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The *Peace Pledge Union* is the oldest
non-sectarian pacifist organisation in
Britain. Through the War Resisters' Inter-
national it links with similar groups
throughout the world. It is one of the
original sponsors of Campaign Against
Arms Trade, a member of Liberty and a co
operating organisation of Landmine
Action

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Next Council meeting 9 March

We were pleased to welcome 1500 new supporters to our white poppy project last year. With help from many of you around the country we distributed well in excess of 110,000 white poppies. A substantial increase on last year. Last year many more white poppy wreaths were laid and more white poppies have gone to Canada and New Zealand where 25 April – Anzac Day – is their equivalent to Britain's Remembrance Day. While in Belgium more white poppies can be seen amid the deluge of the British Legion (Shoulder to shoulder with all who serve) red ones each year. Many thanks too for the generous donations which make our work possible.

Remembrance Day is now only one of several events in support of the armed forces that have imposed themselves on the national calendar. Martial values and the opaque but turbo-charged military ethos, as government ministers like to call it, or militarism as the PPU calls it, is seeping largely unnoticed into every crevice of civil life. At events and displays around the country, at ceremonies, at 'Meet the Army' events, in schools and in the graveyards in Flanders in one form or other the military is ever present to impress on us that their way is the only way. There is no alternative.

The overt militarisation has been visibly underway since 2000 when the Ministry of Defence published 'Soldiering – The Military Covenant'. A document that attempts to give substance to 400 years of wishful thinking. It speaks of the military person's 'ultimate sacrifice' and the special bond and duty the nation therefore owes the soldier. It is silent on the considerable penalty that the citizens pay as a consequence of the soldier's work! Soldiering and its development of a military covenant is special pleading on behalf of a dangerous institution which, together with its many supporters, is demanding our sympathy and money.

Whatever sympathy one may have for individual military persons who have been injured or traumatised or for the families of those who have been killed, it must surely be tempered by the fact that in the last 25 years of Britain's wars these men and women have willingly (and one might say gratuitously) invaded sovereign countries, caused mayhem and untold misery there; the consequence of their actions are all around us and have in no small measure contributed to the instability in much of the world. After all the majority of the military personnel are no more

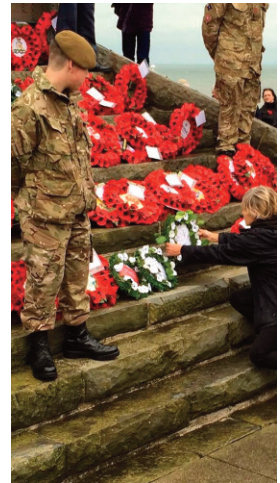
Job Opportunity **PPU Coordinator**

Salary £30,000 pa.

This is a big and challenging post requiring imagination and a mix of skills. From being the public voice of the PPU to managing the PPU's published output and projects to ensuring the smooth running of the organisation, the post offers a opportunity to take the PPU forward from a well-established base to challenge the war-making values embedded in society. See www.ppu.org.uk/jobpack Closing date 12 February

signs and symbols

Jan Melichar



Laying wreaths of white poppies in Aberystwyth under the watchful eye of the military. 2015

PERSPECTIVE



Laying white poppies at the conscientious stone. Remembrance Day 2015

likely to face the 'ultimate sacrifice' that any of us. Though a better resourced NHS might offer greater security and save more lives than any IED proof vehicle.

The military covenant was originally no more than a grandiose aspiration. As a consequence of the British military's 'self inflicted' casualties and following noisy promoting by General Dannatt and the British Legion a reluctant government was forced to codify many of the covenant's expectations. In its new guise as the Armed Forces Covenant it places all kinds of legal obligations on local councils and institutions. The state has never cared much for the shattered bodies returning from the wars it sent them to. As cuts in local services are taking place the

Armed Forces Covenant insists that local services should privilege military personnel. What is your local authority doing? [<http://tinyurl.com/mfn3pun>]

Armed Forces Day, launched nine years after 'Soldiering', was Gordon Brown's more muscular version of the Veterans Day he launched 3 years previously. While 'Soldiering' was a response to Britain's increasing military pursuits and Tony Blair's 'vision' at the time: '...today our Armed Forces are called upon to take action in many different parts of the world, not so much to defend our country but to defend its long-term security interests. ...in truth, today an army fights not just for territory and military superiority but often for hearts and minds, and it depends not simply on discipline,

White poppy extravaganza in Whitstable November 2015



but also on belief', Armed Forces Day was and is designed to embed the military world more closely, more firmly, more seamlessly into civil life and the state is anxious we are in tune with its drumbeat. While once governments promised us a better future today they only promise to protect us from a fearful world full of terrorists, radicals, 'money sucking migrants' and Europe. More military ethos in schools along with renewal of Trident, closer surveillance, more cadet forces, armed policemen and plenty of drones is thought to do the job.

Who do you think you are kidding mister politician...

public understanding of WW1

While the two year funded term of the PPU's Objecting to War Project has come to an end we continue to object! The publicising and promotion of the values that motivated many to become conscientious objectors in WW1 will continue (www.menwhosaidno.org) side by side with a vigorous



In a previous issue we mentioned the failed attempt during the War Resisters International conference in Cape Town to paint a giant AK-47 rifle. This has now been accomplished. The image, over 100 meters in size, by Ralph Ziman and his team shows a broken AK-47 rifle wrapped in world currencies. It is situated on The Grand Parade in Cape Town.

challenge to narrow and narrowing understanding of war and more crucially to a lack of understanding that war is not inevitable.

The anniversary of WW1 has done little to better public understanding as the word diagram here shows. This is based on a YouGov survey for the British Coun-
... hows... well you decide.

What we are reading

A Kingdom United popular response to the outbreak of the First World war in Britain and Ireland. Catriona Pennell. Oxford 2012

Life in the United Kingdom a guide for new residents. Home Office. 2013

Remembering the First World War. Bart Ziino Ed. Routledge. 2014

An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict. Mike Martin. C Hurst & Co. 2014

Kill Chain drones and the rise of high-tech assassins. Andrew Cockburn. Verso. 2015

What are you reading? mail @ppu.org.uk



militarism

The PPU is making a submission to the governments' Education Committee's 'purpose and quality of education' in England inquiry and will shortly publish a paper on Militarisation of Education (www.ppu.org.uk/militarism). If you are interested in participating in this work please get in touch mail@ppu.org.uk

whose war, whose memory?

Peter Glasgow

On a Thursday evening in November I delivered a 20 minute presentation to a diverse audience of academics, teachers, teacher trainees as well as undergraduate and post graduate students at the University of Birmingham. The title of the lecture/workshop was *Whose War, Whose Memory? Teaching the First World War in International Perspective*. Other presentations were delivered by Professor Eckhardt Fuchs, and his two colleagues from the George Eckert Institute in Germany, and Dr Catriona Pennell, a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Exeter. This event was organised by Voices of War and Peace: the Great War and its Legacy and the Institute for German Studies at Birmingham University. The former is a First World War Engagement Centre funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund. The University of Birmingham Centre is a joint initiative with a number of universities across the UK.

Dr Pennell's presentation brought us up to date on her and a colleague's latest research into how the First World War is being taught by History and English teachers across the country. It was interesting to note that there is an apparent tension between History and English teachers as to how the War should be taught with History teachers perhaps questioning

whether English teachers should be involved in teaching cultural history. With both sets of teachers, there was clearly a relationship between popular perception of the war and the default topics that are taught - notably the Western Front, trench warfare and the origins of the war. It was also interesting that English and History teachers both recognise the potential moral dimension in teaching about the First World War, and often use teaching about the war as an opportunity to build pupils' capacity for empathy. For History teaching, in particular, this raised the question of approaching the war as an historical and/or emotional event, particularly in the light of the emphasis placed on battlefield cemetery visits both by individual teachers, schools and the government (in its centenary funding).

Following an introduction into the work of the George Eckert Institute in Germany by Professor Fuchs, Dr Barbara Christophe and Dr Kerstin Schwedes shared with us some fascinating insights into the difference in approaches to the teaching of the history of World War One through their analysis of school text books from a range of countries. There appeared to be a clear link between a country's current political situation and how the War itself was portrayed in that country; this was particularly highlighted by those tex-

The British Armed Forces Learning Resource distributed to schools presents a sanitised version of war, glorifies 'military values' and an uncritical history of British military interventions.

tual amendments that had accompanied political change in Russia since the demise of the Soviet Union.

Both of these presentations reassured me that the structure of the presentation was appropriate. As the Peace Education Officer my contribution differed in that it was clearly not an academic paper related to a particular aspect of teaching about World War One. After a brief introduction and background to the PPU the starting point was an image of the mural, that sees Keir Hardy addressing the huge War against War demonstration that took place in Trafalgar Square two days before Great Britain became involved in the First World War on 4 August 1914. The words on the mural, It was NO then and it will always be NO, served as a reminder that there was a significant anti-war movement before and during WW1.

Dr Pennell's presentation reinforced a view that contemporary English and History teaching is, probably unconsciously, perpetuating a view of WW1 that contains a number of hidden histories.

Continuing with a theme of the hidden history of the anti-war movement, a brief description was given of the experiences, treatment and stereotyping of Conscientious Objectors after the introduction of conscription in

1916, as any initial enthusiasm for war had all but disappeared. Also raised was the absolutely seminal role of women in the No Conscription Fellowship as well as their role in the anti-war movement as a whole.

The work of the George Eckert Institute reminds us of the clear link between contemporary nationalist political thinking and how WW1 is being taught across Europe. I was therefore reassured that I had gone on to make a link between the military character and almost hysterical promotion of Remembrance today in the UK with a number of governmental educational initiatives, that together surely confirms an encroachment of militarism into the State education system.

Without having to go into detail, the audience's attention was drawn to some of the initiatives that make up a clear strategy by the government to promote a 'military ethos' in schools. It was appropriate though to spend a little time on the government introduced Battlefield Tours programme that involves two students and one teacher from every state funded secondary school in England visiting the battlefields on the Western Front. I was able to raise the issue of the inappropriateness of each coach ferrying teachers and pupils to the killing grounds containing at least one serving British

soldier. Dr Pennell is currently undertaking research into the pupils' perception of their trips to the Battlefields and it will be interesting if this was to reveal any concerns being expressed by learners themselves as to the presence amongst them of uniformed soldiers.

Later, in the discussions that followed, mention was made of The British Armed Forces Learning Resource, a politically motivated document, produced by the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister's Office, and distributed to schools in 2014. It presents a sanitised version of war and glorifies 'military values' as well as an uncritical history of British military interventions. The section on the First World War contains a number of simplistic notions that included the idea that Britain did not want war but it could not be avoided as well as a failure to make any mention of the British Empire, never mind Empire related war aims.

The Peace Pledge Union intends to keep coming back to the the whole issue of the increasing militarisation of British society and in particular what is happening in schools but if the general response of the audience at Birmingham University is anything to go by people will find its message not only challenging but also timely and refreshing.

I heard someone saying 'that is scary' and saw a child with a toy hand grenade, which their mother was happily buying for them

news from the ppu

A year on PPU Council. Three council members share their experience of 2015.

Lucy Beck writes. 2015 has been a busy year for the PPU staff, and a little bit for PPU Council members too! Peace work isn't just about visible demonstrations or direct action, but involves detailed painstaking work behind the scenes. I was thinking about what I had done as a PPU Council member this year, and realised that I was looking at it back to front - I should really write about what I gain as a PPU Council member. I get to meet the staff regularly, to hear about the work they are doing; I meet other PPU

members at our events and conferences; I have the chance to think about and plan the future of the PPU; I meet and work with other friendly peace groups through the First World War Peace Forum which the PPU started some years ago; I learn about the lives of the conscientious objectors from that war through the work for our website; I am given access to books about the women who supported the conscientious objectors and have the privilege of doing research into their stories.

And of course there are always meetings to attend, conferences to go to, job applications and fundraising submissions to be drafted, proof-reading, checking proposed publications written by the staff, packing poppies and other more routine work as required, which keeps me active in my 'retirement'.

Attending the AGM and conference brought me up to date with developments around militarism in education and in the country, which has provided fresh stimulation for the PPU to take this issue forward in a more active way than we have done for many years. And I was reminded once again of the seriousness of the issues while in a shop last week - I heard someone saying 'that is scary' and saw a child with a toy hand grenade, which their mother was happily buying for them.

This may seem trivial while wars rage on, Parliament decides to send bombs into Syria, the Trident renewal debate grows nearer, and the UK's arms sales to Saudi Arabia lead to our weapons being used to kill people in Yemen. But that mother's purchase of a toy hand grenade is a symbol of the unthinking acceptance of violence in this society. Our original Campaign against Militarism in the 1980s began with a soap hand grenade spotted in a shop. We

calling all ppu members

At 80 the PPU is in good shape, with more staff and more work planned than for many years - the end of war is still some way off - and so our work continues.

We would welcome your support and one way you can do this is to become a Council member and help oversee the PPU's work and developments. PPU Council meets 3-4 times a year in London (usually an afternoon meeting on days that suit its members). Council members are responsible for staff, fundraising and financial matters as well as setting direction for the PPU's future work. Council reports on its work at AGMs. The present Council wishes to add to its number. If you are interested in helping with this important and responsible work please let us know your interest by writing to Jan Melichar at jan@ppu.org.uk telling us something about the ways you might be able to contribute to the Council's work. We will then be able to send you more detailed information.

have a long way to go and need all the help we can get!

2016 is a important year of WW1 anniversaries, including the Battle of the Somme, and for the peace movement, the introduction of conscription in 1916 and the very first right of conscientious objection to military service established in the UK after the campaigning of our predecessors 100 years ago. I hope you will help locally and nationally to take the PPU's work forward in whatever way you can.



Albert Beale writes. One of the voluntary jobs I do for the PPU - alongside being a member of the Council which oversees the organisation's work - is to take on much of the PPU's interaction with the media.

There isn't always time to initi-

ate contact with the press, radio and television - and even when we do, it doesn't always result in any coverage. But luckily, they often come to us! Although journalists sometimes want "a militant pacifist" to give a distinct line on all sorts of issues of war and peace, much of their interest in what the PPU has to say centres on Remembrance and white poppies. In some years, we get as much press interest in the few weeks surrounding Remembrance as we do in the rest of the year put together.

Requests sometimes come from journalists we haven't dealt with before (but who've done their homework!), and at other times I or the PPU office will get a call from someone we already know, who's aware of the value and interest - or at least the controversy value - of what we have to say. There is sometimes interest from print and on-line publications, and from television, but the most frequent interest is from radio stations.

Our radio coverage is most commonly on local stations (they have a lot of airtime to fill!), but also on national networks from time to time. The majority of news or discussion programmes we're invited to take part in are on BBC channels, but some speech-based commercial channels also show an interest, as do some community and student broadcasters.

This year's Remembrance coverage was reasonably typical: one moment I might be running round London from studio to studio, taking part in three live radio programmes in a day ... and then nothing for a couple of days. The ones which are probably most useful for the PPU in terms of getting our message across - and the ones I tend to enjoy most - are the longer discussion programmes, where I get to go head to head with some pro-military type for half an hour or so. Although journalists interviewing me are rarely particularly sympathetic to a pacifist worldview, their challenges are at least (mostly) fairly polite; but some of the "opponents" I end up in a studio with seem to think that pacifism is inherently barmy, and don't hold back from saying so.

I think a reason that we get increasing amounts of press interest around Remembrance is precisely because the government and the military are more and more using the emotions around Remembrance as a way to increase support for (and recruitment to) the forces: a perspective which refuses to accept that the armed forces should have any role at all in the world is seen as especially objectionable, even offensive, in that context.

An example of this is a Radio 5 programme I was on one Remembrance weekend evening a few

Our submission for the 2016 Armed Forces Bill has focussed on two issues - conscientious objection and under-age recruitment.

years ago. I spent half an hour refusing to discuss the relative de-)merits of specific military activity, and the degree to which we should sympathise with the military's suffering; rather, I made it clear that from a pacifist perspective we ruled out re-

sort to armed force completely, and that the military being commemorated (precisely because they'd chosen to take up arms) were not the main victims of the horrors of war, but the main cause of those horrors. One of the BBC researchers told me afterwards that I'd come close to breaking the record for the number of "string 'im up" hate calls ever generated by a speaker on their weekend evening discussions.

into the system.

For Armed Forces Bills a House of Commons Select Committee receives evidence from interested organisations as to particular aspects of the Armed Forces, and suggested improvements. From 2001 the PPU has taken part, alongside organisations such as Child Soldiers International (previously, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Forces Watch and At Ease. Such focus on the British armed forces at present coincides with renewed efforts by the PPU and others to counter militarism in Britain generally. Evidence is published as part of the Select Committee's Report, a Parliamentary paper permanently available on record, establishing the PPU as a responsible body with evidence-based argument.

In the PPU's submission for the 2016 Bill, I focussed on two issues - conscientious objection and under-age recruitment.

From WW1 the question has arisen of people volunteering for the armed forces, but after a time coming to realise that they are involved in activity contrary to their conscientious scruples and seeking a way out – with the difficulty that armed forces contracts are not subject to simple and immediate resigning. In WW1 Max Plowman was court-martialled for trying to resign his officer commission, but went on to become the first General Secretary of the PPU. In WW2 there were more such men, together with others who originally accepted call-up, but developed a



Remembrance Day PPU 2015.
Tavistock Sq London.

Bill Hetherington writes. Ever since the 1688 Bill of Rights, keeping a standing army in Britain has been unlawful unless sanctioned by Parliament. For centuries Parliament passed an annual Army Act to keep the Army, but since mid-20th century this has been reduced to every five years (with intervening Statutory Instruments), and the Navy and Air Force have been incorporated

conscientious objection, and eventually the system for conscientious objectors was adapted to cover them. After abolition of conscription in 1963 a version of that adaptation has remained for regular members of the armed forces, but there are problems.

One is that, unlike conscientious objection to conscription 1916-19 and 1939-63, it is not written in law but a non-statutory concession. It is little known, and not easily found within differing administrative procedures of the three armed forces.

Another problem is that applications for discharge on conscience grounds are very few, so that experience in dealing with such cases never develops within the armed forces or within the Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors, a lay body chaired by a lawyer set up to hear appeals from applicants after rejection as conscientious objectors at initial application within the navy, army or air force hierarchy. Also, it is little understood that in Britain so-called "political" grounds for objection have been eligible for consideration on the same terms as religious, moral or humanitarian grounds. Recommendations for improvement have been urged.

Britain has a long, and, we argue, dishonourable, history of recruiting boys, and now girls, as soon as they are able to leave school, originally at 14, then 15, and now 16. It is not simply a matter of accepting those especially keen at that age, but a calculated policy of delib-

erately focussing on that age for recruitment, on the principle that if they are not "caught" (that is the actual word used) then, they might go on to further education, apprenticeships or whatever and be lost to the armed forces, whose relentless "need" is valued above the personal development and education of young people.

The Army, which recruits far more people (adults and youngsters) than the other two forces together, exacerbates the problem by requiring under-18s to sign up to a longer contract than adults.



**Remembrance Day PPU 2015.
Tavistock Sq London.**

These policies have been repeatedly condemned by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Joint Parliamentary Human Rights Committee, the Duty of Care Report of the Commons Select Committee on Defence, and even past Select Committees on Armed Forces Bills.

The PPU submission draws attention to all these reports and urges an immediate end to the UK's pariah status as the only country in Europe still recruiting at age 16.

where are we now?

Ben Copsey

The Objecting to War Project came to the end of its second year - unbelievably - two years of research and outreach, coordinating volunteers, designing exhibitions and talking to as many people as possible about the courageous and principled Conscientious Objectors of the First World War.

Looking back on the project, it's easy to tally up the talks and lectures (38), the education sessions (13), the public workshops (8) and the exhibitions (2), and see that in terms of talking to the public, we've worked hard and had a great deal of success.

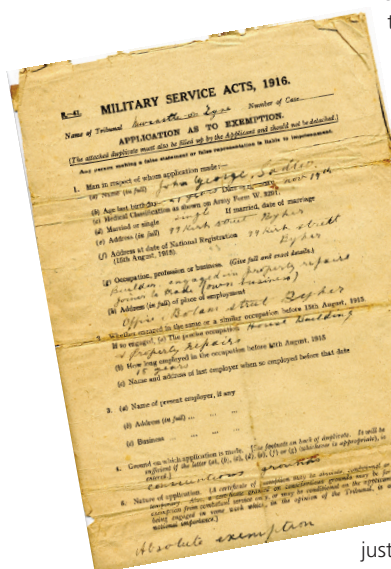
More people know more about the key questions of Conscientious Objection - the who, what, where, when and, crucially, why - than did when I wrote my first article for Peace Matters back in September 2013.

It's harder to think about what we've learned on the project. Not just in how to work with partner organisations to produce great material on COs around London, but also what we know about the Objectors themselves. One of the great tasks of Objecting to War is research - finding the men and understanding their experiences so we can tell those stories to anyone who will lis-

ten. So what have we found, and what have we added to the CO story?

A major aim of Objecting to War was simply finding the COs themselves. Though separated by only 100 years from their decision to pit themselves against war and militarism, records are sketchy and incomplete at best and all too often missing entirely. The project has delved into archives and library collections around London and beyond, digging up the slightest hints to reveal new caches of information, new names and new experiences. We've added hundreds of new names to the list of Britain's Conscientious Objectors, gathering information from sources as varied as previously inaccessible archives in major collections, local libraries, newspaper archives and even wikipedia. These new names come with new stories and new information, but often new challenges and inconsistencies, leading our Archivist, Bill and I to ferret out details like full names, dates of Tribunal hearings and length of prison sentences. This research work will never be finished, but we can be proud of the amazing work we've done, and our volunteers have done, finding these forgotten histories.

The sad corollary of these investigations is to reveal an ever growing



all of our research has led to an inescapable conclusion - the CO story isn't as straightforward as we thought it was

list of Conscientious Objectors who died during the war. Whether finding men who died abroad while serving in non-combatant roles in the army, or in far flung parts of the world, finding these men is always tragic, but our research ensures they will not be forgotten.

Aside from the men themselves, the system of Conscientious Objection has been given more of the attention it deserves. Pieced together from individual biographies and official sources, some of the byzantine politics, economics and daily operation of the Government's

suspicion, but open friendliness by the people of towns and villages around them.

We've revealed more about the process of becoming an objector and the complex decisions that led to men refusing, or indeed accepting, conscription. Even the CO organisations have not escaped scrutiny, and reviews like our monthly look at the No-Conscription Fellowship newspaper *The Tribunal* have revealed that the NCF was as factionalised and concerned with consensus politics as any organisation!

All of our research has led to

revealed the same stories - the Absolutist, the Alternativist, the Medical worker - they've been stories of men who arrived at similar conclusions in different ways, and vice versa. There wasn't a single 'CO story' and there wasn't a single party line. Even within close-knit communities of COs, or organisations, or among men that shared both experiences and motivations, there were complex difficulties and webs of loyalties and obligations that led men down different paths. Every story might seem the same, but the more that we find, the more we realise that



www.menwhosaidno.org

Some of the conscientious objectors and the women who supported them

policies towards COs have been revealed. Of particular interest has been the Home Office Scheme - work camps set up for COs in 1916 - which has long been treated as a uniform system of punishment. Slowly, we've pieced together a more complex story where men had, at times, a surprising degree of freedom, held concerts and put on plays and were, in cases, treated not with hostility and

an inescapable conclusion - the CO story isn't as straightforward as we thought it was. Far from being unassailable paragons of pacifist virtue, who arrived at their conclusions swiftly and easily, held their heads high through all that the military and civil authorities could throw at them, their motivations and experiences were as complex as the situation they found themselves in. While a lot of our research has

every one is different.

The stories we've unearthed and the results of our research can be found on our website Remembering the Men Who Said No. It's an endlessly expanding resource looking at COs in every way we can manage, telling stories, providing analysis and sharing the information we've found on the project. It will grow for a long while yet - research is never over. Watch this space!

PERSPECTIVE



Joanna Bourke

One day, while working in the Archive of the Imperial War Museum in London, I opened a file and read about one man's experience of the Battle of the Somme, in September 1916. The author was a young man, barely out of his teens. He recalled that he was steadying himself for going "over the top" when he spied an old school friend. "I looked at Herbert", he recalled, adding

I could see his lips move – I shouted but I couldn't hear my-

self at all. I wanted to tell him that we would keep together so I grabbed his hand and we went over [the top] together as we had gone to Sunday school, hand in hand.

100 years later, we, too, can play "Over the Top". It is a first person shooter video game aimed at school children. It is described as an "interactive adventure game that allows you to experience life in the trenches during the First World War". It promises players that they can "live through some

of the excitement, despair, brutality, and sheer horror of trench warfare". Note that excitement comes first: and they promise despair, brutality and horror, also – but not too much – because it is supposed to be fun. After all, they tell children and their parents, it is "part history" but also "part adventure game".

The producers promise that it has a high level of "replayability". Players are required to "make a decision" and then

click on your choice and read the

Joanna Bourke speaking at PPU's Remembrance Day event at the CO stone in London



outcome of your decision. A poor decision might mean trouble or, worse, disaster. But don't worry, you can always start over and try a new adventure.... So pick up your rifle, put on your helmet, and get ready for a truly unique experience!

Such fun: young people are encouraged to seek drama without tragedy; the virtualization of violence.

Of course, "war as pleasure" is not new. It is deeply embedded in everyday life. Contrary to the assumption that war is an event that peace activists must work to counter and outlaw, it is more realistic to think of war as a presence, deeply embedded in the games children play, the media we watch, the books we read, and the surveillance techniques that infect our lives.

Military practices, technologies, and symbols have invaded our everyday lives. We rarely even notice it. And, when we do, we don't seem to care too much. Our garrisons are maintained throughout the globe yet the military campaigns we wage abroad seem as real to most of us as the metaphorical wars on drugs or obesity. It is not uncommon to hear people waxing lyrically about the sanctity of life – including that of the two-cell embryo – while cheering on the troops and proudly pinning red poppies to their clothing on Remembrance

Day. The blurring of entertainment and war ("militainment") and the advent of warbots – a generic term for drones, robotic weapons, unmanned vehicles, and suchlike – has led many of us to take for granted that war is without end and without borders. All of us have effectively been turned into citizen-soldiers. Actual combat is only the crude manifestation of omnipresent violence in our society.

One of the first steps, then, is to bring to public attention the ways in which war and military violence are embedded in our society. When I was writing *Wounding the World*, I was amazed by the number of times people assumed that a book about militarisation was a book about American, rather than British society. Although no one disputes that America has a serious problem with militarized violence, we also need to look closer to home. The eruptions of commemorations of the centenary of the First World War (including the computer games mentioned) were shocking in their return to a rhetoric more familiar to 1914 or 1939 than today. The "new militarism" of the post-9/11 world, involving the bellicosity of western nations in conflicts in the Middle East as well as the ubiquitous nature of the "war on terror", has given a new life to the problematic rhetoric of "freedom" and



Wounding the World: How Military Violence and War Play Invade Our Lives. Joanna Bourke. Virago, 2015

"liberty". The last time such concepts were banded about with gusto was during the war against Hitler and National Socialism. Courage, honour, and glory featured loudly. Millions of people solemnly recited the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon and Rupert Brooke, but it was hard to avoid hearing in the tremor of their voices, a vicarious thrill accompanying imaginings of "the horror, the horror".

A deluge of history books, television and radio programmes, newspapers, and museums showcased grandfathers, grandmothers, great uncles and aunts, and other "ordinary people" who were physically or psychologically wounded during that war. We might be forgiven for not becoming

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ing aware of the role of British servicemen and women as inflictors of lethal violence.

One of the main things that we as people who are passionately against militarist excursions into our lives, and, even more, into the lives of our victims, is to provide alternatives and ways of resisting. In other words, what can be done?

The first step requires persuading people that it doesn't have to be this way: we can decide not to remain helplessly enthralled to military ideologies, practices, and symbols. The military is not as powerful as it wants us to believe.

In other words, one of the most debilitating myths for people seeking to forge more peaceful worlds is the assertion that armed conflict is inevitable. But militarism serves instrumental purposes; it involves the investment of trillions of dollars, pounds, euros, rubles, or yuan. It is a social activity. As such, they can be unmade as well as made.

We have buried our heads in the sand and there is only one way out: to return to a politics that recognises that in wounding the world we wound ourselves and our loved ones. By passively accepting militarist encroachments, we also close down encounters with strangers we might have learnt from, laughed with, and loved.

In fact, the strategies open to us are legion. In the three-volume *The Politics of Nonviolence Action* (1973), Gene Sharp catalogues nearly 200 different ways people can engage in nonviolent protesting. Each of us possesses proclivities, skills, and spheres of influence that enable us to make a difference in our own local contexts. Wherever we are situated – as teachers, homemakers, academics, labourers, shopkeepers, secretaries, publishers, journalists, civil servants, entertainers, novelists, artists, lawyers, doctors, scientists, unemployed, and so on – we can make a difference globally. There is only one rule: a refusal to “outsource” political engagement.

I began this talk by conjuring up a young man, who held his school friend's hand as they went over the top. One of them did not survive. I also started with a video game aimed at school children called “Over the Top” and promising children a good time in the trenches. Both that young soldier's innocence and war gaming cynicism can be resisted. In contrast to Margaret Thatcher's famous phrase “There is no alternative”, we can make that act of faith in our future and that of our children.

So, pick up your rifle, put on your helmet and
get ready for a truly unique experience!

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE

