



# WOMEN AND WAR

## The Experience of European Women in the First World War

Primary Source Analysis

Recommended Grade Levels: 9-12

Course/Content Area: Social Studies

Authored by: Laura Huffman, National WWI Museum and Memorial Teacher Fellow

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What was the experience of European women during the First World War?

**SUMMARY:** Using primary sources compiled by either students or the instructor, students will examine a wide variety of documents and artifacts that represent the experiences of European women during the First World War. Following this interaction, students should be able to create a thesis statement responding to the prompt, “Analyze the experience of European women during the First World War.”

**STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:** AP European History Curricular Standards (College Board)

- The course emphasizes relevant factual knowledge about European history from 1450 to the present to highlight intellectual, cultural, political, diplomatic, social, and economic developments.
- The course teaches students to analyze evidence and interpretations presented in historical scholarship.
- The course includes extensive instruction in analysis and interpretation of a wide variety of primary sources, such as documentary material, maps, statistical tables, works of art, and pictorial and graphic materials

**TIME NEEDED:** Two 50-minute class periods

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will:  
analyze primary sources to discover the impact the First World War had on the experience of European women.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY:** Language Arts, Art History

**THEMES & CONNECTIONS:** This lesson was taught following a formal study of the First World War, including instruction on the following:

1. Causes of the War
2. Course of the War (including battles, trench warfare, propaganda, etc.)
3. The Russian Revolution
4. Effects of the War (including the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles.)

After instruction on the 1914-1918 period in Europe, we were able to place the experiences of European women into its proper context.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Primary sources – see Appendix
- Variety of artifacts
- Archivist gloves (optional)
- Student analysis forms

# LESSON

## PRE-ASSESSMENT:

Ask students what they know (or think they know) about the experiences of European women during the First World War. This can be done in writing, via discussion, etc.

## DIRECTIONS:

Prior to instruction, provide primary sources to students for analysis. You may also consider having students collect their own sources to share with the class.

1. Give students their objective: Having interacted with primary sources, discover the impact the First World War had on European women.
2. Provide Guiding Questions students should use when working with individual primary sources. (Not all of these questions will be answerable.)
  - a. Who is the author of this source?
  - b. What is the gender of the author?
  - c. What country or countries does the author represent? What is his or her relationship with his or her country?
  - d. When was this source created (before, during, or after the War)?
  - e. What do we know about this source? How does the source's background influence the source (point of view)?
  - f. Why was this source created?
  - g. How was this source used?
  - h. What is the age of the author?
  - i. What is the class of the author?
  - j. What is the milieu of the source (written, oral, visual, etc.)?
  - k. What is the format of the source (letter, poem, poster)?
  - l. Why has this source, in particular, survived?
  - m. Does this source have a connection to any of the other sources? If so, how?
  - n. Was the experience of the person(s) in the source overwhelming positive, negative, or neutral?
3. What can this source tell you, specifically, about the experience of at least one European woman during the First World War?
4. Determine how students will interact with sources – as individuals, with partners, in trios or small groups, in larger groups, or as a full-class activity.  
Students working individually may want to examine a source and then rotate/swap that source with another student until they've have meaningful interaction with as many sources as possible.
5. Distribute sources accordingly.
6. Determine how students will record their interactions with the sources (via a chart created by the instructor or by the student(s) or via notes taken by the student(s).
7. Allow students time for meaningful interaction with the sources provided.
8. Allow students to ask and answer each other's questions (and to ask the instructor questions where needed).
9. Bring the class back together (unless already working as a full-class) and assess their findings (see below) via discussion, brainstorming, writing, etc.

**POST-ASSESSMENT:**

Discussion regarding the primary question: Analyze the experience of European Women during the First World War. Students can do this via discussion, by crafting a thesis statement to answer the question, or by writing a full essay. The instructor may a full DBQ (document-based question) from this exercise, asking students to use specific sources as evidence to back up their assertions.

**MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMMODATIONS:**

Teachers can obtain actual artifacts to include with this lesson. When doing so, ask students to use archivist gloves when handling the artifacts to enhance the authenticity of the lesson. An instructor can modify this lesson to about with any group during the War, beyond gender to class, race, socio-economic status, country of origin etc. It would be just as easy to fashion a lesson in “What was the experience of African Americans during the First World War?” and simply provide (or have students research) primary sources to suit the lesson’s subject and intention.

AP students can work with this lesson independently or in small groups; less advanced students could work as a large-group activity with direct teacher instruction.

## APPENDIX: 35 PRIMARY SOURCES

### Document 1:

Photograph: Women's Battalion of Death – 1917 (Russia)

*Maria Leont'evna Botchkareva "Yashka" (in soldier's uniform, center) supervises shooting practice.*

---



“First World War: Women at War: Maria Bochkareva.” Spartacus Educational.” <http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWbochkareva.htm>.

**Document 2:**

Artwork: 'Widows and Orphans' by Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) – 1919 (Germany)

*One of the most important graphic artists in Europe in the twentieth century, the first woman to be elected a member of the Prussian Academy of the Arts. Lost her son, Peter, a young painter, in November 1914.*

---



“First World War: Art: Kathe Kollwitz.” Spartacus Educational. <http://spartacus-educational.com/ARTkollwitz.htm>.



**Document 3:**

Irish Recruitment Poster (British) c. 1915

---



"For the glory of Ireland". Poster. Dublin: Hely's Limited, 1915. From the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003668400/>.

#### Document 4:

Letter - printed in *Zhenskii vestnik* (Women's herald) by Sofia Pavlovna Iur'eva  
– 1914 (Russia)

*This letter was printed in Zhenskii vestnik, "a public scientific literary monthly devoted to equal rights and improvement of women's condition." There is no record that Iur'eva succeeded in forming a women's unit, but hundreds of Russian women engaged in active service in the military.*

---

"In the age in which we are living, the age of a great European war, everyone desires to offer up their strength on the altar of the fatherland, everyone strives to give at least something to their homeland. We women likewise do not wish to remain the idle spectators of great events – many of you are joining the ranks of soldiers as nurses to lessen, as best you can, the suffering of wounded heroes. I too burn with the desire to be useful to my dear homeland, but I do not feel called to be a nurse: I want to enlist as a volunteer in the active army. I entreat people of wealth to respond to my appeal and to give me the means necessary to fulfill my cherished dream – to form a detachment of Amazons, of women soldiers.

Do not think that this letter is a hoax, or the whim or an unbalanced mind – no, in this I see my calling, my purpose, my happiness!

I want to shed my blood for the fatherland, to give my life for my homeland!"

---

Sofia Pavlovna, "Letter," in *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I*, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet (New York: Penguin, 1999):19-20.

Original Source: Sofia Pavlovna, "Letter." *Zhenskii vestnik*, November 1914, 234-35.



### Document 5:

Political Writing: “The Debit Balance of War” by Ellen Karolina Sofia Key (1849-1926) – 1916 (Sweden)

*Ellen Key taught at a workers’ institute and an elite women’s school, and gradually discovered a gift for public speaking. By fifty she was a full-time public speaker, visiting Finland, Norway, and England on behalf of maternalist-feminist and pacifist causes. Her political positions offended both left and right: she fought against women’s economic insecurity, especially the wretched conditions of maternity and its dependence on marital status, but she opposed the vote for women.*

---

“How many things of great value are not irreparably lost! Everywhere in the world, in neutral countries as well as warring, people feel themselves robbed. They have lost the ideals that warmed and uplifted them; they are cut off from all international work in the fields of science, literature, and art; they are deprived of the joy they shared with one another in intellectual achievements. The bridges that span the boundary rivers of national prejudices and self-interest will be much more slowly replaced than the physical means of communication.”

---

Key, Ellen Karolina Sofia. “The Debit Balance of War,” in *War, Peace, and the Future: A Consideration of Nationalism and Internationalism, and of the Relation of Women to War*, trans. Hildegard Norberg (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 1-10.

**Document 6:**

Poster (Text only) Organization of Women Workers, Petrograd Bolshevik Committee  
– 1916 (Russia)

---

“Comrades, Working women! This is the day of our solidarity; the day when the working woman, breaking her ancient bonds of submission, slavery and humiliation, proudly join ranks of the international proletariat for the struggle with the common enemy – capital. Working women! The government has sent our sons to their crucifixion for the sake of capital. So build your own organizations, band together in workshop and factory, office and shop, and let us roar in the face of insatiable capital: ‘Enough blood! Down with the war. Bring the criminal autocracy to justice!’”

---

Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

### Document 7:

Memoir – “Amputation” by Maria Luisa Perduca (1896-1966) – 1917 (Italy)

---

“The blood gushed from the cut vessels; he dried; he stopped again, put down the amputating knife; the matron handed him the saw, he grasped it ordering that I inject the patient with morphine. He placed the tool between the torn limbs and began to saw.

A long creak, a blunt blow, it was over.

That instant penetrated us, our brains, our nerves, our flesh, our spirits, and did not abandon us for many days.

The leg fell by sheer force into the basin placed below, like an object that was dead, finished.

A soldier wrapped it in a wax sheet and took it away; and by a strange contrast, we felt as though something alive were being taken away, a person.”

---

Maria Luisa Perduca, “Un’amputazione,” in *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I*, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet (New York: Penguin, 1999): 218.

Original Source: Maria Luisa Perduca, “Un’amputazione,” in *Un anno d’ospedale (giugno 1915-novembre 1916): Note di un’infermiera* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1917) 54-57.

## Document 8:

Personal Letter: Maude Gonne to William Butler Yeats (1866-1955)

– 1914 (Britain/Irish)

*Irish republican, revolutionary, and journalist. Founder of the group Inghinidhe Na Eireann (Daughters of Ireland). Her militant activities earned her 'repeated spells in prison.'*

---

“This war is an inconceivable madness which has taken hold of Europe – It is unlike any other war that has ever been. IT has no great idea behind it. Even the leaders hardly know why they have entered into it, & (sic) certainly the people do not – (I except England from this, she, as usual, is following her commercial selfishness getting others to fight so her commerce of existence shall be ensured by the weakening of Germany.)

...

“If it goes on, it is race suicide for all the countries engaged in it who have conscription, only the weaklings will be left to carry on the race; & their whole intellectual & industrial life is already at a standstill. The victor will be nearly as enfeebled as the vanquished. And who is to end it? In France, in Germany, in Austria only the old men & children & women are left, these are not necessary elements for a revolution which might bring peace.

Could the women, who are after all the guardians of the race, end it? Soon they will be in a terrible majority, unless famine destroys them too. I always felt the wave of the woman’s power was rising, the men are destroying themselves and we are looking on – Will it be in our power to end this war before European civilization is swept away...”

---

Maude Gonne, from *The Gonne-Yeats Letters, 1893-1938*, ed. Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares (London: Hutchinson, 1992), 348-9.

Found in *Women’s Writing on the First World War*. Agnes Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman, and Judith Hattaway, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.)

## Document 9:

Book: *A Frenchwoman's Notes on the War* by Claire de Pratz (? – 1916?) – 1916 (France)  
*A French journalist - may have been one of the casualties on the ferry Sussex which was attacked by a German U-boat on 29 March 1916 on her way from Dieppe to Dover.*

---

“There are even no dinner-parties now given in Paris, but occasionally a hostess invites a few of her old friends to a simple dinner – *le dîner de guerre*, she calls it – composed merely of two dishes. As the men-servants are all away at the war, the war-dinner is served by a simple handmaiden. Economy being severely practised (*sic*) in the household because of the necessary charities to be performed, it is taken quite as a matter of course that one's hostess should deprive herself of all unnecessary luxury, in order to come to the aid of some poor mother of a starving family.

The table therefore is not decorated with expensive flowers nor covered with a lace tablecloth. But the diners – not in evening-dress – gather around and chat together with greater intimacy and *abandon* than ever before. The suppression of all pomp and show has reduced the guests to their native simplicity, and they are all the better for it. At these informal gatherings, as well as at the knitting-parties, which have replaced the formal ‘at home’ calls in the afternoon, the conversation becomes more cordial, and people who formerly would have found time only to be mere acquaintances now become friends. The profounder qualities are allowed to become more apparent. One is not ashamed to show the true depths of one's heart, any more than one is ashamed to own one's poverty. It is no longer ‘the thing’ to be smart, but to be simple, real, and kindly.”

---

Claire de Pratz, *A Frenchwoman's Notes on the War* (London: Constable, 1916), 154-7, 290.

Found in *Women's Writing on the First World War*. Agnes Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman, and Judith Hattaway, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.)

## Document 10:

Short Story: ‘The Godmother’ by Lucie Delarue-Mardrus (1884-1945) – 1918 (France)

*A well-known member of the French aristocratic elite, and a friend of Proust, Gide, and Rodin. Her work tended to feature in school readers, especially in France’s secondary school for girls.*

---

“To have some one at the front, some one for whom to tremble, some one to grow tender over or to take pride in – that is today a prime necessity for the feminine heart. A woman of our time suffers if she is not on an equality in this respect with all the others. To be like the others – that is also a form of Sacred Union. Our feelings are the same, whether death is concerned or glory. Joy and grief are shared equally. That is why the sorrows of war, despite its horror, are perhaps lighter to bear than the sorrows of peace. No woman today feels isolated, whatever may be her misfortune or her happiness. There is among women a new mental war mood, which has all the authority of an established fashion.”

---

Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, ‘The Godmother’, from *Tales of Wartime France by Contemporary Writers Illustrating the Spirit of the French People at War*, trans. William L. McPherson (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1918), 97-108.

Found in *Women’s Writing on the First World War*. Agnes Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman, and Judith Hattaway, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.)

**Document 11:**

Artifact: Belgian Medal

---



---

“Pendant l’Absence” (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial).



**Document 12:**

Artifact: *In Eiserner Zeit* Medal– 1916 (Germany)

---



---

“In Eiserner Zeit” medal, (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial).

### Document 13:

Political Writing: “An Appeal to Women from Austrian Socialist Women” (excerpt)  
by Adelheid Popp (1869-1939) – 1915 (Austria)

*Popp received only three years of formal education before she went to work at age ten. Self-educated, she read novels when she was not working as a domestic or in a factory. As leader of the Austrian Social Democratic women’s movement, Popp demanded the vote in 1911. She wrote a history of the women’s Social Democratic movement, and treatises on women’s labor. From 1919 to 1934 she was a member of the Austrian National Assembly.*

---

“The blood of our relatives, friends, and comrades is being shed on the battlefields, and we do not call only the workers of Austria and Germany our own. The workers of Britain, Belgium, France, Russia and Serbia are just as dear to us, and we know they have, just as our slaughtered workers have, mothers, wives and children who weep for them. Nothing can separate us from the working class of other nations but the frontiers. We are conscious, even if we speak in different tongues, that we must take joint action, because the working class of all countries must suffer from the same fate. It appears to us that one of the most terrible consequences of the war is the fact that communications between the working men and women of all countries have been cut off. But nevertheless we cannot despair! We are conscious that the brotherhood of the peoples is a historical need, made even more necessary by the miseries of daily life.”

---

From *A Group of Letters from Women of the Warring Nations* (Chicago: Woman’s Peace Party, 1915)

## Document 14:

Memoir: “Fighting on Mount Chukus” (excerpt) by Flora Sandes (1876-1956)  
– 1916 (Britain)

*Flora Sandes went to Serbia with a St. John's Ambulance Brigade a week after the war broke out. She was 38. After combating the typhus epidemic and working in an operating room under the Serbian Red Cross, she joined the Second Infantry Regiment as a wound dresser following the Bulgarian invasion of Serbia. Within three weeks she took up arms and became a soldier; she was quickly promoted to sergeant. Wounded in 1916, she was decorated for bravery.*

---

“I had only a revolver and no rifle of my own at that time, but one of my comrades was quite satisfied to lend me his and curl himself up and smoke. We all talked in whispers, as if we were stalking rabbits, though I could not see that it mattered much if the Bulgarians did hear us, as they knew exactly where we were, as the bullets that came singing round one's head directly one stood up proved, but they did not seem awfully good shots. It is a funny thing about rifle fire, that a person's instinct always seems to be to hunch up his shoulders or turn up his coat collar when he is walking about, as if it were rain, thought the bullet you hear whistle past your ears is not the one that is going to hit you.”

---

From “Fighting on Mount Chukus” in *An English Woman-Sergeant in the Serbian Army* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916), 134-147.

## Document 15:

Journalism: “Hands that War” (excerpt) by Rebecca West, pseudonym of Cicily Isabel Fairfield (1892-1983) – 1916 (Britain)

*Rebecca West was a prolific writer and political radical who became conservative in her final decades.*

---

“Every morning at six, when the night mist still hangs over the marshes, 250 of these girls are fetched by a light railway from their barracks on a hill two miles away. When I visited the works they had already been at work for nine hours, and would work for three more. This twelve-hour shift is longer than one would wish, but it is not possible to introduce three shifts, since the girls would find an eight-hour day too light and would complain of being debarred from the opportunity of making more money; and it is not so bad as it sounds, for in these airy and isolated huts there is neither the orchestra or rattling machines nor the sense of a confined area crowded with tired people which makes the ordinary factory such a fatiguing place. Indeed, these girls, working teams of six or seven in those clean and tidy rooms, look as if they were practicing a neat domestic craft rather than a deadline domestic process...

Surely, never before in modern history can women have lived a life so completely parallel to that of the regular Army. The girls who take up this work sacrifice almost as much as men who enlist, for although they make on average 30s a week they are working much harder than most of them, particularly the large number who were formerly domestic servants, would ever have dreamed of working in peacetime.”

---

“Hands that War: The Cordite Makers,” in *The Young Rebecca*, ed. Jane Marcus (New York: Vintage, 1982), 380-83.

**Document 16:**

Political Writing: “Call to the Women of All Nations” (excerpt) by Aletta Jacobs (1854-1929) – 1915 (Netherlands)

*Aletta Jacobs was the first woman in the Netherlands to graduate from a university, becoming a physician in 1879. She held free clinics for working women, prescribed contraception, translated feminist works into Dutch and campaigned for women’s suffrage. Jacobs was a pacifist who viewed the “armed forces as an unmitigated evil.” With Jane Addams she organized the International Congress of Women at The Hague, attended by 1,136 women from twelve countries in 1915.*

---

“We women of the Netherlands, living in a neutral country, accessible to the women of all other nations, therefore take upon ourselves the responsibility of calling together such an International Congress of Women. We feel strongly that at a time where there is so much hatred among nations, we women must show that we can retain our solidarity and that we are able to maintain a mutual friendship.

Women are waiting to be called together. The world is looking to them for their contribution towards the solution of the great problems of to-day.

Women, whatever your nationality, whatever your party, your presence will be of great importance.”

---

*Jus suffragii*, March 1, 1915, 245-46.

## Document 17:

Political Writing: “The Woman at the Plow” (excerpt) by Gertrud Bäumer (1873-1954) – 1915 (Germany)

*Gertrud Bäumer started as a school teacher, earned her doctorate, went on to publish the newspaper Die Frau (the Woman), published a handbook of the women’s movement, and from 1910-1919 led the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (Union of German Women’s Organizations) which worked for women’s employment and welfare and entered debates over prostitution, suffrage, and morality. Her political philosophy was nationalist and interventionist. A woman’s importance, she maintained, lay in her ‘female nature’ and the development of her female abilities.*

---

“Now – as she casts a stone to the field’s edge she raises her face. A discreet face, not eloquent but simple. No expression but attention to work. Her soul follows the iron in the brown earth, the heavy step of the horse that she drives and curbs; the approach that must be, to which her worn-out limbs have belonged, as long as she can remember. The dumb demand of the earth and her duty are tightly intertwined. She has no rights of her own next to the clod that must receive her seed. Neither this hitherto unknown sense of abandonment, nor this dull amazement at the incomprehensible foreign powers who reached suddenly into her life, no the natural limit of her womanly power has anything to say before the simple daily law that she follows when she leads the horse from the stall, because the time has come to plow.”

---

“Die Frau am Pfluge,” in *Weit hinter den Schützengräben: Aufsätze aus dem Weltkrieg* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1916), 125-27.

**Document 18:**

Artifact: Postcard – 1915 (Germany)

---



---

“German mail carrier postcard, 2005.28.13” (Kansas City, MO: National World War I Museum and Memorial).



**Document 19:**

Political Writing: “The Falsehood of Maternal Love” (excerpt) by Vieille Ortie  
– 1916 (Italy)

*Vielle Ortie was probably the pseudonym (old Thistle) of a contributor to La difesa delle lavoratrici, the socialist fortnightly for women workers edited by Anna Kuliscioff.*

---

“Millions of women, millions of mothers have been separated from their children, millions of these ‘heroines’ of the most miraculous love have been parted from the most beautiful, the healthiest, the most able-bodied creatures; if we believe in legend, then millions of mothers have had their hearts amputated, their wombs lacerated; and yet, no one has screamed out. No one has uttered a cry, attempted a gesture, dared a defense, expressed her desperation, her agony, her rebellion. Have any of you heard of women in Germany, in Russia, or in France opposing the recruitment of their children, or invading the barracks, or blocking the gates to stations? No. No one has breathed a word.”

---

From *La difesa delle lavoratrici*, January 2, 1916.

**Document 20:**

Letter: to the Minister of Public Works by Madame Journiac (?-?) – 1918 (France)

---

“January 19, 1918

Dear Mr. Minister,

In the name of all the wives of those fighting at the front, of war widows, of families in the commune of Bézenet whose children are at the front, I protest with all my energy against the unjust, ignoble, scandalous way in which coal is being distributed in this commune. The draft-dodgers of the coal mine, judged to be the only interested parties, receive 540 kilos of coal a month for their homes, while the wives of those who give their blood for the fatherland, the war widows, receive 150 kilos. Please show the willpower to exercise your authority and put a halt to this sleazy behavior, or tell me if it is in our husbands’ absence from home that people make fun of us while, to cap the injustice, our men each day give their lives. You have assumed your responsibilities, Minister – well then! Respond or act!

[signed]

Madame Journiac

---

From A.M. Michelin, “*L’opinion publique dans l’Allier pendant la Première Guerre mondiale,*” master’s thesis (*maîtrise*) directed by Jean-Jacques Becker, and deposited at the University of Clermont-Ferrand.

## Document 21:

Journalism: “Country Women” (excerpt) by Matilde Serao (1856-1927) – 1916 (Italy)  
*Matilde Serao was born in Greece to a Greek mother and Italian father. She was brought up in poverty in Naples and trained as a teacher. She turned to professional journalism and during World War I remained neutral but antifascist.*

---

“And thus the Italian country women in summer and autumn have doubled, tripled their daily work: the heaviest, the hardest, the most extenuating work of men, they have taken on with tacit courage, with mute firmness, keeping within their large heart – yes, large and simple heart! – the sadness and despair for those who are absent, far away. There were no men for the reaping, the threshing, the pressing of the olives, and of the grapes: the women have reaped, threshed, made oil and wine. In no Italian region, not even where work is the hardest and the vastest, in no farmtown where men and machines once worked, has an inch of land been left unharvested, unsown: the country women have done all of this, from girls aged eight to women of seventy, with dedication, with devotion, touching the arid hearts of the meanest landowners. While the Italian country man, obedient and sober, valorous and modest, fought, everywhere, much more, much better than the skeptical and weary city worker, the Italian country woman worked the land, as if she were a man, at the same time nursing a newborn, or feeding soup to an old grandfather. Who will sing your pure and humble glories, Italian country woman?”

---

Notini, Sylvia, trans. “Contadine” from *Parla una donna: Diario femminile di Guerra, Maggio 1915 – Marzo 1916* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1916).

## Document 22:

Journalism: “L. Dorliat” – 1918 (France)

---

“However, you see, I hurt myself too. Forgetting that my buffing machine does an incalculable number of turns a second, I brushed against it with my arm. Clothing and flesh were all taken off before I even noticed. They had to scrape the bone, bandage me every day, I was afraid of an amputation, which luckily was avoided. Only in the last few days have I been able to go without a sling and use my arm; next week I go back to the workshop. I don’t want them to change my job, I’m used to my machine and a fresh apprenticeship would not please me at all. I assure you, the first day I was in this noise, near these enormous blast furnaces, opposite the huge machine at which I had to work for hours, I was afraid. We are all like that, all the more so that we are not given time to reflect. You have to understand and act quickly. Those who lose their heads don’t accomplish anything, but they are rare. IN general, one week suffices to turn a novice into a skilled worker...

Yet among us there are women like myself who had never done anything; others who did not know how to sew or embroider; nothing discouraged us. As for me I don’t complain, this strained activity pleases me. I can thus forget my loneliness – and not having any children, what else should I do with my time?”

---

“À l’usine,” in *Souvenirs de Parisiennes en temps de guerre*, ed. Camille Clément (Paris, Berger, 1918).

### Document 23:

Interview: Mary Gotoubyova (1899-?) by Arno Dosch Fleurot – 1917 (Russia)

*Mary Gotoubyova was reportedly the first woman in the Women's Battalion of Death to kill a German. She was wounded on her second day at the front and sent back with ten comrades to a hospital in Petrograd. She and the other members of the battalion carried cyanide of potassium in case of capture. Of over two hundred in this command only fifty remained after their first battle: twenty were killed, eight taken prisoner, and the rest wounded.*

---

"I am wounded they say. I call it mere scratches, but it may keep me from the front several weeks after only two days' fighting. At any rate, I was in the front trenches and I got my German. I am feeling better already, and hope I go right back. I must go; my country needs me. That is why I enlisted.

I saw soldiers in Petrograd demanding not to be sent to the front, and I realized that the country needed every man and woman who was not a coward. Then the woman's battalion was formed and I joined immediately. I have never regretted it. I was never afraid, and I ask only the privilege to bear a gun against the enemy again. I must fill the place of men who will not fight.

Going to war is not too much for a woman. I was always strong. Still, being a woman, I wondered if it would be too fatiguing. Once at the front, I forgot whether I was a man or a woman. I was just a soldier. The only preparation I made against the enemy was to wrap the upper portion of my body firmly. In the burning battle I was never hampered on account of my sex. The soldiers, the real brave soldiers, treated me like a comrade. Only the cowards jeered."

---

Chicago Daily Tribune, July 31, 1917.

## Document 24:

Diary 1916-1918: Countess Nora Kinsky (1888-1923)

– 1916 (Austria-Hungary)

*Countess Nora Kinsky was selected in 1916 by the Austro-Hungarian imperial ministry of war to inspect Russian camps for prisoners of war, from Nikolsk, near Vladivostok, to the Caspian. On this mission she was to register complaints by prisoners, check conditions for violations of The Hague conventions, draw up lists of those buried in Russian cemeteries, and seek for those missing in action. In her negotiations, her mastery of English, French, Italian, Czech, Polish, Croat, and Romanian as well as German and Hungarian were indispensable, and she taught herself Russian and Turkish during her travels.*

---

“September 22, 1916

Spent the day at Skotowo with the officers. A lack of order and discipline that is heartrending. The camp is not far from the sea, with a very beautiful view, but the barracks are too little, there is too little room for the number of prisoners, which doesn't contribute to their good humor. We are with the Russian officers, as we were not permitted to dine with our compatriots, and they gave us meat from animals with mad-cow disease. The soldiers here are well and the noncoms quite likeable, which pleased me. This hospital made a good impression; the head doctor, Dr. Möstl, a good Viennese, whom the sick seemed to like. I found the morale of the officers worse than that of the soldiers. It's natural, since they suffer more from captivity. The lack of occupation is terrible for them. I was touched by their pleasure at our arrival and the gratitude the prisoners showed for the least effort on their behalf. They seemed completely to forget that it is simply my duty.

The officers who accompany us, the commander of the camp Sokolov and Colonel Markosov, are bland and repellent.”

---

From *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I*, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet (New York: Penguin, 1999), pp. 204-206.

## Document 25:

Testimonial: A Mother's Deportation (excerpt) by Gadarinée Dadourian  
– 1920 (Ottoman Empire)

*Gadarinée Dadourian was a mother of five children living in Guriin (present-day Turkey) when the deportation of Armenians from eastern Anatolia began; her husband was in America. On the way to Del el Zor she lost three of her five children. The last two were killed at an extermination site; she herself survived the blows that knocked her unconscious and was saved by Arab women in the neighborhood. They healed her and kept her as a servant for the rest of the war.*

---

“I was in the last caravan to leave the city; we knew they were leading us to our deaths. After two hours’ march, we were halted at the foot of a hill. The Turks led the women in groups higher up. We did not know what was going on there. My turn came too; holding my two children by hand, I climbed the calvary. Horror! There was a well wide open where the executioners immediately threw the women they were stabling. I received a sword blow on my head, another on my neck; my eyes were veiled at the moment I was thrown into the well with my children. I was on a pile of cadavers wet with blood. My head wound bled and my face was bloody.

I scarcely had the strength to drag myself toward a cavity in the well, where I lost consciousness. When I regained my senses I was in an Arab house. After the departure of the Turks, Arab women had come to search among the corpses in hope of finding some survivors. That is how they found me and seeing I was alive, they saved me. From then on I lived in this family as a servant.

I was anxious about the fate of my children, and the Arabs told me they had been taken in my other Arabs; I sought them but did not find them. Since orphans were carried to Constantinople, I went there in the hope of finding them. They must have died, because on the feast day of Bairam, the Turks took the thousands of children of Del el Zor outside the city, where they were burned alive. Only a few children survived by throwing themselves in the Euphrates, then gaining the further shore.”

---

From “Récit” in *Témoignages inédits sur les atrocités turques commises en Arménie*, ed. Azkanever de Constantinople (Paris: Dubreuil, Frèrebeau, 1920), 55-58.



## Document 26:

Memoir: “Drifting into War” by Halidé Edib Adivar (1884-1964)

– 1926 (Ottoman Empire)

*Halidé Edib was the first Muslim Turkish graduate of the America College for Girls in Istanbul. After earning her doctorate in 1901, she became a school inspector and journalist. She went on to become Turkey’s first minister of education, and continued to advocate for freedom of speech and the equality of women.*

---

“In 1914 not only the masses but most of the intellectual and leading forces of the Unionists were against the war. Only Enver Pasha and a certain convinced military group, along with the profiteers, were in favor of war. Somehow the war seemed and impossibility, although a great many people feared it and felt uneasy, knowing the strength of military dictatorship in Turkey.

I received two different visits and had two memorable conversations during the first days of October. First came Djemal Pasha, the minister of marine, who took tea in my house with Madame Djemal Pasha.

‘I’m afraid our government is drifting into war,’ I said point-blank.

He laughed as if I had said something absurd and childish. I remember the determined expression on his face as he said these very words:

‘No, Halidé Hanum, we will not go into war.’

‘How will you manage that?’

‘I have power enough to persuade them not to. If I fail I resign. It would be extreme folly.’

Three days later Djavid Bey called. He had an air of despondency and looked seriously troubled.

I asked him the same question.

‘If they go to war, I resign,’ he said, ‘It will be our ruin even if we win. There are others who will resign as well, but we hope to prevent it. Talaat is against it at the moment.’

On the eighteenth of the same month Turkey entered the war.

Djavid Bey with some of his colleagues resigned. Djemal Pasha did not resign.”

---

From *Memoirs of Halidé Edib* (New York: Century, 1926), 379-85.

## Document 27:

Diary: Anna Eisenmenger (?-?) – 1918 (Austria-Hungary)

*Anna Eisenmenger dedicated her book “to all the women in the world,” and wished to entreat her readers “without distinction of race of creed, of nationality or of party” to set themselves against war. Her husband, doctor to Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was among the first to learn of the assassination. Her three sons, aged nineteen, seventeen and fifteen when the war broke out, were drafted; the oldest was reported missing on the Russian front in 1915.*

---

“November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1918

During the War there had been no Government restrictions in regard to wood and coal. The prices were very high compared with peace prices, but it was possible to secure considerable quantities from a coal-merchant if one had been a regular customer. Now the difficulty of supplying coal for household needs has suddenly become very painfully aggravated, for the Czechs have completely stopped the export of coal to Austria and Germany, while the German coal-mining districts are occupied by the French or the Poles, who likewise refuse to supply any coal to the vanquished nations. My simple woman’s brain tries in vain to understand why the victors have adopted these measures. The temperature has fallen considerably during the last weeks. Heating of the living rooms has been forbidden by the authorities. A new struggle, which we were spared during the War, is being imposed upon us housewives: the struggle against the winter cold in our homes...

That I should one day, in order to escape freezing in my own home, carry up my coal and thereby constitute myself a criminal, was something that no one had prophesied at my cradle. But this is war, the war of the housewives against the lack of primary physical necessities which is evidently not to cease even after the cessation of the Great War in the trenches.”

---

From *Blockade: The Diary of an Austrian Middle-Class Woman, 1914-1924* (London: Constable, 1932), 75-79.

**Document 28:**

Poem, “August 1914” by Vera Brittain (1893-1970) – 1918 (Britain)

*Vera Brittain left university at Oxford to join the Voluntary Aid Detachment (V.A.D.) as a nurse. A life-long advocate for women’s rights and pacifism, the war’s profound effect upon her (she lost her fiancé, brother, and friends in the war) manifests itself in numerous novels and memoirs.*

---

August 1914

God said, “Men have forgotten Me;  
The souls that sleep shall wake again,  
And blinded eyes must learn to see.”

So since redemption comes through pain  
He smote the earth with chastening rod,  
And brought Destruction’s lurid reign;

But where His desolation trod  
The people in their agony  
Despairing cried, “There is no God.”

Somerville College, Oxford

---

“August 1914,” in *Verses of a V.A.D.* (London: Erskine Macdonald, 1918), 15.

**Document 29:**

Poem, “1914” by Vida Jeraj, pseudonym of Frančiška Jeraj, née Vovk (1875-1932)  
– 1935 (Austria-Hungary)

*Poet and playwright Vida Jeraj was born in Slovenian Austria and became a village schoolteacher in 1895. Her first book of poetry was Izbrano delo (1908); a book of children’s poetry appeared after the war in 1921, as well as plays for children.*

---

1914

I

Black berries in a rose wreath,  
Each a dead man’s skull,  
Each a drop of blood,  
May God have mercy!

Pray, pray, O Slovene,  
Perhaps God remembers you!  
He who does not pray, shall curse:  
May Satan have mercy!

II

From dreams a mother rises into night:  
Memory knocking at the door,  
Knocking at thousands of cottages.  
On the battlefields lies my son!

Where does that red trail lead in the snow?  
Where does the wind bear the last sigh?  
Lands, waters, nine mountains high –  
My son, how can I get across?

---

Translated by Ellen Elias-Bursac

From *Izbrano delo* (Zagreb, 1935).

**Document 30:**

Artifact: Postcard – 1915 (Britain)

---



---

“Fall in and Follow me! postcard, 2005.28.14” (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial).

**Document 31:**

Artifact: *La Vie Parisienne* Magazine – 1918 (France)

---



---

“*La Vie Parisienne* magazine cover, August 17, 1918, 2011.17.1” (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial).



**Document 32:**

Illustration - *Our Hospital Anzac British Canadian* illustrated by Joyce Dennys (1893-1991) – 1916 (Britain)

*Joyce Dennys was an illustrator, painter, author and playwright. While serving as a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) during WWI, she was contacted by John Lane who asked her to illustrate this book. The images she drew were inspired by the scenes that she had seen while volunteering at military hospitals in Devon, England.*

---



Gordon, Hampden. *Our Hospital ABC*. London: John Lane Publishing. 1916. Accessed through University of Washington Libraries Digital Collections.

<http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/childrens/id/1100>



### Document 33:

Poem, “In Memoriam, July 19, 1914” by Anna Akhmatova, pseudonym of Anna Andreyevna Gorenko (1889-1966) – ?(Russia)

*One of the greatest poets of the twentieth century, Akhmatova began writing at age 11. Devotion to her country kept her from emigrating during the war and subsequent revolution, saying that it took greater courage to stay behind and accept what came. Although the period from 1914 to 1922 was one of her most productive, much of her writing was not published until later.*

---

#### In Memoriam, July 19, 1914\*

We aged a hundred years, and it  
All happened in an hour.  
The short summer was already dying,  
Smoke rose from the plowed plains' body.

All of a sudden the quiet road grew colorful,  
a lament took off flying, silverly ringing.  
I covered my face and begged God  
To kill me off before the battles began.

Like a load now unneeded, songs' and passions'  
Shadows have vanished from memory, which  
The High One has ordered emptied, to become  
A terrible book of calamities to come.

Summer 1916. Slepnyovo.

\*July 19, 1914 was the date war was declared on the old Russian calendar.

---

Translated by John Henriksen

“Pamyati, 19 iyulya 1914” in *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova*, ed. and with an introduction by Roberta Reeder (Somerville, MA: Zephyr, 1990), 1:448, 450.

**Document 34:**

Preface to children's book, *My Little Friends* by Margit Kaffka (1880-1918)  
– 1918 (Hungary)

*Margit Kaffka trained to become a school teacher, and then taught and wrote poetry, stories, and reviews. Some of work concerned the 'new woman,' while other fiction and poetry focused on the plight of the worker, especially the working-class woman in a moment of revolutionary change. She died in the influenza epidemic of 1918.*

---

“As I start to write, in the adult world times are difficult; sad and terribly ugly, wicked things are happening. There is war; sensible grown people are living on the plains in holes and wet ditches, cut off from their families. They do no useful work, nothing beautiful or serious; they shoot to kill each other, with guns and other ghastly weapons. Millions are out there: Hungarians, Germans, Russians, Italians, English, French. All suffer terribly from fellow humans they do not know and have never seen before. Thousands have terrible wounds, many are crippled for life, others have only a burial mound beneath which they rest, their names unknown forever. At home a sad family may not even know of the death, but wait with tears and hope for his return. And apart from these sorrows, there is terrible inflation everywhere; families at home struggle, worrying, working twice as hard because the duties of those mobilized cannot be neglected...

While I write this book I should like to forget the madness and hatred of this terrible world, in which only your play gives hope and beauty! Perhaps by the time I have finished God's sun will shine again; and then we will be able to rejoice in the hope of a happy future for you.”

---

Translated by Charlotte Franklin

From “Preface,” in *Kis emberek: barátocskáim* (Budapest: Palla Irodalmi, 1918).

**Document 35:**

Artifact: Victory Medal – 1919 (Belgium)

---



---

“Victory Medal,” (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial)

## FURTHER RESOURCES

Artifacts may be easily found on eBay. I purchased a French magazine from 1915, a German medal from 1916, and an English postcard from 1919 and had them all shipped to me for a total under \$50. Students especially enjoyed donning artifact gloves to handle the magazine, and felt that by using these actual artifacts they were literally ‘touching’ the past.

## WORKS CITED

Many sources used here were taken from the following two works:

*Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I*, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet (New York: Penguin, 1999), pp. 204-206.

*Women’s Writing on the First World War*. Agnes Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman, and Judith Hattaway, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.)