



Rexpoede, Calais - 1917 (photo by Paul Castelnaud)

On the Wire

Official Newsletter of the Great War Association

Spring 2025

COMING TO NEWVILLE? PLEASE NOTE:

Selling Stuff?

All vendors - including members with items for sale - must set up in the new 'Vendor Area' to the southwest of the main parking lot. This area has been cleared of trees and undergrowth, is freshly mulched to help keep dust down — and having the flea market in one place will make shopping easier for those ready to spend money.



THE ONLY ENTRANCE TO THE GWA SITE IS THROUGH THE GREEN METAL GATE FROM MIDDLE ROAD.

IF YOU DON'T PASS THROUGH A GREEN GATE, YOU ARE IN THE WRONG PLACE.

Use '520 Middle Rd., Newville PA' as the address you plug into your navigation device.



Photo courtesy of Marc A. Hermann

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EMBRACE YOUR INTERESTS

How the GWA has changed my life, and can change yours

By Ryan Hunneshagen, Sgt. H. 1K/JR25

My passing interest in WWI and my German cultural roots have grown into a significant positive force in my life, and the GWA was an essential piece of that. Although this is just a personal share, I hope the story of how WWI re-enacting has impacted my life can be something motivational for others in the GWA.

I discovered WWI re-enactment at age 19 through a guy I met playing Minecraft online- that's the real story. He belonged to the GWHS IR23, and introduced me to the GWA IR23. At about the same time, I started college at Indiana University where I met my friend Skyler Zenisek—now XO of IR23 and CP authenticity guru. We decided to join IR23 together, and began a great adventure.

As we built our kits under the aegis of retired greats such as Nick Bakris and Marshall Wise (I'm sure that phrase will cost me something!), we plunged into German language and culture. Marsh instilled in us the importance of culture studies. Over the years, Skyler and I stuck with the same unit, same kit, and delved ever deeper into the culture. To this day, that is a driving force behind IR23. It takes the experience from dress up to acting. Between attending Newville twice a year and showing up to small events throughout the Midwest, I ended up with quite a wide network of hobbyists, and not a few close friends. I attended one of these friends' weddings last weekend, and will become the godfather of another's child soon. I even managed to pull in some of my "normal" buddies into the hobby. A significant part of my social life hangs on my choice to join IR23.

Then came the collapse of "Old" IR23! When Marsh handed Skyler and me the helm of a sinking ship, we weren't sure if we would stick with it. We had about 4 members all-inclusive. The bunker was (is) not in the best shape. But we answered the challenge, and I'm happy I'm able to say that IR23 is once again one of the larger infantry units on the CP line. I can only speak for myself, but this level of responsibility and leadership in my 20's has formed me into a more effective man outside the hobby, and forced me to redouble my commitment within the GWA. Every time I go down our roster of cool guys with top-notch impressions, I feel a glow of satisfaction. I look at our club and say "we built THAT."

Then, WWI re-enacting sent me abroad to Europe. Last summer, I had the pleasure to visit a few WWI German reenactors in Baden-Württemberg. I was graciously hosted for a four-day stay at the home of Herr Manuel Wöller of the RIR121 Württembergisches who I met at Newville in 2017. We shared stories (some about our mutual friend Herr Landrik of IR124), photos, conversations in both our languages, and of course, shared a beer or three! We also drove up to visit the renowned Bernd Fehrle, the master tailor behind Bekleidungsamt 13. It was a great experience to see where the highest quality WWI German uniform reproductions are made, and meet the man himself.



Wöller, Bernd Fehrle, Ryan

We ended with a trip over to Hartmannswilkerkopf on the Western Front. It was incredible to walk the frontline, guided by a fellow reenactor who's familiar with the place.



Hartmannswilkerkopf (now in France)

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EMBRACE YOUR INTERESTS

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None of this happens if I didn't make time during my studies in 2017 to come to Newville and meet Herr Wöller, asking for advice on how to properly roll my Mantel and Zeltbahn. I happened to be near Germany because last summer I also took the opportunity to live in Vienna, Austria for three months. My knowledge of German, born in the hobby, made it feasible for me to get along socially there. I went back for a visit this past February to attend a ball, after which I was invited to a classic "Verbindung," a social fraternity.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the men there were singing some of the same songs we sing in the IR23 bunker after hours. They were elated that I knew the tunes. Through this adventure, and only because I followed my interest in German language and culture, I have a network in Vienna and could feasibly be moving over there later this year.

These are the real impacts. WWI re-enacting has significantly changed my life, in the 9 year span I've been involved, and that all started with joining the GWA. It has filled my time with meaningful activities, given me many important friendships, and immersed me in my cultural heritage.

My encouragement to any GWA member is to unleash your enthusiasm. The GWA is an anchor that ensures the hobby won't move out from under you. There are only two events a year, but 50 other weekends to spend reading up, learning a language, studying your impression, calling your buddies, and making sure the next event is even better.

My short tips would be these:

1. Carefully select who you reenact with. Make friends. Pull your "normal" friends in. Invest in the guys in your unit who you get along with the best. These relationships are the glue that hold a club together.
2. Corollary: know who to avoid. "Cut sad dogs who spread gloom," wrote advertising mogul David Ogilvy. Avoid dramatic reenactors like the plague, and don't get involved.
3. *Become* your impression. Learn the language if it's foreign to you. Do photo and culture research to your heart's content, and then some. Buy the silly early war kit you never use, just because you're interested.
4. Change units seldom to never. If you find another unit you really click with, by all means go to them. But be very circumspect about the decision. My experience is that a decade of IR23 has borne more fruit than others I know who have swapped impressions or units several times. You can't form bonds or a quality kit if you're a switcher.
5. Enjoy the ride. The things I noted in this article are ~10 years experience in the GWA. Two of those were COVID years, many more were "reforming IR23" years. It took me that long to reach a conversational level of German. The slow, step by step is necessary. But trust me, the payout is there.

In conclusion, I hope my little journal entry is enough to motivate the younger or less-experienced GWA reenactor to stake a claim and invest in where you are in the organization. When you apply yourself and go deep, as with any club, you get as much out as you put into it. Don't be afraid to talk to people too, in person or online. The more connections you have in the hobby, the cooler the stuff you hear, the better your gear deals get, and the more far-flung places you get invited to. Let's keep building the GWA into something that's not just for fun, but that enriches our members' lives. It has absolutely done that for me.



Ryan Hunneshagen & Skyler Zenisek

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

This column represents my personal opinions, and is not intended to convey an official statement or reflect the personal views that may be held by any other member, or any other member of the G-8.

It's springtime in beautiful South Central Pennsylvania, and that means chicken manure. Lots of it. Mellowing in big stinky mounds, spread over soggy fields, fallen overboard onto the blacktop of back roads. Chicken shit everywhere.

Which reminds me. I heard, second- and third-hand, that a small number of members were in a dither over my clearly-designated opinion piece in the January issue. My *editorial*, as it were, given my current role as *Editorix*. I'm sure the topic chafed some of you, as I knew it would - but I think the bigger issue for some was that I chose to print the word "vagina."

Or maybe it wasn't the word "vagina" itself, but my reference to the fact that I have one? I very intentionally used a proper, grown-up anatomical term rather than launching into vernacular evoking visions of cats or overseas caps or stealing. In any case, to those of you who found the medical word for "lady parts" to be triggering, I do apologize.



Many of you out there recognized and appreciated my satire as the cherry on top it was intended to be - and a few missed it entirely and made my point for me. Doesn't it seem ridiculous to waste so much energy talking about genitalia in the context of World War I reenacting?? *You bet it does.*

The bottom line is that this whole conversation has been mischaracterized and sensationalized. My position has never been about "codify[ing] acceptance of cross-sex impressions," nor has it been about codifying *anything.* What it has been based on, rather, is an attempt to remind the membership that it's a decidedly bad idea to intentionally codify discrimination in direct contravention to our Bylaws and in open defiance of the laws of the state of New Jersey (where we are incorporated, and have been since 1986). I don't care about making the GWA more inclusive - but I do care about keeping it from being made exclusive in a way that puts us at risk of losing everything. I don't personally care whether or not there are girls in the trenches, but I do care about there being trenches and shell holes for the other 98.8% of you to play in at all. I take very seriously my fiduciary responsibility to this organization, so regardless of who it's popular with or not, and regardless of my own personal opinion or the opinion of a loud few, I will push for what's in the best interest of the GWA, every time, and unapologetically. I didn't run for this position for power or glory or prestige or authority or whatever. I have a day job where I get to be important. This is a hobby. But it's a hobby most of you are really, really passionate about, and you spend a ridiculous amount of money to come out here a couple times a year, so I think you deserve somebody who's willing to fight to preserve your ability to reenact WWI at Newville.

In the last two months, I have heard from an astounding number of members who didn't know what the gender conversation was about, or who didn't know one was happening at all. The overwhelming majority who were aware of it felt like it didn't personally affect them, so 'what's the fuss about?' And some had heard one version or another and had some questions, but weren't sure if it was okay to ask them.

Let's be clear. It's okay to ask questions. It's okay to expect to know what's going on. This membership organization doesn't have "top secret" communication or "classified proceedings." The information belongs to the members. If you've been told otherwise, somebody's not being honest. Please don't hesitate to reach out at any point if you have concerns.

So in the interest of transparent communication, the attorney opinion letters pertaining to the gender restriction issue landed in each member's in box earlier this week. (If you didn't get them, please make sure I have your correct email address.) Both letters, one paid for with \$2500 of the GWA kitty, and the other independently paid for by an individual member, are also included in their entirety in Appendix A, so you can read them and draw your own conclusions. Also included are screen snips of the relevant portions of the GWA Bylaws and New Jersey Revised Statutes § 10:5-12 (2023), also for you to read for yourselves, rather than be spoon-fed a selected version from either perspective.

Unfortunately, the great hoo-ha debate has opened up a treasure chest of ugliness in terms of the way some people treat others, and it brings to mind a lesson Scott and I taught our kids really early on. The Golden Rule — really, the entire

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FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

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Ten Commandments, actually — can be summed up in one tidy line, and we refer to it as Rule Number One: “Don’t be a douche.” Ask any of our five kids, or our three sons-in-law: “What’s Rule Number One?” and I guarantee you they’ll grin and say “Don’t be a douche.” We aren’t perfect - and for the record, I promise, neither are any of you - but we raised our kids to value integrity, honesty, kindness, and respect as the true measures of whether somebody is a good person.

Anyway. As you’ll see in the following pages, the Entente has delivered a bunch of great content this time!! And their CP colleagues have again produced some great stuff too. You’ll see some other opinion pieces as well, printed in the order they were received, so as not to infer preferential placement.

Please travel safely to Newville, if you’re coming. Use the main entrance (aka the big green gate), park in the marked rows, and if you’re selling stuff, set up in the new Vendor Area. And for the love of Pete, don’t be a douche.

See you next Thursday, and have a great day meow -

Erica Miller
Secretary, GWA

SPRING 25 EVENT PRIMER

by Bret Werner, Allied Combat Commander

As the Spring 25 event closes in on us, I just wanted to convey some basic information.



Firstly, spring is always the lighter of the two events, but ‘lighter’ does not mean ‘not as good!’ Mike Landree, my CP counterpart, and I have an incredible event sketched out and I hope everyone has stocked up on extra ammo, because you will need it! As always, we try to balance each event with authentic combat, time for unit activities and time for camaraderie. This event will be no different.

A few reminders, roads and flanks are not in play unless ordered specifically by your respective sides’ Battalion HQ. Both headquarters buildings are not to be entered and ransacked, if you can knock on the door, you have captured it! Maybe we will even give you a souvenir for your efforts. Take your hits, no one actually wins or loses this game. Do not try to stop overwhelming odds, get out to fight another day. Be civil and most importantly, be safe!

Thanks to the rest of the G8 for all their tireless efforts behind the scenes to make each event better than the last, It’s a thankless job that is not always fun or glamorous, but everyone works very hard at bettering our hobby.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

2025 Fall Tactical

2026 Spring Tactical

2026 Fall Tactical

November 7-8

April 17-18

November 6-7

ADDITIONAL UNIT-SPONSORED EVENTS CAN BE FOUND ON THE WEB SITE:

[HTTP://WWW.GREATWARASSOCIATION.ORG](http://www.GREATWARASSOCIATION.ORG)

FROM THE CP COMBAT COMMANDER

Reenactors of the Central Powers,
Meine Herren und Damen,

I have asked the Secretary of the GWA and the G8 to rename this newsletter to its proper designation "Auf dem Draht" (German for "On the Wire") based upon the overwhelming content by the Central Powers membership over the past year. I see why not and it seems only appropriate. Great job; keep it up!

We are a very few short weeks from the Spring 2025 event and it's being worked up to be another great event. Our scenario will be roughly based upon the late spring/early summer 1918 era as the Americans entered the war in force. As a Marine, I have a strong love for the U.S. 2nd Division's Battle of Belleau Wood around Chateau-Thierry. As such, Saturday's battle will replicate this in general terms. Bret Werner and I hope y'all will continue to enjoy the changes in scenarios and adaptations which provide a change to the mundane generic battles of the past. We are working to provide sharp, intense actions along with structured down times so that units can perform many of the micro-scenarios, training, meetings, and general Kameradschaft activities which our site provides for. Not everything is for everyone, but there's always something for everyone.

There seems to be some misunderstanding of the rules concerning "the entire site" use during our events. Until recently, the roads behind the CP and Allied lines were off limits to the opposing forces. So if the Allies attacked the Central Powers defenses, the CP could retreat to the road and use it to redeploy forces, while it was not allowed the Allies to do the same. Correspondingly, if the CP forces broke through the Allied lines, the Allies could use their rear road to redeploy forces, but we were not allowed to use it for the same purposes. In this way, the defender can "game the system" while the attacker was prevented from exploiting their successes. Both the Allied Commander and I disagreed with this artificially imposed restriction and wished to get rid of it...within limitations. What we don't want to occur is for a unit, on their own

accord, to go around the established defenses and conduct a flanking attack to exploit an area that would have extended well beyond the boundaries of our main battle line. For instance, FR90 is our current right flank, but in reality, another unit would be adjacent to them and this line



would extend for hundreds of miles in both directions. We don't want units exploiting this by "gaming the system." However, when each combat commander has an overarching attack plan, these gaps can be exploited for the scenario to be achieved, although assaults will be upon trenches or at the edge of them. Every one of these scenarios are coordinated by both command groups so there are no "surprises" and "gaming the system," but these are rather used to advance the scenario. Lastly, during daylight hours, we have specified down times to allow for training, micro-scenarios, unit meetings, etc. and, to protect these opportunities, combat is restricted to "no man's land." Units can operate without restrictions within no man's land," but may not cross into the enemy's trenches. This restriction does not apply during night time operations. So to reiterate the rules for units, during day time operations (outside major attacks planned and executed by the Allied and Central Powers Commanders), units are restricted to "no man's land" and during night time operations, are enabled to penetrate the enemy's lines as long as they enter through the trenches (no end arounds). For all major assaults, the entire GWA site is available for the tactical within the maneuver areas designated by your orders.

We will again have a Soldatenschule for all ranks. In order to better support reenactor's schedules, we are shortening the training and starting later (1pm start time). Hopefully this will better enable your participation. This is very good training for Rekruten and Alte Soldaten! I want to also reiterate learning drill so that we look and act more like Soldaten during our Appell as well as marching for

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FROM THE CP COMBAT COMMANDER

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the safety brief on Friday. Commanders, please lead your men in these following basic drill movements:

Angetreten, Achtung Stillgestanden, Rührt Euch, Nach Recht Richt Euch, Augen Rechts, Augen Gerade Aus, Das Gewehr Über, Gewehr Ab, Präsentiert das Gewehr, Rechts Um, Links Um, Gleichschritt Marsch, Links Schwenkt Marsch, Halt, und Wegtreten.

Below is the current structure for the Spring event:

1. Zug	2. Zug	4. Zug	5. Zug	7. Zug (Sturm)	General Support
Duffy Bauer	Steve Lehman	Skampi	Bob Gräbe	Eric Cleveland	
5 Garde Rgt	12 MinenWerfer	JR 23	König Bayern Leib	Sturm Btl'n Rohr	8 Kürassier
JR 10	JR 52	JR 92	20 MGSS	PB 13	Rotes Kreuz
FR 73	JR 63	RJR 236	JR129	PB 14	
FR 90	KuK JR 63			JR 124	
JR459					

I am very proud of all of you and the great strides you are making towards making our hobby better. Alternate impressions are on the rise, which give us all a broader experience. We are growing due to your professionalism and our great leaders at all levels. Thank you for all you do and let's all lean forward to grow the Zentralmächte Kompagnie! I'll see you in the trenches!

„Wir haben einen Willen; Sieg oder Tod!“

Mike Landree
Otto Landrik
Hauptmann u. Kompagniechef



The men of IR92 enjoyed a *cozy* and *manly* (to quote the two most common adjectives in *Storm of Steel*) weekend hosted by FR90. As always the event was great fun. The temperatures were cold and the snow aplenty, but our Sergeant and Feldwebel-Leutenant ensured we had plenty of wood to keep our bunkers warm.

The Soldaten presentations on Saturday at the FR90 bunker were a great addition and highlight of the weekend. Folks shared presentations about shoulder straps, one year volunteers, personal identification labels, Feldpost, building first person impressions, and other topics. The French and English were great sports and we enjoyed fraternizing with the Allies in no mans land.

The evenings were filled with Kameradschaft, singing, Harzerkäse, and games of Kaputski in the IR92 Headquarters bunker.

Thanks as always to Joe Murray and the Kerls of FR90 for hosting!

Unteroffizier Reinhold Klein
9 Kompanie
Braunschweigesches Infanterie Regiment nr. 92

THE QUEEN OF NO MAN'S LAND

by David Freeman, 7th Coy CMGC

There is no doubt artillery was the king of “No Man's Land” – the Vickers gun, therefore, was the Queen.

Reenacting a specific era can be done for many reasons.

Perhaps you had an ancestor who served with the unit you portray. Maybe it holds a significant interest in your life. In my case, portraying a Canadian machine gunner of the Great War has allowed me to blend two of my passions – history and firearms. Over the last 12 or so years, being involved with both the Great War Association and Canadian Military Heritage Society has helped me understand a little of what the “Emma Gees” went through in that period - not so much the horrors of the war itself, but the mechanics, logistics and technology involved. I joined the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry WW1 reenactment group in 2013 – a year before the anniversary events began to happen. The PPCLI reenactment group is also part of the Canadian Military Heritage Society, and many of the members of the WW1 group are also members of the WW2 group by the same name. The PPCLI is also a currently-serving Canadian military unit and has a very proud heritage – born at the dawn of World War 1 in 1914 and losing 1272 officers and enlisted men between January 6th, 1915 and November 11th, 1918. I began as a regimental “Emma Gee” and currently portray an “Emma” in the 7th Canadian Machine Gun Company – as a divisional asset, they would have served alongside the PPCLI, 42nd Royal Highlanders, Royal Canadian Regiment and 49th of Edmonton. On the day of the Armistice, the strength of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps was: 422 officers, 8349 other ranks, 464 machine guns. Some 13,411 officers and men served in the CMGC, with 5,777 becoming casualties, earning it the nickname “the Suicide Club.”

I own a World War 1 era fluted jacket semi auto Vickers, and an 08 Maxim gun. Both have been converted to fire 7.62x54r, but with the change of a barrel and headspacing can easily be reconfigured to shoot the original .303 British or 8mm. We use Czech 7.62x54r blanks (steel case, copper wash) and original British blank firing adapters for the Vickers. Being set up for semi-auto only, there is no need to fill the water jackets –

although it gets warm, it never gets hot enough to damage the barrel as would a full auto gun firing ball ammo. Much of the heat generated in firing a machine gun is the friction of the bullet passing through the barrel – that extra heat is eliminated with blank firing guns. On top of that, we never reach the actual rate of fire as a full auto.



The Vickers heavy machine gun is nothing like a 1917 Browning 30 caliber water-cooled machine gun. The lock, internals, barrel, booster - everything - is completely different. It takes one with a mechanical aptitude to keep it in operation. A gun crew in 1917 consisted of 6 men, all numbered. No1 carried the tripod – his responsibility was to place the gun in the field and fire it. No2 carried the gun itself and assisted No1 in firing it. No3, 4, 5 & 6 carried the condensing can, water, spare parts, first aid kit, ammo boxes and their personal kit as well. Late in the war they tried to keep one of the numbers a rangefinder, but that was dependent on training and equipment availability. A standard load-out of ammunition for a single gun crew was 15,000 rounds in 250 round cloth belts – each in a wooden ammo box. The name “Emma Gees” or simply “Emmas” came from their call name by phone - “M”a “G”e (Machine Gun). 2 “range cards” each would be kept – one at the position to keep track of ammunition expenditures, activity and targets with ranges, and

THE QUEEN OF NO MAN'S LAND

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another sent to HQ. One of the key reasons they were required to keep track of rounds expended through each gun is at 8,000 rounds the barrel needed to be replaced with a new one, especially if it was to be used for overhead indirect fire. Ammo was brought by wagon trains to dumps in the rear lines and required the regular infantry to hump it to forward positions as much as possible. In the early years of the war Vickers gun crews would have gone over the top with the main assault – as the Lewis gun came into service they were held back and used in indirect and defensive fire roles. The range of a Vickers was 2500 yards effectively so it was ideally suited for use between the infantry in the front trench and the reach of the artillery.



My first events I brought and ran the semi auto Vickers alone. I fabricated a correct-looking machine gun cart which allowed me to move it to and from the line - it can be done but takes a lot of time and, once in place, is not easily moved by one person. A Vickers gun requires many individual items to be used in the field – the gun, tripod (which can be broken down into the head and legs), spare parts, tools and ammo. A Vickers gun weighs about 35 pounds. The tripod weighs 55 pounds. Blank ammo in wooden boxes are about 10 pounds each. That's just Vickers related – I also carried (as did the Emma Gees of 1917) my personal kit – 08 webbing, entrenching tool, PH hood, Mk6 Webley revolver with

ammo, rain poncho, bayonet, canteen, cup, mess kit, rations and personal items in the small pack.



After a few years and numerous events doing this alone, I decided to enlist my friends Sean and Derek (who was a machine gunner in the Canadian military). With a few months of planning we began to form a gun crew. Life was easier with three people to distribute the load and we soon found ourselves going “over the top” in support of the main attacks, as was done early in the war. A few years later I had enlisted more like-minded friends to our gun crew and at one of the last events we fielded 11, enabling us to send runners and protect our flanks as well as operate two independent guns. We performed 1917 British machine gun drill by the book, practiced loading and unloading both guns, firing commands and disassembly/reassembly of the guns as often as possible. We bring a loader into the trench, and during down time load belts and maintain the gun – as they would have done. At the end of the day the guns are completely disassembled and thoroughly cleaned. While the majority of our mates in the PPCLI are enjoying camaraderie after the day's events, we are busy cleaning and reassembling the guns.

Being in the trench all day allows us to handle the Vickers in numerous conditions. We've fired it in 80 degree plus weather, in the rain, snow, fog – pretty much most climates over the years. What I've really noticed is how the function of the gun is affected by changes in temperature and humidity. It can be set up and running perfect during the day but after the sun goes down and it

THE QUEEN OF NO MAN'S LAND

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gets cool the fussee spring tension will change – altering how the gun runs. If you don't get a chance to clean and oil it every once in a while, fine rust can form in the receiver box - slowing the function. Dirt and dust can also present changes in function. As for parts breaking, I have encountered broken muzzle glands, lower feed block arms, front fussee cover rivets and firing pins. The only broken part that took the gun completely out of action was the fussee cover rivets. All others were replaced in the field. The only part we ever lost from the gun was a rear sight screw (twice). We make sure all screws are tight now. I've gained a tremendous respect for what machine gunners (of both sides) endured.

One item I have encountered numerous times is that screws will vibrate loose. We have lost 2 rear sight scale top screws and had every other screw loosen up while firing (including the muzzle gland). Always check the screws on a Vickers (or Maxim) to be sure they are secure. I have thus far not read a personal account of screws loosening in the field but they must have. The main difference is that the British and Commonwealth forces issued spare parts – I have precious few. I have since begun to use Loctite blue on certain parts before firing and it seems to solve any problems of screws backing out.



They say you get out of life what you put into it. The spring and fall WW1 events at Newville are both the most strenuous and most rewarding weekends of every year for me. The chance to catch up with friends from afar, meet new folks (including some fantastic Hun from across No Man's Land), watch some aerobatics and run a few rounds through some cool old guns makes these events special.

Very respectfully,
David Freeman
7th Coy CMGC



IN MEMORIAM:
KENNETH L. TOBERTGA, SR.
(IR92, Retired)



Kenneth L. Tobertga, Sr., formerly of IR92, passed away on February 1, 2025 at the age of 94 at home in Fairhaven, Massachusetts. Ken was a member of the Great War Association for many years and loved coming to events at Newville. His daughter Carol (Tobertga) Nelson believes that at one time, he was one of the oldest participants still in the trenches, and said “this was truly one of my Dad’s greatest adventures and groups with which he loved being associated.”



“WITH A VIEW TO ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY”

Meet the VAD (Allied Non-Combatants)

Submitted by Carolyn Miller & Laurie Kline



V.A.D.: Voluntary Aide Detachment (acronym refers to the organization and to the human volunteers)

The VAD was established in Great Britain in August 1909. Both the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem in England had their own VAD branches during the war, both branches reported to the Joint War Committee. This was by design, with the goal that neither organization was duplicating work nor competing against the other soliciting money for the war cause.

Comprised of civilian volunteers, these individuals held no rank. Unlike many of the medical and nursing units, the VAD operated independent of the authority of the British, Canadian and Australian military. As noncombatants, they fell under the Red Cross banner of neutrality. It was common to see men and women from aristocratic families serving in the VAD, for few ordinary people had the luxury of leisure time to work without pay. While military medical staff served near the front lines in casualty

clearing stations, VADs were utilized in larger--and often urban--hospitals located several miles from the front. Despite being relatively far from the shelling and the mud, these volunteers often witnessed the emotional and psychological toll of the war, providing comfort to many of the Great War's most critically injured victims.

Across the Empire, 90,000 men and women served in 3,000 hospitals. They were comprised of two branches: Special Service and General Service. Volunteers in the Special Service provided face-to-face patient care and hospital support. They assisted nursing staff with direct patient care. Their formal training was limited to first aid and hygiene. Often, these individuals were referred to as nursing assistants or aides. Those serving in the General Service performed non-medical duties outside the scope of patient care: clerical, administrative, transportation, cooking, laundry and housekeeping to name a few. These individuals were typically referred to as orderlies.

VAD units were separate for men and women; they did work together but were under separate command. A women's detachment usually consisted of the following (this changed over the course of the war but this is the 1909 VAD standard):

- 1 Commandant (man or woman)
- 1 Quartermaster (man or woman)
- 1 Trained Nurse (as Lady Superintendent)
- 20 women (of whom 4 should be qualified as cooks)

The first VADs went over to France 14 October, 1914. Sixteen women traveled from London accompanied by two fully trained nurses to set up a rest station outside of Boulogne. They established a

“WITH A VIEW TO ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY”

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dispensary, kitchen, stores and quarters; within 24 hours they had fed 1,000 soldiers. Dame Katherine Furse led the unit, and after 3 months she returned to England to coordinate with the Joint War Committee the organization and mobilization of VAD men and women to France and Belgium.



At Newville today, the VAD canteen provides refreshment and a respite from the action in the trenches. Australian, Commonwealth, and Allied troops enjoy warm meals, while a recreation hut offers games, a writing station and other diversions providing opportunities for relaxation and socialization. Please stop by in April, meet us and say hello! We welcome new recruits--female and male--and would be delighted to consider your application to join us.

Famous VADs of note

E.M. Forster (author of *A Room with a View*, *Howard's End* and many others) a conscientious objector, worked as a Red Cross Searcher for The Wounded & Missing Enquiry Department in Alexandria, Egypt.

Agatha Christie (prolific author) served in a hospital in Devon.

Vera Britain (author of *Testament of Youth*) served in multiple theaters and campaigns.

John Galsworthy (1932 Nobel Prize winner in literature, author of the *Forsety Saga and Chronicles*) trained as a masseur and worked in a French hospital. His wife Ada accompanied him and worked in the laundry.

Lottie Dodd (5 time Wimbledon champion) served in a Chelsea hospital.

Sophia Duleep Singh (daughter of the last Sikh Maharajah of India, god-daughter of Queen Victoria) cared for colonial soldiers in a Middlesex hospital.

Dr. John Alcindor (a British physician rejected by the Army due to his “colonial origin” of Trinidad) worked in Paddington.

Edith Clavell rendered care for both Allied and Central Powers patients: she was captured for assisting 200+ Allied soldiers in escaping German-occupied Belgium. She was executed by the Germans October 12, 1915.

Violet Jessop survived three White Star line disasters at sea: as stewardess on RMS Olympic (1911), stewardess on RMS Titanic (1912) and as a VAD on RMS Britannic (1916) when it sank in the Aegean after detonating a German mine.

Amelia Earhart (American Aviatix) served as a nurse's aide in Toronto, Canada at Spadina Military Hospital.



For further reading

Moore, Wendy, *No Man's Land: The Trailblazing Women Who Ran Britain's Most Extraordinary Military Hospital during World War I*. New York: Basic Books (2020).

Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England on Voluntary Aid rendered to the Sick and Wounded at Home and Abroad and to British Prisoners of War, 1914-1919. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office (1921). Reprinted by The Naval & Military Press Ltd in association with The Imperial War Museum (2009). <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/wvcsywwa/items>

OPINION A

January 17, 2025
To the G8,

The topic of women portraying men in the hobby is one fraught with complexities, often resulting in polarizing opinions. With this in mind, I submit this letter fully aware that my perspective may rub some of the membership and the G8 the wrong way.

First, let me clarify my position: I have extensive experience reenacting in various time periods and units, some of which embraced women portraying men, and others that restricted roles to the sex of the individual. I say this as not to get misconstrued as biased or some other frivolous accusations by anyone who has an agenda. I have witnessed commendable performances by women who embodied the men they portrayed with dignity and historical accuracy. However, I have also seen instances where this practice undermined the integrity of the hobby and disrespected the memory of those we aim to honor.

In my long involvement with a Civil War unit, we initially welcomed a female veteran whose portrayal was commendable. However, the shift towards valuing quantity over quality led to the inclusion of individuals whose participation did not honor the historical accuracy we strive for. Another woman joined who lacked the dedication and respect necessary for reenacting. This experience in our unit opened a Pandora's Box, where fear of being labeled sexist trumped the integrity of our reenacting unit.

Similarly, in a WWII unit that allowed cross-dressing, the policy faltered due to disruptions caused by a particular individual. However, the other women who portrayed sex appropriate roles, did so with near professionalism for the correct roles they were portraying. Even, I dare say innovating aspects of the hobby they were passionately involved in.

Again, this boiler plate is necessary to quell any accusations or dismissive attitudes by any reading this.

The Great War Association (GWA) has long upheld the unwritten tradition of restricting participation to sex-appropriate roles—a standard that reflects the historical authenticity we strive for. One that I believe can only change through a popular and transparent vote by the membership. A decision that also looks hard at the unintended consequences of such a change.

The first concern is a cultural change of the GWA. The introduction of women portraying men may initially attract stellar participants. However, as acceptance broadens, standards risk being diluted. For example, the emphasis on authenticity, including proper grooming and adherence to historical details, could erode in order to get more bodies in the field. A problem that we have already seen and are trying to correct. Furthermore, Units like the RK, CMAC, and SA, which exemplify excellence in reenacting, could face challenges recruiting when the idea of trigger time becomes more available and accepted.

The single greatest concern is the question of how will allowing women to portray men in the trenches change how events and units operate. The physicality of WW1 reenacting presents unique challenges. Activities such as simulated hand-to-hand combat, battlefield first aid, and POW searches require careful consideration of physical interactions; will these once standard practices be dropped? If these practices remain unchanged will they require liability or assumption of risk waivers? Will units who permit women cross dressing have to include sex segregated accommodations?

The question of individual units and their by-laws raises important concerns: Will these units truly have the autonomy to decide who fills specific roles, or could a complaint compel them to accept women into their ranks to remain in compliance with the GWA's by-laws?

There is much more that needs to be hashed out than some would make it out to be. What safeguards exist to prevent future G8 members from mandating that all units accept women portraying men? The attitude of "just let the units decide" is not going to hold up if we get a petty and punitive board in future.

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OPINION A

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Waiving away these concerns now does not do justice to the intent of the GWA, nor respects the membership.

These are not hypothetical concerns but practical realities that demand clear and thought out by-laws. Any decision to allow women to portray men must be predicated on robust mechanisms to address these complexities and risks. Questions about liability, accommodation sex segregation, and the handling of potential sexual assault allegations must be addressed. The absence of clear by-laws and procedures could lead to legal and ethical quagmires. The board members and membership at large must be fully aware of the ramifications beyond their personal opinions on this delicate matter.

Considering the importance and delicacy of this issue, I strongly advocate for a full membership vote, guided by clear and well-documented legal counsel. The process must be transparent and based on thoughtful deliberation, ensuring all members are fully informed of the potential consequences before making a decision.

I urge the G8 to facilitate an open, informed discussions where all members can voice their thoughts, ensuring that any decision reflects the will of our membership, not just the loudest or most controversial voices. A decision which must not be clouded by fear of backlash but grounded in a thorough understanding of all implications. The integrity of the GWA hinges on such careful consideration to maintain the standards and traditions that define our reenactment group. The GWA must guarantee that any policy changes are focused on preserving the integrity, safety, and enjoyment of our reenactments.

I will openly share any correspondence on this matter addressed to me by any member of the G8 with all members of the GWA. This commitment is made to uphold the principles of full transparency and to eliminate any possibility of confusion or the spread of misinformation.

Duffy Bowers

8K JR459

(March 11: Since the original date of this missive there has been no forthcoming legal opinion from the G8. This is a disservice to the interest of the GWA's membership and risks inflaming the hot heads on both sides further. I am disappointed.)

OPINION B

I have reenacted my whole life, from AWI, WW1, WW2, to Vietnam, and spans while short for some, my full 38 years! I have seen the rise of progressivism, the emergence of a “mainstream,” and the advancement of our hobby that we hold so dear being that of living history and the pretend soldier.

Instead of continuing to promote research, investigate various obscure topics of history that would enrich our fellow enthusiasts, we spend ourtime arguing about genderism, the “effect this may have on portrayals,” and on the hobby as a whole. Ultimately what I have personally witnessed across the board is folks who say that a woman portraying a man, or a man portraying a woman will “take away from the historic aspect of folks’ time in the field” as they ignore the 60 year old man, overweight private, and modern eating, camping, and military equipment. It all boils down to one must ACCURATELY portray... *enter impression here...* Whether that is a soldier, civilian, nurse, aid, what have you! If I can tell that you are a woman in ranks, or a man playing nurse, then that is a problem. No different than the soldier in farby gear, the nurse with a French manicure, or civilian in modern boots. Until we take the step and say no one portraying a role in which you could not currently serve due to age, weight, or race, we can not, nor SHOULD NOT restrict sex.

We have spent countless hours on the topic of genitalia, when we could be discussing better entrenchments, better safety protocols, but instead we debate a topic that should be treated as any other inaccuracy. If you are not meeting the standards of your impression then fix it! Groups should self police, and the GWA should hold groups accountable to those standards. If we draw a line in the sand and say ok to excluding based on genderism then why stop there?!? Right now in the world it is fashionable to be anti-DEI, but in order to advance our hobby we need to be inclusionary, and promote the diverse cultures and roles that existed in WW1, If you can not or will not go all the way to sizism, or exclusion based on race, than what motivates you to go after this particular “issue”? Look to yourself to improve the hobby, lead by example. To be inclusive also includes helping those improve, perhaps they are doing the best they currently know how. THAT’S HOW WE ALL GET BETTER! Not just excluding folks until the ones we like are all that are left.

I know we all have opinions on this topic and I truly feel for the current leadership having to navigate the minefield here as we attempt to move forward. But the fact that the GWA has had to seek legal council should be sounding alarms to the folks that are quick to celebrate being exclusionary.

Sincerely,
A concerned British soldier and friend to all living historians!

FROM THE CP REPRESENTATIVE

by Eric Cleveland

Guten Tag Everyone,

First, I'd like to thank the Central Powers for allowing me to be their representative for the past 5 years. It has been a special privilege to be your voice to the G8 and I hope that I've done well for you. I'd also like to thank the two Presidents who've served during my term and recognize the outstanding leadership of Carter Bertone and Jim Boswell, and all the sacrifices and hard work they made for our organization.

A lot has happened in the past few months and I'd like to take this opportunity to update you. As always, I welcome comments from all the GWA membership.

Times are what they are and over the years we've seen many changes in the reenacting world. When I first began reenacting in 1991 we used original muskets in War Between the States reenacting, and original uniforms and web gear in WWII. WWI reenacting was in its' infancy. Women have become far more involved in reenacting in recent years with many of them taking on men's impressions, and frankly oftentimes exceptionally well.

As you may know, this issue has come to the G8's attention in the past few months with some members pushing to codify the acceptance of cross-sex impressions, ie women portraying men and potentially men portraying women. This was brought to the G8's attention following the November event and the immediate acceptance of this was strongly pushed. Once it became apparent that there was a concerted effort to change years of GWA practice, I took the issue to the CP to get an idea of where they stood on the issue.

Let me be abundantly clear. I have a personal opinion as to whether we should allow cross-sex impressions or not, but that opinion is entirely, and completely, irrelevant. It is my position that the G8 should work together to determine a policy that supports the wishes of the membership while minimizing risk to the organization and protecting the organization legally and financially, whatever that policy may be. I also believe that if we intend to change years of GWA practice, we should do so with the full involvement of the membership.

To ensure that we fulfilled both aspects of our positions, I consulted with the Commanders of the CP units to determine the CP wishes, as well as an attorney to judge the legal risks of attempting to abide by those wishes. The G8 also consulted with two different attorneys. We recently received formal opinions from two attorneys and they will be sent to you by the secretary soon.

If you'd like to discuss them, contact me anytime. You may also attend the townhall meeting at the French Chateau on Sunday, April 6th at 0800.

With an eye for the future, there are many things to be done. We're putting forward potential amendments to the bylaws to allow minors to participate with a parent/guardian, and an amendment to formalize how to put forth an amendment to the Bylaws.

Minors have been participating in reenacting other time periods with their parents for years, and many people believe that they should be allowed to bring their minor children to Newville. You may recall that we had a spirited discussion about this several months ago and I put forward two versions of the amendment for signatures to get them on a ballot. Neither received enough votes individually, so I've reworded the amendment to allow parents/guardians/step-parents to bring their child aged 16 or 17 to participate. If it receives 50 signatures, we'll be able to discuss it again prior to a vote in November.

We've had a multitude of proposed bylaw changes come through the process in the past few years. Some of them are exceptionally well written and explanatory, while some of them leave much to the imagination. A proposal is being put forward to discipline the process so that all proposed bylaw changes are well documented, thought out and have an opportunity for the G8, or others, to respond. The proposal won't change the basic process, but will require that the sponsor be identified with point of contact information, state the reason for the change, the specific location in the bylaws to be changed and allow for a G8 position on the change. The G8 position is to ensure the proposal is legally and financially sound.

FROM THE CP REPRESENTATIVE

(continued from p. 17)

Looking to the future. We've had bylaw changes coming in regularly and every attorney on the internet recommends regular bylaw reviews, so I believe it's time for a comprehensive review of our bylaws. Personally, I don't see that it needs major changes, but we should ensure that we're in compliance with 501c7 law, as well as any clarifications that are needed.

In the past, we haven't operated with a long-term plan. Developing a construction plan for the future would ensure that we use the property sensibly as we grow. It will also allow us to plan a budget for future growth.

Speaking of budgets, ours should be made available to the membership. This will allow you to see where the money goes, and we may get some better ideas from the membership on how to spend our money.

To facilitate this, periodic Town Hall meetings with the membership could be an excellent source of ideas for the leadership, as well as a way to get out the information about how the GWA is being run.

The event in April should be a great time. The two combat commanders have been working on the scenarios that will keep us moving. We're also developing ground burst simulators to give the effect of an artillery barrage. Hopefully, we'll have a few to demonstrate this time and then to use for full effect in November.

On Thursday, Apr 3rd, the CP will be running the Kriegschule. It will begin at 1300 at the Hauptquartier and I can't overemphasize the importance of having your unit represented at the school. We will cover drill, marching, including marching from line to column and back, as well as tactics including how to exit the friendly trench, cross no man's land, entering and moving through the enemy trench, as well as offensive and defensive "open field" fighting. This training has been very important for us to standardize our tactics, increase our collective lethality, build leaders' confidence, and train our younger members how to take over once we age out. Please mark it on your calendars and attend. Even if your whole unit can't attend, it would be of great benefit to the CP side for the unit commander and several unit members to attend as a "train the trainer" opportunity. We also would like to invite any Allies who would be interested to come participate, or observe, as you see fit.

And as always, make grenades, make grenades, make grenades.

Thank you very much,
Eric Cleveland
CP Rep

Matters Up for Vote at Spring Event

Admission of 5GrzF as a GWA Member Unit
(Verbal vote of membership at Safety Formation)

**Proposed Bylaw Amendment to Article 36:
Process for Amending Bylaws (See Appendix B)**
(Paper ballots at registration)
(If you'd like an absentee ballot, contact greatwarsecretary@gmail.com)

This photo, as well as those attributed to him on the first and last pages, was taken by Marc A. Hermann at the November event, on 4x5" film with Graflex camera.



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

***On the Wire* Summer 2025 issue publishes in late July.**

Please submit content for the Summer issue prior to July 15th, including unit updates, feature stories, pictures, etc. Something you'd like to see? Please also feel free to pass along your ideas.

Send content / suggestions to GreatWarSecretary@gmail.com.



Photo by Marc A. Hermann