed the military futility of the Macedonian campaign. Lake described the frustration felt by fellow soldiers with the lack of fighting, made worse by the fact that most of them believed "killing Bulgars" was useless and victory would be established on the western front.⁴² "Meanwhile," he wondered, "is there no need for our troops upon another battle front?"⁴³ He complained — ironically, considering the eventual outcome of the campaign — that "we knew and our hearts admitted that there was no hope in this direction of a big advance, no hope that we might have a share in a great campaign."⁴⁴ The time, money, effort, and lives that the British poured into the Balkan front were, according to him, wasted. He did not speculate on the political motivations behind the campaign; he

³⁹ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 259. On a similar note, according to Laugesen, in her study on soldier entertainers, the war also presented opportunities for those wishing to embark on a career in entertainment. The narrative of these men framed their occupation as "war work" and emphasized the sacrifices and potential danger they faced in order to legitimize their experience.

⁴⁰ Moore, "Letters," IWM Con Shelf 12814, 51.

⁴¹ Harold Lake, *In Salonica With Our Army* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1918), 282.

⁴² Lake, *In Salonica with Our Army*, 267.

⁴³ Lake, *In Salonica with Our Army*, 266.

⁴⁴ Lake, *In Salonica with Our Army*, 267.

was concerned nearly exclusively with the military, and military involvement in the Balkans was, from his perspective, a wasted exercise.⁴⁵

Aimed at the larger public, G. Ward Price's account, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, was more ambitious. According to Price, the failure to achieve the initial aims (the rescue of Serbia) created disappointment with Salonika in the public mood at the beginning of the campaign, a disappointment which never lifted.⁴⁶ For Price, the importance of Salonika was threefold: first, and probably least important, the Allied presence assured their commitment to the cause of Serbia.⁴⁷ Second, they were blocking German dominance of the Balkans, during the war *and* after the war—and, implicitly, protecting Britain's own interests there.⁴⁸ Third, the British were in Salonika to take advantage of potential German weakening on the western front by pushing on other fronts.⁴⁹ Price's account was published in 1917. Its aim was to attempt to placate an audience hostile to a military campaign which had not yet proven its worth. He asserted that the Balkans were "the hinge and pivot" of Germany's war aims,⁵⁰ and stated reassuringly that the Allied involvement in Serbia was not due to only sentimental reasons: "it is based on something more tangible than sympathy for 'gallant little Serbia.'"⁵¹ He later contradicted this point entirely by writing that, even if the Salonika campaign has not done any good in the overall war effort, "we at least put heart into Serbia."⁵² He also admitted the mysteriousness of the vast expenditure on a campaign "at the *other* end of Europe [emphasis mine]" that was not "accomplishing anything proportionate towards the aims of the war."⁵³ Price believed that "our schemes in the Balkans have never been more than a small part of the vast operations of war"⁵⁴ but that the Salonika campaign was contributing to the war effort nonetheless. British soldiers, as Price and Lake illustrated, thought of their service in terms of importance to the war effort. Most men were patriotic and believed in the aims of the war; they also believed they were helping the war effort and were deeply hurt by public opinion that implied those at home believed otherwise. They even thought, to some degree, that they were helping a good

⁴⁵ See also Henry Day, *Macedonian Memories* (London: Heath Cranton Limited, 1930), 10; 129-135.

⁴⁶ G. Ward Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 1; 17.

⁴⁷ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 5; 203-204.

⁴⁸ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 6-8; 11. This view was shared by Olive King, who towards the end of the war hoped Britain would support a united "Jugo-slav" nation, but she was more concerned that Serbia not come under German domination for its own sake rather than Britain's. King, *One Woman at War*, 91.

⁴⁹ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 12. See also H. Collinson Owen, *Salonica and After: The Sideshow That Ended the War*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919).

⁵⁰ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 11.

⁵¹ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 7-8.

⁵² Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 203-204.

⁵³ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 250.

⁵⁴ Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, 151.

cause by coming to the aid of the Serbian army, while at the same time acting in Britain's interest, of course.

The discussion of the defence of the Macedonian campaign in Palmer's secondary history *Gardeners of Salonika* (published in 1965) reflects similar arguments in more personal accounts. Palmer goes into detail about opinions of the importance of the campaign held by various important figures, both among the Allies and the Central Powers. For example, Hindenburg wrote on October 3, 1918: "As a result of the collapse of the Macedonian front and the weakening of our western reserves which this has brought about... there is, so far as can be foreseen, no longer a prospect of forcing peace on the enemy." Surprisingly, Hindenburg appeared to believe that the Allied victory in the Balkans led to the end of the war. However, Palmer shrewdly points out that Hindenburg may have been attempting to deflect blame away from the armies of the western front, over which he exercised more control.⁵⁵ Palmer argues that it would be impossible to "seriously maintain" that the Bulgarian defeat alone caused the collapse of German and Austrian empires, but he argues, "that is no reason for doubting the reality of [the Salonika forces'] triumph—the rout of the Bulgarian Army and an advance across four hundred miles of mountain in six weeks"⁵⁶ and the subsequent collapse of the Ottoman defence. In this respect, it seems even more unfair to Palmer and other sympathizers that the Balkan front is so neglected by history. A review of Palmer's book which appeared in *The Mosquito* (the newsletter of the Salonika Reunion Association) reflects this:

But for those who survive there is a feeling that they have left not only some of their friends but also a part of their own lives among the hills and fields of war, and to find that so much has been forgotten, even if it was ever known, is doubly hard to bear. There is a very clear understanding of this on Mr. Palmer's part, and he has gone a long way towards redressing the balance.⁵⁷

As the French and Serbian armies advanced into Austria-Hungary in October 1918, the BSF headed east towards the Ottoman Empire. Most troops, however, "never saw Constantinople." An armistice with Turkey was signed before they had reached the border and they returned to Macedonia on the same difficult roads. As Palmer points out, "Frustration and disappointment remained the lot of the British force to the very end of the campaign."⁵⁸ Palmer describes the visit the Bishop of London made to the BSF units after the Bulgarian armistice. As Davidage wrote, they paused in their journey to listen to a speech by the bishop.

⁵⁵ Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 228.

⁵⁶ Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika*, 246.

⁵⁷ G J Davidage, "Papers," IWM 96/23/1, 42: ref 8. Book Review, *Mosquito*, n.152 (1965), p.101-103.

⁵⁸ Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika*, 232-233.

Soldiers are never very impressed by this sort of thing... our comments afterwards would have saddened the Bishop... But we did him less than justice, for when he returned to England, as we discovered later, he did his best in public speech and in writing to give those at home some idea of the kind of job the Salonika Army had done and was doing.⁵⁹

The bishop published a letter in the *Times* as an attempt "to plead for full justice to be done at home to the work of the Salonika Army." He described all the same discomforts of which the men complained: boredom and mosquitoes, to name a few, writing, "These men in our Eastern Armies have had the dust and toil, without the laurel, of the race to victory." But Palmer argues that the timing of the Bishop's letter was unfortunate. It was published a few days before the armistice with Germany was signed. Any notice the public might have taken of the Bishop's defence of the BSF was quickly eclipsed by enthusiasm or relief at the end of the war—the real war—with Germany.⁶⁰ Those on the Balkan front, however, did not forget that the Bulgarian army was the first of the Central Powers to capitulate. Ford, complaining about the wait to be demobilized and the public attitude towards the Macedonian campaign, wrote, "I think they are treating the Salonika army like a lot of dirt. But who finished the war for them. The men who had been hiding behind the hills for nearly four years."⁶¹ The *Balkan News* reprinted the text of the bishop's letter with timeline of advance on reverse. It appears as a memento in Page's miscellaneous papers, together with a poem entitled "Who won the war and why." According to this poem, "The SALONIKA FORCE WON THE WAR MY BOY./ 'CAUSE THEY COULDN'T GET HOME ON LEAVE."⁶²

"Outrageous proposition": Motivation of volunteers

Soldiers may have had little choice in whether to go to the Balkans or indeed, whether to enlist in the army, with social pressure and later conscription. Volunteers were afforded more agency, and many of them actively asked or hoped to be sent to Serbia or Macedonia. Emslie decided to "go to the Front" almost a year after the war began, after having been discouraged by both the war office and the chief of her hospital. She described her motivations in her memoir:

We were young and hopeful and thought we were helping to make those who came after us secure from war for evermore. My ideals were not all upon such a high plane,

⁵⁹ Davidge, "Papers," 39.

⁶⁰ Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika*, 242.

⁶¹ Edwin Ford, "Papers," IWM Misc 321, n.d. but late Dec 1918 or early Jan 1919.

⁶² A S Page, "Papers", IWM 81/21/1.

for there was also the lure of adventure and of experience in the surgery of war and in medicine in different lands and climates.⁶³

Emslie wrote that she "hoped to go to Serbia, that typhus-ridden, primitive country. My poor mother was greatly relieved when, in fact, I was posted to France."⁶⁴ Her mother must have been dismayed when, after six months in France, Emslie's SWH unit was transferred to Salonika. When a friend of Elsie Corbett's father suggested she accompany a nurse from his hospital, Corbett wrote, "It was... the kind of outrageous proposition that appealed very much to my father." There was general outcry at the idea and many of her conventional friends entreated Corbett not to go, but "all this acted as a spur to both my father and me."⁶⁵ The idea that they would be facing dangerous conditions appealed to adventurous souls who enjoyed the admiration they received for their self-sacrifice.⁶⁶ Corbett's heart was set on going to Serbia. At the Red Cross HQ in London, "when the secretary asked my age there was a ghastly moment. 'Oh dear,' she said, 'nobody under 23 is allowed to go to France.' My heart stood still. 'But I'm not going to France,' I said. 'Oh well,' she said, 'I suppose Serbia is all right if they'll take you.'"⁶⁷ The romance of the Balkans was a strong aspect of British perceptions of the region, as discussed in chapters one and five. Even before the war, the propensity of the Balkans to attract British women was noted. Goldsworthy offers an explanation, writing,

In all its apparent backwardness and poverty, the Balkan world offered British women a chance of real equality with men. British women enjoyed a sort of 'honorary male status' in the Balkans. Many of them took little interest in Balkan women, except in a thoroughly patronizing way.⁶⁸

Goldsworthy describes the respect and influence that British women who devoted themselves to the Balkans enjoyed, and cited Flora Sandes and Isabel Emslie (Hutton) as examples of "the way Balkan societies could open up opportunities unavailable for women in Britain at the time."⁶⁹ She adds, "Many of these women traveled to the Balkans in order to find themselves, to discover, to engage and to support a cause, and simply to escape the boredom of home. In this, they were the true heirs of Byron."⁷⁰

⁶³ Isabel Galloway Emslie Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor in War and Peace* (London: Heinemann, 1960), 131 and Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 16-17.

⁶⁴ Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor*, 131.

⁶⁵ Elsie Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia 1915-1919: A Personal Diary of Experiences* (Banbury, Oxon: Cheney & Sons, 1964), xi.

⁶⁶ G Holland, "Papers," IWM 88/26/1, 144; Ingram, "Papers," unsigned letter to Ingram, 5 Jun 1915.

⁶⁷ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, xii.

⁶⁸ Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (London: Hurst and Company, 2013), 217.

⁶⁹ Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, 218.

⁷⁰ Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, 219.

Often the experience of being overseas reinforced a motivation for freedom and adventure, and to serve. As King wrote, "it's a free & independent life now-a-days, and I'm so grateful to the Serbs for providing it, that I would gladly work day & night for them. I feel I just can't do enough...to show the army how much I admire & respect them, their pluck, their fine unconquerable spirit."⁷¹ Her dedication to the Serbs, and her determination to help them, was demonstrated throughout her letters.⁷² For King, her service with the SWH, Serbian army, and later running the Australian-Serbian canteens put the rest of her life into perspective: "I truly want to do good, the best I can, & make up for a hitherto idle selfish wasted life."⁷³ For volunteers, exotic new experiences and the opportunity to serve the less fortunate contributed to positive attitudes towards their work.

"We were worth it": Recognition of volunteers' service on the Balkan front

Relief work, by comparison to the "Tommyes" in the army, was recognised on the home front as well as appreciated by Allies. It was not just women who received recognition for their relief work. Butler related his amusement "at receiving wholly unmerited salutes from various Tommyes."⁷⁴ Nevertheless, volunteers in every capacity still considered their efforts to be secondary to those in the military. Bonner's reaction to her brother receiving a military honour reveals this, as she wrote, without any apparent sarcasm, "My head is in a whirl. Here was I thinking what a credit my medal [from the French for service at Ghevgelija] was to the family."⁷⁵ Moreover, as glad as they were to be serving the Serbians, volunteers also wanted to be helping their own countrymen. Inglis, despite having been rejected from the British war office and having her hands full managing multiple hospitals in Serbia, was obsessed with the idea of sending a SWH unit to Malta to nurse the British wounded from the Dardanelles.⁷⁶ After the Serbian advance in 1918, Emslie was glad to have a chance to accept British men in her hospital, and immediately reserved two wards for them when a RAMC colonel asked her to care for any of the British Transport Company who might need it. She wrote, "Everyone was delighted to have at last this opportunity of service to our own countrymen."⁷⁷

⁷¹ Hazel King, ed., *One Woman at War: Letters of Olive King, 1915-1920* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1987), 38.

⁷² King, *One Woman at War*, 90; 96.

⁷³ King, *One Woman at War*, 103.

⁷⁴ Butler, "Papers," 29 July 1915.

⁷⁵ Bonner, "Papers," Letter to mother, 1 Sep 1917.

⁷⁶ Eva Shaw McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 133, 106, and 108.

⁷⁷ Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor*, 170.

It was a novelty for women volunteers, so used to being rebuffed and made to feel inferior, to have their services and themselves so appreciated by the Serbians. Aside from the enormous practical help that the volunteers brought to Serbia, they also served as representatives of Britain. Flora Sandes arrived in Salonika on the same ship as the SWH Girton Newnham unit, which was accompanying the French division sent to aid Serbia. She intended to re-join the hospital where she had previously worked but, like the British and French military, she had arrived too late. Instead she attached herself to the army as a nurse. While the invading enemy forced the Serbian army into retreat, Sandes was still reluctant to leave the men to whom she had, over the last year, grown so attached. So she asked to remain with the army. Although she expected to be sent to Salonika "as a female encumbrance," Sandes was told by a Serbian colonel that

it would be better for the Serbians if I joined the army and went through Albania with them, as the simple peasant soldiers already looked upon me as a sort of representative of England, and a pledge, and if I stick to them it would encourage them...The only thing that distinguished me particularly, and made them treat me with so much affection and respect, was the fact that I, an Englishwoman, was willing...to fight for Serbia... [T]hey say, "to die for your country is not to die"; but to die for someone else's country they thought to be something extra special.⁷⁸

In an earlier account, Sandes related this same event in much the same way.

To [the soldier's] simple minds I represented, so to speak, the whole of England. The only thought that buoyed them up at the time, and still does, was that England would never forsake them...I believe the fact that I went through with them did perhaps sometimes help to encourage the soldiers.⁷⁹

It would perhaps have seemed paradoxical to some British that such a patriarchal society—they might have said "backwards" or even "barbaric"⁸⁰—placed such a high value on female work.⁸¹ In fact, other Serbian women fought in the army. But Serbia was in no condition to be picky about the gender of the medical help it received, and it seems that the fact that they were female was secondary. In several cases, the fact that the volunteers were British seemed to count for more with the Serbians than the fact that they were women.⁸² The Serbs were happy for whatever help they could get from the Allies. It just so happened that most of what they could get was from women.

⁷⁸ Flora Sandes, *The Autobiography of a Woman Soldier: A Brief Record of Adventure with the Serbian Army, 1916-1919* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1927), 13.

⁷⁹ Flora Sandes, *An English Woman-Sergeant in the Serbian Army* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), 91-92.

⁸⁰ Sandes, *An English Woman-Sergeant*, 92; King, *One Woman at War*, 82.

⁸¹ McLaren, *The History of the Scottish Women's Hospitals*, 111.

⁸² This is also pointed out by Angela K. Smith; according to her, Sandes' "status as a British woman made her unique" from the other (Serbian) women in the Serbian army. Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (Manchester University Press, 2001), 52.

Corbett, Dillion, and the other SWH transport drivers were caught up in the victorious advance into Serbia in 1918; retaking the land from which Sandes had retreated nearly three years earlier.

It is difficult to know, and impossible to explain, what good we thought we were doing on that Advance. For one thing we were obeying orders; but the Serbs were a primitive and mystical people and there was a curious bond between us and their army. We were their sisters, and we were also the might of England fighting on their side. We accepted more than our share of food and shelter, but I hope perhaps, in a curious way, we were worth it.⁸³

It seems obvious, from these two accounts, that the concern of these women was with *defending* — even if just to themselves — their presence in Salonika, and more specifically, with the Serbian army. Their sentiment echoes Henry Fitch when he wrote about his friendships with the Serbians, "Perhaps in a vague sort of way I am really earning my pay after all!"⁸⁴ For Corbett and Sandes, "to put heart into Serbia" was a motivating factor, not the least of three reasons, as it was for Price. They were more than happy to represent the "might of England" fighting for the Serbians.

Price and Sandes or Corbett may have differed in their opinions of the importance of the Macedonian campaign, but virtually all of its participants were united in their opinion that the campaign was severely underrated and unfairly criticized. Emslie echoed the sentiments of her countrymen when, defending both the campaign and one of its much criticized leaders, General Milne, she asserted,

Those of us who saw the thing through, realized what his leadership and force of character meant in carrying through to ultimate success that difficult and important Macedonian "side-show" which, though there was comparatively little heard about it, was so important a factor in the shortening of the war.⁸⁵

Just as in Serbia of 1915, in accounts of the Macedonian campaign, one can detect subtle criticism of the Allied policy that over emphasized the western front over the Balkans and denied the Serbians the help they needed and, perhaps, deserved. Some found a light-hearted way to deal with their frustration. Dorothy Brindley and six other SRF volunteers working in a cellar hospital in Monastir established a newspaper, the *Monastir Monitor*, in July 1917, which poked fun at their situation. An excerpt reads: "It is hoped by the aid of a new micrometre which has just been delivered our Staff will be able to determine the movements of the Macedonian Front with precision."⁸⁶ Others were more serious. Emslie concluded her romantic description of the advance into Florina with "alas!

⁸³ Corbett, *Red Cross in Serbia*, 139-140.

⁸⁴ H M Fitch, "Papers," IWM 76/191/1, 14, 24 and 26 Jan 1917. (See chapter one.)

⁸⁵ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 75.

⁸⁶ Monica Krippner, *The Quality of Mercy: Women at War: Serbia 1915-1918* (London: David & Charles, 1980), 198.

no reinforcements were forthcoming. The Serbians had lost heartily and *men could not be spared from other fronts* [emphasis mine].⁸⁷ Those in Britain were more concerned with the western front: it was closer to home, and there were more soldiers stationed there. It was even understandable that soldiers in the Balkans were more concerned with the western front, if they believed, as Lake did, that victory would be achieved there alone. But for Emslie and others like her, it was not surprising that the Balkan front was important. Emslie was on the Balkan front—she was not "home", nor was she in France. She was working with the Serbs, for whom the Macedonian front *was* the home front. Moreover, the Serbians (and her British colleagues on the Balkan front) appreciated and recognized her work. So, while she sympathized with her compatriot soldiers, she also sympathized with the Serbians.

Fitch's attitudes reflected those of his compatriot volunteers rather than the soldiers. Although he was in the military, he was a career naval officer, and as a liaison officer he had a professional as well as emotional interest in helping the Serbs. His memoir expressed the dismay he and his liaison colleagues felt when the British government failed to voice its support for the Salonika front.⁸⁸

According to Michail,

Going to the Balkans gave female volunteers an opportunity to transcend the barriers of male-dominated hierarchy, to claim roles that they chose and to work in terms determined not by gender politics but by the emergency of war politics. Their personal contact with the locals in need was thus a vehicle in their own effort to distance themselves from their own environment. As a result, at this level of British-Balkan contacts, the Balkan space thus acquired different meanings that were determined not by political - as was the custom until then - but by social debates back in Britain. What had not yet been challenged was the actual dynamics of the human relations, the Balkan people remaining passive recipients of aid, mere observers in the debate over the type and meaning of the contacts that Britons were having with their land.⁸⁹

Although this is an interesting argument it over-emphasizes the difference between home and away. Volunteers were not distancing themselves from their home environment, but bringing many aspects of it with them. Michail also artificially reduces the relationship the British had with the Balkans; while British attitudes were questionable, he does not allow for the nuances of the real emotional attachment that many British had towards the Serbs and Serbia.

⁸⁷ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 81.

⁸⁸ Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 266, 272.

⁸⁹ Eugene Michail, *The British and the Balkans: Forming Images of Foreign Lands, 1900 - 1945* (London: Continuum, 2011), 61.

"To use to the full my initiative and experience": Difference of experience

For volunteers, and especially for women, the Macedonian experience was something extraordinary. A passage in Emslie's biography reveals how her sense of usefulness had given her fulfilment during her war work.⁹⁰ She also wrote, "I realized that the thing that must have kept us going so strongly and happily in the primitive and comfortless Balkans was the feeling that we were so much needed."⁹¹ Volunteers may have been, like the soldiers, exhausted, stressed, and worked to the bone; they may have even been, like the soldiers, risking their lives, but they were, as King put it, "happy."⁹² They were mostly free to interact with one another as they chose. They were entrusted with dangerous and important tasks, and their work was appreciated. They were living a life that was, while not glamorous, certainly adventurous. For many of them, these were all new experiences.

Emslie described the role of her unit in the advance of the Serbians in 1918 as a "humble part"—yet it was a part nonetheless.⁹³ Corbett's account of that advance exudes a kind of euphoric, then delirious, exhaustion. These two, and certainly many others in Macedonia at the time, felt keenly their own "humble part" in the war's end. For them, however small the role they perceived themselves to have played, it was a personal triumph. For the soldiers, the advance meant the end of a miserable campaign and, though this was later denied them by history, a part in ending the war.

Scholars have already explored the idea of the different effects the war had on men (emasculating them), and on women (liberating them). The newfound freedom and opportunities that many women enjoyed as a result of the war seemed to reinforce male bitterness.⁹⁴ Michail argues

This wide popular interest in the story of the aid missions is indicative of the popular theme of the liberalization of the roles of women during wartime. It shows not only the increasing visibility of women but also the projection of an acceptance of the adoption of more adventurous roles by them. It is interesting to note, however, the somewhat safe distance of the field of their actions, away from the home front, and the fact that, for Sandes, the breaking of the roles meant the actual wearing of the uniform of the soldier, something that could have only happened in the context of a totally disorganised Balkan army retreating in defeat.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor*, 224-225.

⁹¹ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 291-292.

⁹² King, *One Woman at War*, 49.

⁹³ Hutton, *With a Women's Unit*, 13.

⁹⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert, "Soldier's Heart; Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higginnet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 199-200.

⁹⁵ Michail, *The British and the Balkans*, 62.

Yet, as has been discussed previously, women wearing uniforms, while contested, was part of British society even before the war. Michail again emphasizes the distance of the Balkan front from the home front, as though this isolation would somehow prevent war participants from returning to British society.

It may at first seem as though the Balkan experiences strengthened these different gendered experiences of the war. The volunteers — mostly women — were largely enthusiastic about their war work, whereas the British soldiers, all men, were reluctant and rather resentful of their posts. While one might assume gender accounts for this disparity, it could be something usually aligned with gender—the roles prescribed to each gender by society. While Sandra Gilbert argues that the "apocalyptic events of this war have a very different meaning for men and women [and] such events were in fact very different for men and women,"⁹⁶ men and women experienced the war differently not simply because they were different genders, but because they did so through the roles which society prescribed to their sexes. Gerard DeGroot notes how "For some women, the war offered the possibility of being able to imitate men, an understandable desire given the barriers to achievement in patriarchal society", citing Sandes as one example. Goldsworthy's argument that the Balkans gave women the opportunity to achieve "honorary male" status has already been mentioned. When women stepped away from their traditional roles and participated in the war in a way much like men were doing, or when men took on roles more similar to those often fulfilled by women, the differences that divided gendered experiences of the war became less significant or, indeed, disappeared altogether.

Some evidence of this is the careful wording that must be used when discussing the experiences of volunteer workers. While the vast majority of them in Macedonia were women, a small but significant portion of them were men. So, the terms "volunteer workers" and "women" cannot be used interchangeably. Furthermore, in Serbia, nearly all of the British (with the exception of the naval mission), men *and* women, were volunteers.⁹⁷ In Serbia, the different perceptions of work that divided the Macedonian participants virtually melted away. Their experiences reflected those of other volunteers, and military professionals, who also saw value in their war work.

In Macedonia, the volunteers had signed up for their posts. Soldiers—the vast majority of men—may have volunteered for the army, but they certainly did not volunteer to be sent to Salonika. In addition, soldiers perceived their work negatively because they

⁹⁶ Gilbert, "Soldier's Heart," 200.

⁹⁷ Charles Fryer, "The Watch on the Danube: The British Naval Mission in Serbia, 1914-1916," *The Mariner's Mirror* 73, no. 3 (1987), 297-312 and Fortier Jones, *With Serbia into Exile: An American's Adventures with the Army That Cannot Die* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1916), 218-222.

could have been serving more gloriously on the western front. Soldiers on the Macedonian front found their contributions undervalued both during the war and severely after, when the definition of valuable war contribution was limited to the western front. Volunteers, whatever their motivation, would have had reasons to prefer Salonika to France or Britain. Male volunteers usually had a reason they were not in the army. For example, Stebbing was a college professor who only had a few months to volunteer.⁹⁸ Although the value of women's war work was recognized by the public during the war (particularly relief work, which, even though it required some appearance changes, was closer to idealised femininity than munitions or farm work), women—and to some extent, male non-combatants, would have been hard pressed to find anywhere else the kind of appreciation and affection poured upon them by the exiled Serbs.

While the experiences of men and women in Macedonia were very different, this difference might have had more to do with the roles they served than their gender. This can be seen in examining how the experiences of male volunteers, particularly in Serbia but also in Macedonia, closely align with those of their female counterparts. Men and women were both likely to criticize their government's policy in Serbia in 1915.⁹⁹ For Stebbing, unloading the hospital's equipment was an urgent matter, because the unit had the opportunity to "get up to the front," and would not be able to go without their stores. "It was a chance in a million... Anyway fighting was going on up in the mountains; there would be wounded, and the Serbians had no properly equipped hospital on that front."¹⁰⁰ Stebbing was as enthusiastic about going to the front as the women in the unit (there were only two other men) were: the thought that they might not be able to was "tormenting."¹⁰¹ It can also be seen in the way the experiences of the females who stepped out of the traditional roles of women's work, and worked closely with men and lived much as those in the army did, also align, to some extent, with that of the soldiers.

In some ways, work on the Macedonian front actually reduced the difference between men and women's experiences. The isolation of the Macedonian front led to a greater interaction between men and women at these fronts. Volunteers close to the army experienced the same frustration with lack of action, and excitement, when it finally began. King, like the male soldiers, lamented the "inactivity" and bemoaned the unlikelihood of her "dream of being in the thick of things coming true."¹⁰² Volunteers, like soldiers,

⁹⁸ Edward Percy Stebbing, *At the Serbian Front in Macedonia* (London: John Lane, 1917), 1.

⁹⁹ See chapter one.

¹⁰⁰ Stebbing, *At the Serbian Front*, 40

¹⁰¹ Stebbing, *At the Serbian Front*, 49.

¹⁰² King, *One Woman at War*, 24.

resented the civilian and political criticisms of the Macedonian campaign and the implied devaluation of their own war work. Those in Serbia did not have this problem. The work of volunteers was greatly praised by the British public.

Women, used to being under-appreciated, or relegated to the drawing-room, revelled in the opportunity to find their work so valued, or the opportunity to do something that fulfilled them for the first time. Men, used to having their work appreciated, were discouraged and resentful to find themselves relegated to a much-criticized "side-show." These differences were due to normative gender roles in society. Perception of the importance of their work also had an impact on the way that participants remembered their war work. This explains why volunteers were more likely to reflect positively upon their Balkan experiences than soldiers were; but the displacement of alternative narratives to the western front experience affected soldiers and volunteers equally.

"All that had happened was preserved within me"¹⁰³: Retrospective importance of the Balkan front

Many accounts of wartime experiences end abruptly without reflecting on the effect these had on postwar lives, so unfortunately a longer discussion is impossible. Yet, from those whose records extend beyond the armistice, individual memory of the Balkan campaign reflects the importance of participants' war experiences in their own lives, despite the relative unimportance in society.¹⁰⁴

After the inclusive atmosphere that prevailed at the Balkan front, many people felt isolated when they returned home, and kept in touch with the friends they had made during the campaign. According to Wakefield and Moody, the Salonika Reunion Society was the first of its kind, although such location-specific military reunion organisations are common today. It was created to fulfil a need for the ex-BSF servicemen, who experienced a "sense of belonging" among those who had shared a common war service.¹⁰⁵ In a retrospective conclusion to his edited diary, William Mather wrote, "Looking back more generally at my present advanced age I can now say that it was a wonderful experience which I would not have missed for worlds and I can only be sorry for those who did not go through this or a similar adventure."¹⁰⁶ Emslie echoed this when she wrote, "I, who had never once felt lonely in the wildest portions of the Balkans, felt very lonely indeed in

¹⁰³ Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor*, 206.

¹⁰⁴ For example, see Fitch, *My Mis-Spent Youth*, 303-304.

¹⁰⁵ Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody, *Under the Devil's Eye: Britain's Forgotten Army at Salonika 1915-1918* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), 233.

¹⁰⁶ William D Mather, *"Muckydonia", 1917-1919: Being the Adventures of a One-Time "Pioneer" in Macedonia and Bulgaria During the First World War* (Ilfracombe: Stockwell, 1979), 254.

England."¹⁰⁷ When he was demobilized, Gwinnell wrote, "Surprisingly I felt very depressed. After four years with all the troubles, I was going to miss my old comrades. And what would I do when I got home? I knew I would not go back to the job I had left."¹⁰⁸ The worry over what to do and how to return to a "civilised" life was one that was shared by many. After the war ended, King wondered and worried about what she would do when the canteens had to close.

If anyone has a streak of vagabond in them, the war has developed it to such an alarming extent that the problem of finding some sort of occupation when we're obliged to quit the Balkans, or wherever we are, is an appalling prospect for thousands of vagabonds...some day we will have to close the canteens, it's coming on me with a sort of cold horror. "What shall I do then?" Live in London, with all one's interests in shops & theatre? Or in Sydney, going to teas & luncheons, playing tennis at the Golf Club...& always being gossiped about & disapproved of? Absolutely impossible, either prospect. I shall have to find work of some sort, but something where I am my own boss, & not tied down by either discipline or convention. Four years' war never taught me discipline, & with every year I live, I hate conventions more.¹⁰⁹

At the end of the memoir of her war work (she was in Turkey until 1920), Emslie described her torn desires: to follow her colleagues "to the outposts of the world where they felt they could do more important work [than in England]"¹¹⁰ or to re-join the society that was enjoying the world.¹¹¹ She was weary of living amongst "suffering people,"¹¹² and yet found normal working conditions "all much too civilized for my liking!"¹¹³ Although Emslie sometimes minimized the significance of her war experiences in her writings, she eventually conceded their importance. At the end of her 1928 book about her war work, she wrote: "After a few weeks I slipped back into my old post, and, after a day or two, felt as if I had never been away. The past five and a half years might have been spent in another world for all there was about me to remind me of them."¹¹⁴ Significantly, the above quotation is reproduced in her later autobiography, with the appended reflection: "but all that had happened was preserved within me and could not be forgotten as long as life and memory lasted."¹¹⁵ Emslie claimed not to have thought about her war service much after it was complete, but her life after the war was markedly different than the one before. The most significant change was her marriage to an officer whom she got to know in

¹⁰⁷ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 291-292.

¹⁰⁸ Gwinnell, "Papers," 130.

¹⁰⁹ King, *One Woman at War*, 169-170.

¹¹⁰ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 199.

¹¹¹ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 247.

¹¹² Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 247.

¹¹³ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 217.

¹¹⁴ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 294.

¹¹⁵ Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor*, 206.

Constantinople, where she would not have been if not for her war work.¹¹⁶ No doubt her experiences as the head of a hospital unit in Serbia prepared her for her Second World War work with the Red Cross in India, where her husband was stationed. She also went on a malarial mission to Albania with one of her wartime pals, "an old friend," Vera Holme. When she accepted the malarial mission to Albania, Emslie's "heart leapt at the thought of returning to the Balkans." This surprised her because

I had hardly ever dwelt on my past experiences there, so engrossed was I in the present. We who had taken part in the war were trying to make new lives for ourselves, and some, like myself, had found it heavy going. I realised that it was not only for pity of suffering people that had urged me to volunteer for Albania; it was a longing to go back into that wild countryside, to lead the primitive life and use to the full my initiative and experience.¹¹⁷

According to Wakefield and Moody, "The members [of the Salonika Reunion Society] realised that few but themselves knew what they had gone through and that keeping the memory of the campaign alive was a task they would have to undertake for themselves."¹¹⁸ Michail writes,

Balkan politics and aid missions attracted proportionally far more media coverage and references in fiction than the Salonika army, during and after the war. The publicity attracted by the presence of British women in the Balkans, which for them was a sign of much-needed inclusion in the popular discourses of the time, must have accentuated the feeling of exclusion and frustration among the Salonika army soldiers.¹¹⁹

Yet the opposite has been shown, with Emslie's defence of the BSF and the appreciation of patients for their doctors and nurses.¹²⁰ Volunteers and soldiers bonded together out of the lack of public appreciation for the Balkan front. The tendency of the war accounts from the Balkan front to try to defend the campaign from its common criticisms was also an attempt of the participants to claim some of the glory, appreciation, or attention that had been devoted to the western front for their own war contributions and that of their colleagues. They bonded together in memory just as they had in experience, through sharing inclusive language of events and evocative experiences of places.¹²¹ They sought out one another for mutual understanding in the wilderness of Britain in the postwar years just as they had sought out the company of their compatriots in the wilderness of Macedonia and Serbia. Outsiders' ignorance and misunderstanding replaced criticisms of the public as the main enemy (aside from mosquitoes) of those who served at the Balkan front.

¹¹⁶ Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor*, 186.

¹¹⁷ Hutton, *Memories of a Doctor*, 224-225.

¹¹⁸ Wakefield and Moody, *Under the Devil's Eye*, 233.

¹¹⁹ Michail, *The British and the Balkans*, 64-65.

¹²⁰ R Hill in M Blackstock, "Papers," IWM 84/4/1 is a good example.

¹²¹ Hutton, *With a Woman's Unit*, 75; Owen, *Salonica and After*, 30.

While volunteers found fulfilment and satisfaction on the Balkan front, soldiers felt betrayed by the rejection of their war experience by the home front in favour of the "soldier's story." Because the British relied so heavily on their connection with the home front and their prewar lives, this disconnect was especially traumatic. Many soldiers were motivated by belief in the war effort, with the result that they often felt disillusioned with their own part in the war. Volunteers, on the other hand, were similarly motivated by their contribution to the war effort, but also felt personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement. The same was true for professional officers, for many of whom the Balkan front also presented opportunities not accessible elsewhere. The contrasts between these motivations were made stark by the lack of recognition for the BSF and the positive reception of aid workers. However, the differing experience of appreciation did not drive a wedge between volunteers and soldiers, who each championed the others' cause.

The memory of the campaign, both individual and collective, echoes the experience of the campaign itself. Balkan front veterans, whether soldiers or volunteers, were united in their rejection of criticisms of the campaign and struggled against the de-legitimization of their war experience, while the western front "trenches" became the common cultural definition. The emergence of the "soldier's story" partially explains why the Balkan front is ignored by so many historians, but the memory that individuals had of their experiences remained an important part of their self-identity, just as the isolation they encountered while actually in the Balkans became an important part of their war experience.

Conclusion

As is usually the case with PhDs, the final scope of my project is necessarily much narrower than my original aim. Though the themes and outlook of the thesis were informed by the sources and evolved organically as I uncovered sources, there are a few topics that regretfully proved impossible to include due to restraints on time and resources. There is material here for a closer reading of the interplay between local identities and ideas of Britishness. I would have liked to more fully explore the political leanings of many of the sources is an area. It would be interesting to study the reactions to male cross-dressing further to examine the effect on the perception of gender roles. My biggest regret is lacking the time and space to do a close comparison of retrospective and contemporary sources for those people who produced both, to see how they remembered their experiences differently from how they experienced them at the time. I had addressed these differences in places but a monograph on this topic would benefit from including a more complete exploration.

I was inspired to write a PhD on the British in the Balkans because, delving into the research, I found the historical sources to be so engaging and entertaining. A sense of the atmosphere comes so clearly across and through the sources that I wanted to see what could be learned from the British society depicted. I have tried to give a sense of this here.

Time and time again the same tropes, observations, events and people are mentioned in sources disparate from one another. Records of friendships, rivalries and allegiances were written by both sides. The Balkan front was isolated and it was difficult to leave; many people stayed for years, if not the duration of the war. They left behind rich material not simply for the study of wartime experiences but for the study of the effect of these experiences on a community.

It seemed logical to draw inspiration for the structure of this thesis from the themes that come across clearly in the sources. These themes were: a sense of pride in Britishness and a heightened awareness of national identity, a strong sense of community with both positive and negative aspects, a pervasive concern for the activities and concerns of the everyday, a deep appreciation for the defining events on this theatre of war, reaction to and interaction with space, and a concern for the motivations and perception of work of their work. Throughout all of these themes, Balkan front participants drew heavily from their home, prewar lives to inform their wartime experiences and interactions. The knowledge, customs and behaviours that British people brought with them served as the foundation for the ways in which they coped with life at the front. Although changes were necessary, the new social and cultural norms that they created on the Balkan front were an

attempt to reflect those primary customs. How they modified certain behaviours in order to maintain ideals reveal what was most important to the British. Furthermore, the imperial experience of British society informed the ways in which they adapted to a new, exotic and temporary surrounding. Therefore, wartime experiences in fact represented a continuity of British values and society.

Wartime participants (female volunteers as well as male soldiers) relied on familiarity in order to make sense of their surroundings and experiences, which suggests continuity with their prewar lives. Because of the need for familiarity, participants normalized their war experience by either asserting continuity with their prewar lives, utilizing familiar discourse to frame the narrative of their experience (even – or especially – when their experiences were unfamiliar or exotic), or engaging with their collective experience of the Balkan front as a community. These themes can be seen through this thesis: the British relied on their prewar connections in order to form their wartime social and professional lives on the Balkan front (chapter two); they dealt with the unfamiliar atmosphere of Salonika by utilizing the familiar discourse of the exotic to frame the narrative of their experiences (chapter five); they created a new communal identity as a front in order to make sense of the significant events within their community (chapter four). These themes are also overlapping: the British defined the familiarity of Britishness against the exoticness of the foreigners they encountered (chapter one) – exoticising was a familiar way of dealing with the unfamiliar. The hardships and unfamiliar experiences of war helped to build community, and community equalled normality.

Together, these themes create the undeniable sense that familiarity enabled participants to not only cope with the ordeals of wartime, but to make sense of their experiences, to parse them in a way that not only they, but also their families and friends at home, could understand and relate to. Familiarity, in essence, was the conduit for continuity for everyday experiences through the war.

Although the popular perception of the role of the Great War in British society tends to emphasize its importance, more recent scholarship argues that, rather than representing a watershed in history, the war was a temporary aberration (if that) in the generally static story of British society. Continuity shaped both the British experience of war and their postwar reflections on their experiences. The war effort was not marked by a disconnection with the past, but a connection to it, where British experiences of empire greatly informed their reactions to and interactions with their local, other nationalities, and themselves. Moreover, British attempts to create a society on the Balkan front were based on that of the home front. Unsurprisingly, those who were the most unhappy were those

who were the most cut off – their existence was the furthest away from that they had left behind in Britain.

This is a study of a makeshift British society in a setting that was neither empire nor metropolis, at a front that was somewhat disconnected from the war effort by distance, by politics, and by military strategy. It is not just the micro-society of Britishness existing in Salonika which makes this era so interesting for a study, but also the pressures which worked to create this micro society in the first place. The war, the specifics of the expatriate community, and the lack of respect afforded to those on the Balkan front by those on other fronts were all important features of the British experience. This study is, in essence, a cultural history of a micro-society – the British abroad in Serbia and Greece, 1914-1920. In many ways it is a history of an expatriate community, or a fin-de-empire outpost. The war had a significant impact on all of the circumstances which made up the society – it was after all, the reason that they were all there. It formed the background, brought them together, and weaved in and out of their quotidian lives. For some (such as front line soldiers), it was obviously much more the reality than for others. Yet what is striking is not the uniqueness of the setting and circumstances, but rather how much this thesis has turned out to be a record of everyday life.

While the Balkan front is often regarded as an insignificant part of the Great War, if regarded at all, the appeal of these ordinary people with extraordinary stories who served on the front has inspired a continuing interest in researchers and members of the public alike, as evidenced by the small but consistently growing body of work about the Balkan front. The small scale has enabled me to make a fairly comprehensive study of the sources available, and to address a wider range of topics than is possible in most cultural histories of war. While it was at times a challenge to engage with the vast historiographies of sport, food, or sex, for example, I believe it has paid dividends by helping me to produce a thesis that is, while narrow in scope of study, fairly wide in addressing these topics of culture and everyday life. The large presence of middle-class British women on the Balkan front (mainly aid workers) meant that the officers of the British army had their social equivalents present to form a microcosm of British society, creating the perfect lens through which to examine the way that Britons dealt with the changes brought by the war. I had difficulty uncovering sources which revealed working class perspective of these events and themes. My focus on aspects of everyday culture might arguably have deemphasized the importance of military affairs. As discussed in the introduction, Wakefield and Moody's *Under the Devil's Eye* provides a good description of the experiences of ordinary soldiers, just as Michail's work provides an analysis of the memory of the Balkan campaign. I hope that this work

will be useful not only to disciples of this "forgotten" and "unknown" front, but to those who wish to explore how prewar norms and customs informed wartime experiences of identity, relationships, community, everyday life, events, space, and perceptions of worth.

On a global scale, the Balkan front seems both distant and insignificant in comparison to other historical subjects of Great War study. I have sometimes struggled to come up with a justification for my research other than the undeniable human interest that lies within the lives and records of participants. While the Balkan front is an under-studied aspect of the Great War, some might argue that is it understudied for a reason – that it *is* insignificant. Although my interest is social, not military, researching an understudied area of history should have some justification, other than simply adding to the behemoth that is the study of the Great War simply for the sake of it. "Understudied" and "*interesting*" are not enough.

With the anniversary years now upon us, not only historians but politicians, media, societies and the public are reflecting on the significance of the Great War. Like many contemporary historians, I have grown frustrated with the portrayal of the war in the media and popular perception. One hundred years on, the story of the Great War has been reduced to clichés and memes: poppies, war poets, trenches, and a sense of a tragedy so great, so utterly overwhelming that it could not be comprehended. Thankfully, that is now changing. With the influx of Great War-related media, including comment, fiction, and scholarly study, more of it focuses on the role of women and minorities, Britain's allies, Britain's involvement beyond the Western front, and the effect on and of popular culture. There is a renewed interest in individual lives, with projects such as Lives of the First World War encouraging members of the public to research their ancestors, add to the database of knowledge, and reflect on the experiences of the war on an individual level.¹ Relating to war participants on an individual level is key to reaching beyond the canonized "soldier's story" of mud and blood in the trenches to experience a better understanding of the Great War.

Taken as a whole, the history of the Great War is overwhelming. Numbers of casualties are so great that they cannot be comprehended, leaving only a sense of the scale of the tragedy, but no real understanding of it. And that is what makes the study of individual lives so *interesting*. The stories of individual participants are told in a way that the reader can recognise. Recreation, food and drink, relationships – these are all things that individuals can immediately relate to. This places a discussion of the impact of war

¹ <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/>

experiences within an understandable context. And when we relate on an individual level, we can begin to understand the impact of the war as a whole.

The Balkan front is an ideal setting within which to study the war at a micro-level. Isolated and distant, but with a large group of record-producing Britons, British society on the Balkan front was just small enough to enable a study of popular culture and wartime experiences – not just one aspect of it. While differences between the fronts will have led to different experiences, the dovetailing of my research with that of aspects of popular culture on the western front suggests that the impacts of these experiences might not be as different as one would expect. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that this study will be useful to researchers of popular culture and individual experience, regardless of the setting. It will also be of interest to general readers who seek to expand their understanding of the Great War by finding a story they can relate to. This thesis is a story of how Britons, individually and collectively, understood their own experiences of wartime events and situations, and is a reflection of the enduring nature of culture.

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