

WAR + INK

New Perspectives on Ernest Hemingway's
Early Life and Writings

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HEMINGWAY

A Typical Doughboy

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The phrases *Hemingway* and *typical doughboy* are rarely, if ever, paired in the same sentence. From the vantage point of someone who has spent her academic career studying the American soldiers' experiences in World War I, I would like to advance the notion that in many respects Ernest Hemingway's military service in World War I was rather typical. At first glance, Hemingway's actual military service appears much more atypical than representative. Hemingway did not fight but served in the Red Cross, went to Italy not France, was quickly wounded, and spent most of his remaining time overseas recovering in a hospital from his wounds and then from jaundice. But a closer look at Hemingway and, more importantly, a closer look at the American soldier experience reveal just how typical many aspects of Hemingway's experiences truly were. To understand Hemingway in this manner does not require a great deal of reinterpretation about his military career. Instead, it entails a more complete understanding of how the average American soldier's wartime experience differed from the archetype developed in a range of iconic poems, novels, and memoirs by French and British soldiers.

When the United States entered the war in April 1917, Hemingway was a high school senior who would not turn eighteen until July 1917. If he wanted to fight, his sole option was to volunteer since the first Selective Service law drafted men only between the ages of twenty-one and

thirty. By the time the draft-eligible ages were extended to include men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five in August 1918, Hemingway was convalescing in a Red Cross hospital in Italy. Nonetheless, like many men of his generation, Hemingway felt tremendous societal pressure to demonstrate a strong desire to get overseas and fight, whether or not he actually wanted to serve in the frontlines. Much debate surrounds Hemingway's claim that he tried to volunteer for the army but was rejected for his poor eyesight. Biographer Kenneth Lynn doubts that Hemingway really tried to enlist, concluding that "for all his patriotism the prospect of trench warfare put Ernest off" (73). Whether or not he actually tried to volunteer, the fact that he felt compelled to openly make this claim connects Hemingway to many others of his wartime generation.

Every history of America in World War I notes that on June 5, 1917, ten million men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty registered for the draft amid patriotic celebrations throughout the nation. Ship horns, church bells, and factory whistles rang out in cities and towns to announce the start of registration, and many families accompanied their sons, husbands, and brothers to the designated registration sites. In some areas, men camped out overnight to be the first to register from their neighborhoods—with much shoving, pushing, and occasional fistfights in the morning over who would receive this honor.

Registering for the draft proved quite different, however, than expecting to go to war. Although twenty-four million men eventually registered for the draft without incident, millions then took advantage of their legal right to request a deferment because of their occupation or support of dependents. In the end, over sixty-five percent of those who registered received deferments or exemptions from service (Provost Marshal General 110–14; Chambers 196–98). The largest proportion (forty-three percent) of deferments went to married men who were the sole providers of their families. As one applicant succinctly noted, "No one wants to take care of another man's wife" (James and Wells 112). Occupational deferments became more common during the second year of the war. Millions of men thus gave the appearance of being willing to go to war, preserving the veneer of masculine respectability while staying safely at home. Most accomplished this goal by publicly registering for the draft and then privately requesting a deferment. Hemingway fit this pattern by concocting a convincing story of trying to volunteer but being rejected.

Men who had a legitimate reason or excuse for staying home nonetheless spent the war in constant danger of being perceived as “slackers” who were purposely avoiding their duty. The “slacker raids” of 1918 that sent police dragnets through urban movie palaces, bars, and restaurants in search of men who had failed to report to their draft boards illustrated that falling afoul of the law could have serious consequences. Being tried and convicted in the court of public opinion was also an ever-present concern for men out of uniform (Capozzola 21–54). Serving the cause by selling or buying war bonds, keeping a victory garden, or working in a war-related industry were all ways that draft-age men tried to allay any doubt concerning their patriotism or loyalty to the cause. Sensitive to the possibility of being considered a slacker, Hemingway joined the Home Guards upon arriving in Kansas City for his first newspaper reporting job and relished participating in drills and maneuvers in the regular army uniform he received (Mellow 45–47). As a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, Hemingway filed many stirring reports on the military recruitment drive. He was not, therefore, just the passive recipient of America’s preoccupation with wartime mobilization. Hemingway also played an active role in creating a wartime culture that linked masculine adventure with going off to war.

Controlling one’s fate in this situation was difficult, but not impossible. Unable to withstand the mounting pressure to do more than write patriotic accounts of men heading off to war or drilling in his free time, Hemingway joined with those who tried to make the most of their dwindling options. Some men who did not receive deferments found another way to preserve the appearance of volunteering for service. For those who agreed with Congressman James Beauchamp Clark that “there is precious little difference between a conscript and a convict,” volunteering remained more appealing than the draft as a way to enter the wartime military (Chambers 165). Until December 15, 1917, men could volunteer for any branch of the army. Yet during the short window available for enlistment, men did not flock to the colors. Instead, enlistments came in fits and bursts, as individuals weighed their chances of being drafted with their desire to control where they served. Once the War Department decided the order in which numbers assigned to draft registrants would be called, individuals had new information that often affected their decision to volunteer. Those with numbers unlikely to be called had no incentive to volunteer. “If they’d come and got me I’d have grabbed a flag and yelled ‘Hurray!’

and 'Let's go!' but they didn't come around so I didn't go. I wasn't mad at anybody," said Huey Long, the future Louisianan governor and senator, to explain his decision to sit out the war as a young man (Baldwin 27). No one could accuse them of being slackers; they had registered for the draft after all but had just not been called into service. Those with numbers likely to be called, however, found a new reason to volunteer. When the deadline for volunteering approached, the Army witnessed a surge of enlistments. As the Provost Marshal noted, "there persisted always, for many at least, the desire to enter military service, if needs must, by enlistment rather than by draft—that is, to enter voluntarily in appearance at least" (Provost Marshal General 224). One enlistee offered a clear reason for his decision to enlist before the deadline passed: "You can pick any branch you want *now*, later they pick you" (Keene 15).

When Hemingway volunteered for the Italian Red Cross in the winter of 1918, he exhibited a similar desire to control where he served. As importantly, he had managed to find a way to get overseas that satisfied his own inclinations as well as those of his father. Hemingway's father, who had refused to support any scheme for his underage son to enter the army, apparently "relented when it came to the idea that Hemingway would be providing a useful Christian service as a noncombatant" according to one of his biographers (Mellow 48). Like many parents, Hemingway's father and mother found it difficult to jettison the sentiments that made the 1916 song "I Didn't Raise My Son to Be a Soldier" a hit during the 1914–17 period when the United States remained on the sidelines as a neutral nation. They struggled to reconcile their concern for his safety with their desire that he fulfill his civic duties in a manly fashion. Helping to save wounded men through the Red Cross in Italy appeared to meet both goals, and he left with their blessing.

For many parents, including Hemingway's, the idea of their sons stopping in New York City, and enjoying all the various pastimes available there, was as troubling as nightmares of their sons lying prone on a battlefield overseas. The temptations of women and wine, freely offered to men in uniform, proved hard for many men to resist despite warnings from their parents and commanding officers. Hemingway already had ample exposure to both prostitutes and alcohol in Kansas City, so New York did not provide too many new revelations to him. Letters from Hemingway's parents urging him to remember his church upbringing and

middle-class values echoed the admonitions that countless mothers and fathers sent their sons as they left their relatively cloistered homes for urban adventures on their way to war. As one mother explained, women throughout the nation could be certain of reuniting with their sons in heaven if they were "torn to shreds" fighting for their country. The same boys, however, would be lost forever to their families if they "be returned to us besotted degenerate wrecks of their former selves cursed with that hell-born craving for alcohol" (Bristow 2).

The Selective Service Act made it illegal to serve alcohol to men in uniform, and before a soldier left on leave, he often received a graphic training camp lecture on the evils of venereal disease. Enjoying a final binge before their ships sailed, thousands of soldiers overstayed their passes in New York and found themselves at best reassigned to other units, at worst facing courts-martial (Keene 70–71). Hemingway and his comrades did the requisite sightseeing in New York by visiting the aquarium, Woolworth Tower, and Grant's Tomb (where he perhaps witnessed scenes of the gritty underside of urban life: men meeting to indulge in lurid sexual fantasies) (Mellow 53).¹ Leading socialites offered officers their chauffeured limousines to drive around Manhattan, an offer that Hemingway and his friends gladly accepted along with invitations to parties and dances.

Hemingway clearly relished the immediate social status and authority that came his way once the Red Cross issued him a regular army uniform, complete with insignia, leather aviation puttees, and officer's shoes. Referring to himself as a "camouflaged 1st Lieuts [sic]," Hemingway wrote with glee of walking up and down Broadway in New York City, forcing enlisted men—367 in all, so he claimed—to salute him (Lynn 74). Hemingway may have enjoyed the experience, but the enlisted men probably did not. Hemingway did not count the enlisted men who refused to salute him, a growing problem in the wartime army. Army officials understood the distaste enlisted men had for saluting. The average soldier viewed saluting as a sign of their subservience to officers often no more experienced than themselves. Army leaders, however, viewed salutes as an essential component of military discipline (Pace 51–56; Clear 719–20). Soldiers who did not recognize military authority with a salute could not, army officials believed, be counted on to obey orders in battle. Yet, ironically, army officials devalued the salute as a symbol of obedience themselves when they commenced a campaign to convince, rather than compel, citizen soldiers

to perform the gesture. By the last few months of the war, army officials were earnestly trying to popularize the salute as a courteous way for officers and enlisted men to greet one another.

Army officials, however, fought a losing battle in trying to convince citizen soldiers that no caste system existed in the wartime army. Numerous officer privileges, ones that Hemingway had no trouble enjoying, conveyed exactly the opposite message. As Private T. P. Wilson told friends, "It was hard for a soldier fighting for democracy to understand why it was improper for him to conduct himself as a social equal and on a social level with any fellow soldier" (Keene 135). Why did army canteens post large signs warning "No Candy, etc. For Enlisted Men?" one soldier wondered. "Have we won Democracy [sic]," Private George E. Simons wrote, when only officers got reserved seating at shows, received better food and housing, could bring their souvenirs home, openly date French women, and drink wine? After the war, it was not uncommon for drunken, discharged soldiers to verbally assault officers on the street.

The army also became the victim of its own success in fostering the notion that a courageous performance on the battlefield served as the truest test of manhood and patriotism. Unlike the Civil War in which ninety percent of soldiers fought, in the First World War sixty percent found themselves relegated to skilled and unskilled noncombatant ranks (Wool 17, 195). Some clearly sought these assignments by choice; others, however, chafed under the sense of unfairness that they remained stuck performing tasks of drudgery that would afford them little chance for recognition or heroism during the war.

Both at home and overseas, the army now asked many wartime soldiers to perform logistical tasks undertaken in previous conflicts by civilian laborers. A severe shortage of civilian workers at home and in France, along with prohibitively high civilian wages, precluded the army from hiring or transporting workers overseas. Combatants and noncombatants alike anticipated that going to France would be an exciting, dangerous adventure, and thus the actual monotony of rear-line life took these troops by surprise. The greatest challenge for many noncombatants remained overcoming the boredom of this position. Hemingway clearly found it tedious day after day to drive up into the Dolomite Mountains in the northern Italian Alps to retrieve wounded men and transport them to the hospital. "There's nothing here but scenery and too damn much of that," he complained to a friend (Lynn 78).

The warrior image of soldiering fostered in wartime propaganda, the stories expected by families at home, and the physical expressions of masculinity championed in the training camps through recreational activities like boxing haunted noncombatants who became increasingly disillusioned when their military experience failed to live up to this ideal. The contradiction between their expectations and what military service actually entailed for noncombatants precipitated an unforeseen crisis of identity for these men within the wartime army. Despite enormous differences in the type of work they performed, all noncombatants shared the problem of defining their status among the military ranks. In many respects, the importance of the logistical tasks they fulfilled revealed that the warrior model for soldiering was becoming increasingly obsolete in the modern army. Yet rather than abandoning or attacking this ideal, instead the noncombatants tried to enumerate the various ways that their experiences fit the mold it provided.

Engineer, signal, supply, and ambulance work all exposed noncombatants to a fair amount of artillery shelling and battlefield carnage. Rather than appreciating these experiences on their own terms, noncombatants often went to great lengths to equate the perils that they faced with those encountered by frontline troops. Engineers spoke of going into no-man's-land to repair barbed wire entrenchments as "going over the top," the term usually reserved for men making a frontal assault on enemy trenches. Ambulance drivers boasted of driving daily on open roads under fire, noting that men in the trenches had bunkers where they could wait out artillery and gas attacks. Lieutenant Carl K. Hill oversaw a medical supply depot in France where men spent the war loading and unloading supplies from railway cars. He acknowledged that his men would "never wear shiny wound stripes nor sport a D. S. [Distinguished Service] cross before their ladies. Nevertheless, they have fought as steadfastly as their buddies at the Front" (67). To support this rather bizarre contention, Hill likened living next to "shrieking locomotives" and the "crash of a fallen box" to the booming artillery and exploding shrapnel raining down on frontline troops. Private Elmer Goodrick returned home with a piece of the shell that had exploded near him while driving supplies to the front to show his family: proof that he had gotten close enough to the enemy to be under fire (Logsdon; McKinney; Goodrick). Others, like Hemingway, were constantly on the lookout for chances to get nearer to the actual fighting. "I'm going to get out of this ambulance section and see if I can't find out where the

war is," he told a friend, jumping at the chance to deliver cigarettes and chocolates to Italian soldiers in the trenches when his supervisor asked for volunteers (Lynn 78). Chester C. Nash Jr., a cook in an army hospital in France, echoed these sentiments, noting in his diary that "I would prefer to get into a man's unit, get out of this baby affair. Then I might be a real man" (Byerly 243). Nash was one of many noncombatants submitting a steady stream of requests for transfers to combatant units.

Noncombatants also became compulsive artifact collectors because souvenirs from the front offered concrete evidence that a soldier had actually been near the enemy. Few wanted to save a shovel, typewriter, or ambulance steering wheel as acceptable symbols of their military service. Legitimate souvenirs associated the owner with the peril of the overseas military expedition. German bayonets, helmets, and uniform buttons evoked the romance and brutality of a personal encounter with enemy soldiers on the battlefield. Despite numerous attempts, therefore, military authorities could not stop enterprising soldiers from souvenir hunting and profiteering. "That morning the call became too strong so a party, including three privates and our interpreter started out for souvenirs. . . . [F]rom the rear we looked more like walking junk shops than anything else," Emmett Riggins noted about one scavenging escapade (Riggins). On his trips ferrying injured soldiers from a rear-area triage center to the hospital, Hemingway picked up "a wonderful lot of souvenirs" and even had a friend snap a photograph of him wearing a German helmet with a rifle slung over his shoulder (Mellow 59). How he acquired these items remains a mystery. Many wounded American soldiers forthrightly accused enterprising ambulance drivers and hospital attendants of robbing them of their own souvenirs while they slept or were rendered unconscious by their wounds. When he returned briefly to his parents' house after the war, Hemingway proudly displayed in his bedroom the bayonets, pistols, and gas masks that he had collected, a shrine regularly visited by his younger brother and his friends who relished Hemingway's war stories.

Hemingway's private angst over his disappointing wartime record provided the fodder, Hemingway scholar Keith Gandal asserts, for the theme of disillusionment that runs through much of his postwar fiction. This interpretation offers a different portrait of Hemingway than the one advanced by biographer Kenneth Lynn. Rather than someone who purposefully avoided duty in the trenches (Lynn's view), in Gandal's ac-

count, Hemingway was eager to participate in the greatest adventure of his generation by taking up arms. Disappointed in these ambitions when the army turned him down, Hemingway became full of angry resentment against a military establishment that accepted and promoted those whom Hemingway considered beneath him—particularly Jews and immigrants. In *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*, Gandal views Hemingway's subsequent enlistment in the Red Cross to serve on a "joke front" as the source of the disillusionment that pervaded his postwar fiction. Hemingway, Gandal suggests, was not part of the Lost Generation, but the "generation that lost out" on the chance to lead men into battle (143–45). The root of the disillusionment that crept into Hemingway's postwar fiction, therefore, came not from having seen some fighting firsthand but rather from having failed to reach the Western Front as an officer.

Gandal's work suggests yet another way to view Hemingway as a spokesman for the average doughboy. David Kennedy, in *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, the oft-cited standard-bearer for understanding the war and the home front, asserts that the postwar novels of protest, including Hemingway's, exposed a brutal, alienating war that differed dramatically from the romantic and upbeat assessment of the war's purpose and fighting that average doughboys often saw in their own memoirs and veterans' magazines (212–30). Kennedy asserts that the wide divide between intellectuals like Hemingway and the masses made this elite-produced postwar literature unrepresentative of the average soldiers' experience. Unlike in Europe, where antiwar novels of disillusionment mirrored the fighting man's general disenchantment with the war, Kennedy concludes that Lost Generation novels provide little insight into the American experience of war but instead simply continue the American literary tradition of rebelling against authority. A host of upbeat memoirs by ex-servicemen seemingly confirm this notion. Rather than disillusionment, many American veterans remained proud of their military prowess and celebrated the rite of passage that military service represented.² Gandal's work, however, proposes a way to reconnect Lost Generation writers to their fellow veterans. These writers articulated the sense of disillusionment and disappointment that many soldiers shared, not about the experience of combat or fighting but about their failure to serve along the frontlines. Men commonly lamented their noncombatant

role, as Everett Taylor did, with the assertion that "it was not my fault I was behind the line" (Taylor). Having experienced firsthand the frustration of spending the war among the noncombatant ranks, Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and William Faulkner were perfectly positioned to speak for a majority of the wartime generation and their anger at the powers that be who relegated them to the rear.

By collecting similar keepsakes and emphasizing the same hazardous aspects of their work, noncombatants incorporated parts of the combatant soldiers' identity into their own army persona. Still, a great number of noncombatants found it difficult to convince themselves of their own heroism. The title of Paul Maxwell's memoir, "The Diary of a Dud," more accurately symbolized the conclusions many noncombatants privately reached about their military careers (Maxwell). The commander of the Services of Supply tried to reassure support troops that they "did more for their country by living for it than they could possibly have done by dying for it," but many soldiers, including Hemingway, returned home unconvinced (Freidel 102). The only true honor and respect went to those who risked their lives at the front, preferably as fighting troops, not as support troops. Even this commander acknowledged that noncombatants were "doomed to spend the rest of their lives explaining why they served in the Services of Supply" to relatives and friends at home who equated military service with fighting (Freidel 98).

Hemingway narrowly escaped this fate. After only a few weeks at the front, he was seriously wounded when a trench mortar exploded in front of him. This pivotal event gave the budding novelist a way to reinvent himself as a combatant in the eyes of those at home, even if privately he could not escape the truth.

Hemingway's wounding by mortar-shell fragments revealed the reality that artillery shells caused nearly seventy percent of all wartime casualties in the American army. "To be shelled is the worse thing in the world," noted one American soldier (Shaffer 158). "It is impossible to adequately imagine it." Clayton Slack privately concluded, "Those that weren't scared, weren't there" (Coffman 289). Deafening noise and pulverizing artillery were regular features of every doughboy's stint in the trenches. Troops soon learned to tell the incoming shells. Corporal Elmer Roden recalled that "in combat we named the different shells by their sounds." Other nicknames for high explosive shells included "ash cans," "trolley cars," and

“Jack Johnsons,” named after the famed African American boxer. Properly identifying incoming shells helped soldiers predict how much imminent danger a particular barrage posed. “Whenever the sound is as if crying the danger is slight, as the shell will pass over your head” explained Private Ernie Hilton (Keene 46).

To combat the constant terror of regular artillery shelling, troops developed an array of superstitions and coping mechanisms. Some soldiers accepted that the matter was out of their hands. “I don’t think I survived because of talent or know-how. . . . It was a matter of luck, I think I can safely say, . . .” Corporal Meyer Siegel concluded after the war (Sterba 183). Other soldiers embraced the belief that the shell that killed a man “had his number on it,” but skeptics questioned this notion. “They claim that a man’s shell has his name on it, if it’s for him,” wagged Sergeant Harry Weisburg, “but it is the part of a wise man to keep his nose out of the way of another man’s shell” (Sterba 183). Hemingway did not spend enough time along the front to acquire skills in detecting the danger different types of shells posed or to adopt any superstitions to avoid them. Instead, he was like many new arrivals at the front whose inexperience cost them dearly (Keene 47).

It was, Hemingway noted, an “awfully satisfactory feeling to be wounded” in a letter to his parents dated October 18, 1918. He wrote these words in a letter for his parents that was, as he anticipated, republished for hometown consumption in the local paper (Hemingway and Baker). “I know that you were rejoicing . . . to think that you were not found wanting when your supreme opportunity came . . . and so will be marked forever as a brave man,” his mother replied (Lynn 82). Hemingway biographer Kenneth Lynn claims that for Hemingway being wounded transformed what “could have been construed as woman’s work”—passing out treats to frontline troops—into a manly adventure (91). The story of his wounding certainly contained heroic elements. The force of the trench mortar explosion sent over two hundred bits of shrapnel into both of his legs and threw him on his back so violently that he hit his head and suffered a concussion. Unable to walk, he crawled on his elbows in a valiant, but futile, effort to help a nearby Italian soldier injured by the same explosion. Upon reaching a dressing station, he insisted that the medical personnel first attend to other, more gravely wounded men. Hemingway nonetheless felt the need to continually embellish this story about his harrowing

ordeal. By exaggerating his wartime adventures, Hemingway joined ranks with other noncombatants who decided to bolster the traditional narrative of wartime heroism that they had learned as boys when they could have just as easily opted to destroy it.

The narrative provided by the Italian government when it awarded him the Silver Medal of Military Valor was not sufficient to recast Hemingway as a valiant fighting man. "Officer of the American Red Cross, responsible for carrying sundries (articles of comfort) to the Italian troops engaged in combat, gave proof of courage and self-sacrifice," it read, telling of his courage under fire but also emphasizing that Hemingway was not among the fighting ranks (quoted in Lynn 80). Being wounded as a noncombatant was not enough; he needed a story and artifacts that placed him alongside the ranks of fighting men in the dangers that he faced. Hemingway, therefore, added fictional details that emphasized his camaraderie with frontline soldiers. The Red Cross "became an embarrassment that he simply eradicated" from the wartime narrative that he subsequently related, according to biographer Michael Reynolds (23). The tale soon grew into one that included fictional bullet wounds, the harrowing rescue of an Italian soldier whom Hemingway claimed to have carried on his back to safety, and props like the bloodstained and torn trousers that he carried with him when speaking to school or civic groups back home about his war experiences (Reynolds 20; Lynn 85). By then, Hemingway's five-week adventure at the front as a Red Cross worker had morphed into a tale of joining the Italian army, receiving a commission as a first lieutenant, and fighting in three major battles (Reynolds 55–57). Hemingway's compelling battlefield saga included describing a pain so intense that he fought off the temptation to use his fictional revolver (Red Cross workers did not receive sidearms) to "finish the job" of ending his life.

Hemingway used these fictionalized accounts to publicly situate his wartime experience with a mainstream narrative that bestowed honor upon men wounded at the hands of the enemy. His wound and pain had been real, but he knew that the actual circumstances (handing out chocolate to Italian combatants at the front) of his wounding would be less likely to bring him acclaim as a war hero in the eyes of his family and hometown. As he lay recuperating in a hospital in Milan, Hemingway received a gushing letter from his mother exulting that "in the eyes of humanity my boy is every inch a man. . . . It's great to be the mother of

a hero" (Reynolds 33). These types of letters kept many young men from sharing the truth about their war experiences with their loved ones.

In his October 18 letter to his parents after his wounding, Hemingway simultaneously distanced himself from noncombatant status and expressed sympathy for those (like himself) stuck in this uneviable position. "We all offer our bodies and only a few are chosen," Hemingway wrote, placing himself squarely in league with the "chosen" combatant. Nonetheless, he opined, "think of the thousands of other boys that offered." This last thought perhaps offered a veiled reflection on his actual (as opposed to fictionalized) military record (Hemingway and Baker). Not everyone felt comfortable camouflaging the truth in ambiguous language. Writing to the *Stars and Stripes*, one soldier elected for absolute honesty. "I have just received a letter from home saying that my mother is proudly displaying a service flag because 'yours truly' is with the A. E. F. in France. As I happen to be only a field clerk, . . . I am wondering if it is right to let her display this flag. . . . I don't like to be masquerading at home as a soldier," he wrote (Zeiger 84). Hemingway apparently felt no remorse in masquerading as a soldier when he returned home, and he was certainly not the only veteran to embellish a wartime record.

When Hemingway returned home, he did indeed receive a hero's welcome from his hometown press and community, thanks in part to the stories he invented about his wounding and military record. He clearly enjoyed the admiring glances that he received while walking around town in his uniform. Hemingway also, however, entered into an aimless period as he tried to readjust to domestic life and find his way in the world. Many other returning veterans also found the homecoming difficult. William Henkelman wandered along the "scenic route in box cars all over America," while ex-Sergeant Major W. H. Biggar, noted that he "arrived home last June, and have held at least a dozen positions since that time without finding one suited to my ideas at that time" (Keene 161). For many veterans finding their way back into civilian society took time.

His boasting nonchalance aside, Hemingway suffered from lingering pain, and, in his private moments, reliving his brush with death proved more traumatic than his blustering comment, "don't worry about me because it has been conclusively proved that I can't be killed" (Mellow 63-64). Suffering from insomnia, Hemingway nonetheless continued to sleep with a light on to quell fears that equated darkness with death. Back

living in his childhood bedroom, Hemingway fought with his parents, surreptitiously drank from liquor bottles hidden in his bookshelves, and wrote sentimental stories that were not published. "For Ernest it must have been something like being put in a box with the cover nailed down to come home to conventional, suburban Oak Park living, after his own vivid experiences," his sister recalled sympathetically (Mellow 90). By 1920, his mother was writing a dramatically different kind of letter from the one cited above when she first heard of his wounding in 1918. Instead of pride in her military hero, Hemingway's mother chastised him for his "lazy loafing, and pleasure-seeking—borrowing with no thought of returning . . . spending all your earnings lavishly and wastefully on luxuries for yourself." As she kicked him out of the house, she warned that unless "you come into your manhood—there is nothing before you but bankruptcy" (Reynolds 138).

In a letter home in the fall of 1918 to his local newspaper, Sergeant Judson Hanna tried to prepare his Pennsylvanian community for the changes that they would certainly notice in those who had fought on the Western Front. "Some men who went though the big barrage still show the effects of it. Let a door slam and a big healthy man will jump as if stung," he wrote (Richards 108). But general nervousness was the least of the combat veteran's problems, this soldier wrote. Often their experiences under fire had reshaped their entire personalities. To support this contention, Hanna described the changes he noted in a friend after he was covered with dirt from exploding bombs during an artillery barrage. As he hugged the ground, this friend felt a shell fall right beside him. "The soldier waited in this makeshift grave for the bomb to explode, knowing the uselessness of trying to escape, and trying to prepare his mind for the bumping off of his body. Those seconds of agonized waiting for an expected tragedy may change a whole man's character. This bomb was also a dud, but the man today goes around with a strained face and seems always listening for something," Hanna observed. Coming to terms with these brushes with death proved hard for many World War veterans, even those like Hemingway who openly bragged about their exploits. In private, Hemingway wondered about the causes of his postwar depression, furtively reading his father's medical journals to investigate the symptoms of shell shock before ruling that out as the source of his malaise (Reynolds 47).

Rehabilitation offered disabled men the promise of living an independent life as a contributing member of society. In military hospitals, men

learned to use prosthetic limbs, underwent reconstructive surgery, and received care for reoccurring respiratory ailments. Hemingway spent nearly six months in a Red Cross hospital in Milan undergoing physical therapy so that he could walk again. The tedium of this period was relieved somewhat by his love affair with Agnes von Kurowsky, an American-born twenty-six-year-old nurse. In theory, the government offered all disabled veterans the chance to learn a new skill or trade better suited to their new physical or mental condition. In published testimonials, doughboys provided soothing assurances that their lives could indeed proceed normally after the war. "I will never become a charge upon public society," declared Private Ray Wunderlich, a machinist in civilian life who lost a leg at Belleau Wood. "When the government fits me with a new limb I'll be as good as new all over, and as soon as I can learn to use it handily, I'll go back to the machine shop once more" (Wecter 385). An army propaganda film even showed a group of amputees playing baseball. One-legged soldiers hopped around the bases while their wheelchair-bound comrades cheered them on.

Nearly 128,000 wounded veterans completed government-funded occupational rehabilitation programs from 1919 to 1928, meaning that over one-half of the wounded (including Hemingway) returned home without receiving any further assistance in resuming civilian lives. The welcome home was not always cordial. Many Americans wanted to put the war behind them as quickly as possible. In some respects, Hemingway's leg injuries provided immediate evidence of a legitimate war wound. A soldier on crutches received instantaneous respect from the public, and there was little fear that he had returned as damaged goods. For those with less-appealing physical or mental wounds, the public was less sympathetic. Surgeons and craftsmen created specially designed masks that hooked around a patient's ear to add an anatomically correct chin, nose, or cheek to a face destroyed by bullets or shrapnel. Avoiding stares in public was one way to help disfigured veterans reenter civilian life, but it was harder to mask the lingering effects of exposure to gas or combat. When most Americans thought of war injuries, they thought of amputations and blindness, but these actually accounted for very few of the disabilities that World War I veterans suffered. Instead, the overwhelming majority of disabled veterans suffered from gas-related tuberculosis and war neuroses (Hickel 244).

Other veterans found it difficult to readjust financially. In the end, the issue that successfully unified this wartime generation was not a shared baptism of fire on the Western Front or even dismay over the war's failed

goals. Many soldiers, like Hemingway, remained remarkably uninterested in the war's larger political purpose, much to the dismay of Army officials who believed that soldiers needed commitment to a political cause to persevere on the battlefield. Instead, it was the issue of adjusted compensation that encapsulated their postwar disillusionment. Like Hemingway, the source of their disillusionment did not emanate from revulsion over the horrors of war. Instead, it was the financial inequities of war that enraged them. Within a few months of returning home, veterans began grumbling about the high wages and large profits that civilians at home had accumulated during the war. The government, veterans complained, had allowed civilians to profit financially from the war while paying soldiers only one dollar a day. Their increased difficulties in finding steady employment as the economy slid into a postwar recession prompted many veterans to call for an adjusted compensation payment from the government. In their view, the government had paid soldiers too little during the war and now needed to retroactively increase their soldier pay. In making this claim, the American Legion based its argument on conscription. "As I recollect," one legionnaire declared, men "were yanked out of their ordinary walks of life, deprived of their earning capacity and in many tens of thousands of cases were obliged to leave dependents with no adequate means of support" while people at home enjoyed record wages (Keene 172). The draft had given the army the power to decide who went into the military and who stayed home. To make the draft fair, veterans contended, the government needed to ensure that the financial benefits and burdens of the war were evenly distributed throughout the population. Finally, in 1924, veterans received adjusted compensation in the form of a bond that matured in 1945. The accepted compromise that delayed payment for twenty years eventually fell apart during the Great Depression when disgruntled veterans mounted the Bonus March in 1932.

Where does this all leave us in considering Hemingway as a typical doughboy? Like many other young men of his generation, Hemingway wanted to control where he served and demonstrated a willingness to volunteer for service. Hemingway wanted to please his parents and win the esteem of his community. And he proved quite happy to shed the constraints of his middle-class upbringing so he could enjoy the carefree lifestyle that soldiers embraced both in New York and overseas. He enjoyed the salutes that he received—confirmation of his superior status within the

military hierarchy—the hospitality of New York’s upper class, and collecting souvenirs of his time overseas. He was wounded in the way most soldiers were maimed, and his initial homecoming proved bumpy as he sought to readjust to civilian life and find his way into a satisfying career. Perhaps most importantly, Hemingway shared a sense of disillusionment with his fellow soldiers. The sources of disillusionment among American soldiers in the First World War were multifaceted—anger over military discipline and officer privileges, disappointment over the denied experience of combat, not receiving due recognition for one’s sacrifices and suffering, and the disproportionate financial gains made by civilians during time of war. American soldiers did not experience the years of devastating trench warfare that provided the foundation for postwar European disillusionment, but that did not make their disillusionment any less real. Hemingway’s military record suggests that he had more in common with the average doughboy than previously imagined—many of the sources of his disillusionment were theirs. His military experience provided fodder for his life’s work as a novelist, and thus, his fiction can indeed be seen as speaking to and for the generation of young men who came of age during the Great War.

Notes

1. See Mellow, *Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences*, 53, for suggestions that some of Hemingway’s later pornographic writings were inspired by his time in New York.
2. See Steven Trout. *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919–1941*.

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