

Source: https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php?title=Famous_British_Authors_Defend_England%27s_War

The new British War Propaganda Bureau under Cecil Rhodes' relation Charles Masterman, and specifically the American Propaganda Chief Sir Gilbert Parker approached these authors earlier that month (ca. Oct. 1914) in a bid to secure the power of their pens. See also <https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWwpb.htm>

FAMOUS BRITISH AUTHORS DEFEND ENGLAND'S WAR

Fifty-three of the Best-Known Writers of the Empire Sign a Vigorous Document Saying That Great Britain Could Not Have Refused to Join the War Without Dishonor.

One of the most interesting documents brought forth about the war was issued Sept. 17 in London. It was signed by fifty-three of the leading British writers. The Times prints herewith the text of their defense of England and their autographs thereto in facsimile.

THE undersigned writers, comprising among them men of the most divergent political and social views, some of them having been for years ardent champions of good-will toward Germany, and many of them extreme advocates of peace, are nevertheless agreed that Great Britain could not without dishonor have refused to take part in the present war. No one can read the full diplomatic correspondence published in the "White Paper" without seeing that the British representatives were throughout laboring wholeheartedly to preserve the peace of Europe,

and that their conciliatory efforts were cordially received by both France and Russia. When these efforts failed, Great Britain had still no direct quarrel with any power. She was eventually compelled to take up arms because, together with France, Germany and Austria, she had solemnly pledged herself to maintain the neutrality of Belgium. As soon as danger to that neutrality arose she questioned both France and Germany as to their intentions. France immediately renewed her pledge not to violate Belgian neutrality; Germany refused to answer, and soon made all answer needless by her actions. Without even the pretense of a grievance against Belgium she made war on the weak and unoffending country she had undertaken to protect, and has since carried out her invasion with a calculated and ingenious ferocity which has raised questions other and no less grave than that of the willful disregard of treaties.

When Belgium in her dire need appealed to Great Britain to carry out her pledge, that country's course was clear. She had either to break faith, letting the sanctity of treaties and the rights of small nations count for nothing before the threat of naked force, or she had to fight. She did not hesitate, and we trust she will not lay down arms till Belgium's integrity is restored and her wrongs redressed. The treaty with Belgium made our duty clear, but many of us feel that, even if Belgium had not been involved, it would have been impossible for Great Britain to stand aside while France was dragged into war and destroyed. To permit the ruin of France would be a crime against liberty and civilization. Even those of us who question the wisdom of a policy of Continental ententes or alliances refuse to see France struck down by a foul blow dealt in violation of a treaty. We observe that various German apolo-

gists, official and semi-official, admit that their country had been false to its pledged word, and dwell almost with pride on the "frightfulness" of the examples by which it has sought to spread terror in Belgium, but they excuse all these proceedings by a strange and novel plea. German culture and civilization are so superior to those of other nations that all steps taken to assert them are more than justified, and the destiny of Germany to be the dominating force in Europe and the world is so manifest that ordinary rules of morality do not hold in her case, but actions are good or bad simply as they help or hinder the accomplishment of that destiny. These views, inculcated upon the present generation of Germans by many celebrated historians and teachers, seem to us both dangerous and insane. Many of us have dear friends in Germany, many of us regard German culture with the highest respect and gratitude; but we cannot admit

that any nation has the right by brute force to impose its culture upon other nations, nor that the iron military bureaucracy of Prussia represents a higher form of human society than the free Constitutions of Western Europe. Whatever the world-destiny of Germany may be, we in Great Britain are ourselves conscious of a destiny and a duty. That destiny and duty, alike for us and for all the English-speaking race, call upon us to uphold the rule of common justice between civilized peoples, to defend the rights of small nations, and to maintain the free and law-abiding ideals of Western Europe against the rule of "Blood and Iron" and the domination of the whole Continent by a military caste. For these reasons and others the undersigned feel bound to support the cause of the Allies with all their strength, with a full conviction of its righteousness, and with a deep sense of its vital import to the future of the world:

William Archer
Granville Barker
J. M. Barrie
Mrs. H. B. Hall
Annie Fremantle
A. J. Benson
Edward Frederic Benson
Robert Agn. Benson
Laurence Binyon
A. C. Bradley
Robert Bridges
Hae Cane
R. C. Carton
C. Haddon Chamberlain
Hubert Henry Davies
Arthur Conan Doyle
H. A. L. Fisher
Margaret F. G. G. G.
Anstey Guthrie (F. Anstey)
W. H. Haggard
Thomas Hardy
Jane Ellen Harrison
Anthony Hope Hawkins
Maurice Hewlett
Robert Hichens
Jerome K. Jerome
Henry Arthur Jones
W. G. L. Locke
E. V. Lucas
J. W. Mackail
John Masspie
A. E. W. Mason
Gilbert Murray
Henry Newbolt
Barry Pain
Edith Sitwell
Eden Phillpotts
Arthur Quiller-Couch
Sir Gilbert Parker
George R. Sims
May Sinclair
Flora Annie Steel
Alfred Sutcliffe
George Macaulay Trevelyan
George Otto Trevelyan
Humphrey Ward
Mary A. Ward
H. G. Wells
Margaret L. Woods
Israel Zangwill

WHO'S WHO AMONG THE SIGNERS

- WILLIAM ARCHER, dramatic critic and editor of Ibsen's works, author of "Life of Macready," "Real Conversations," "The Great Analysis," and (with Granville Barker) "A National Theatre."
- MR. GRANVILLE BARKER, actor, dramatist, and manager, shares with his wife management of the Kingsway Theatre, London; author of "The Voysey Inheritance," and (with Laurence Housman) "Prunella."
- SIR JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE, creator of "Sentimental Tommy" and "Peter Pan," famous for his sympathetic studies of Scotch life and his fantastic comedies.
- HILAIRE BELLOC, best known as a writer on history, politics, and economics; a recognized authority on the French Revolution.
- ARNOLD BENNETT, author of many popular realistic studies of English provincial life, including "Clayhanger" and "Hilda Lessways."
- ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON, chiefly known for "From a College Window," "Beside Still Waters," and other volumes of essays.
- EDWARD FREDERIC BENSON, brother of the preceding, author of many novels of modern life, including "Dodo."
- VERY REV. MONSIGNOR ROBERT HUGH BENSON, the youngest of the three famous Benson brothers. Besides numerous devotional and theological works, Monsignor Benson has written several widely appreciated historical novels.
- LAWRENCE BINYON, author of many lyrics and poetic dramas, Assistant Keeper in the British Museum, in charge of Oriental Prints and Drawings.
- ANDREW CECIL BRADLEY, critic, sometime Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, author of a standard work on Shakespeare.
- ROBERT BRIDGES, Poet-Laureate. Prominent as a physician before his poetry brought him the high honor he now enjoys.
- HALL CAINE, one of the most popular of contemporary novelists.
- R. C. CARTON, dramatist, author of "Lord and Lady Algy" and "A White Elephant."
- CHARLES HADDON CHAMBERS, dramatist, author of "John a Drama," part author of "The Fatal Card."
- GILBERT K. CHESTERTON, essayist, novelist, poet; defender of orthodox thought by unorthodox methods.
- HUBERT HENRY DAVIES, dramatist, author of "The Mollusc" and "A Single Man."
- SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, creator of "Sherlock Holmes."
- HERBERT ALBERT LAURENS FISHER, Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University, author of "The Mediaeval Empire," "Napoleon Bonaparte," and other historical works.
- JOHN GALSWORTHY, a novelist and dramatist who has come into great prominence during the last five years, his plays, "Sir Ke" and "Justice," and his novel, "The Dark Flower," being widely known.
- ANSTHEY GUTHRIE, (F. ANSTHEY,) author of "The Brass Bottle," and other fantastic and humorous tales.
- SIR HENRY RIDER HAGGARD, author of many widely read romances, among them being "She."
- THOMAS HARDY, generally considered to be the greatest living English novelist.
- JANE ELLEN HARRISON, sometime Fellow and Lecturer at Newnham College, Cambridge University; writer of many standard works on classical religion, literature, and life.
- ANTHONY HOPE HAWKINS (ANTHONY HOPE), author of popular historical romance and sketches of modern society, including "The Prisoner of Zenda."
- MAURICE HEWLETT, poet and romantic novelist, author of "Earth-works Out of Tuscany" and other mediaeval tales.
- ROBERT HICHENS, novelist, author of "The Garden of Allah," "Bella Donna," and other stories.
- JEROME K. JEROME, humorist, famous for "Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow" and the "Three Men" series, and for his play "The Passing of the Third Floor Back."
- HENRY ARTHUR JONES, dramatist, author of "The Silver King," "The Hypocrites," and other plays.
- HUDYARD KIPPLING needs no introduction to people who read the English language.
- WILLIAM J. LOCKE, author of "The Morals of Marcus," "Septimus," and "The Beloved Vagabond," which have been made into successful plays.
- EDWARD VERRAL LUCAS, associate editor of Punch and editor of several popular anthologies, author of "A Wanderer in Holland."
- JOHN WILLIAM MACKAIL, Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, author and editor of many volumes dealing with ancient Greek and Roman literature.
- JOHN MASEFIELD, known chiefly for his long poems of life among the British poor.
- ALFRED EDWARD WOODLEY MASON, writer of romantic novels, of which "The Four Feathers" and "The Turnstile" are perhaps the best known, and of several popular dramas, among which may be "The Passing of the Third Floor Back."
- GILBERT MURRAY, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford University since 1908, editor and translator of Greek classics, perhaps the greatest Greek scholar now living.
- HENRY NEWBOLT, "laureate of the British Navy," author of "Drake's Drum" and many other songs.
- BARRY PAIN, author of "Eliza" and other novels and short stories of adventure, of many well-known parodies and poems.
- SIR GILBERT PARKER, of Canadian birth, poet and author of romantic novels, including "The Judgment House," and "The Right Way."
- EDEN PHILLIPOTS, realistic novelist, noted for his exact portraits of the English rustic, author of "Down Dartmoor Way."
- SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO, one of the most popular of living dramatists. His plays include "Sweet Lavender" and "The Second Mrs. Tanguer."
- SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH, Professor of English Literature at Cambridge University, poet, novelist, and writer of short stories.
- SIR OWEN SEAMAN, since 1906 editor of Punch, writer of parodies and light verse.
- GEORGE R. SIMS, journalist, poet, and author of many popular dramas, including "The Lights of London," "Two Little Vagabonds," and "Harbour Lights."
- MAY SINCLAIR, writer of novels dealing with modern moral problems, "The Divine Fire" and "The Combined Maze" being best known.
- FLORA ANNIE STEEL, author of "Tales from the Punjab," "On the Face of the Waters," "A Prince of Dreamers," and other novels and short stories, most of which deal with life in India.
- ALFRED EUTRO, dramatist, author of "The Walls of Jericho," "The Barrier," and other plays of modern society.
- GEORGE MACAULAY TREVELYAN, late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge; author of "England Under the Stuarts," and other historical and biographical works.
- RT. HON. GEORGE OTTO TREVELYAN, historian, biographer of Macaulay, and author of a four-volume work on the American Revolution.
- HUMPHRY WARD, journalist and author, sometime Fellow of Brasenose College, editor of several biographical and historical works.
- MARY A. WARD (Mrs. HUMPHRY WARD), best known of contemporary women novelists; her first success was "Robert Elsmere."
- H. G. WELLS, novelist, author of "Tono Bungay" and "Ann Veronica."
- MARGARET L. WOODS, poet; her "Wild Justice" and "The Invader" have placed her in the front rank.
- ISRAEL ZANGWILL, novelist, poet, dramatist, interpreter of the modern Jewish spirit.

TRANSCRIPTION:
Who's Who Among the Signers
William Archer
K. Granville Barker
[Sir James Matthew Barrie](https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php?title=Famous_British_Authors_Defend_England%27s_War)

Hilaire Belloc
Arnold Bennett
Arthur Christopher Benson
Edward Frederic Benson
Very Rev. Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson
Lawrence Binyon
Andrew Cecil Bradley
Robert Bridges
Hall Caine
R. C. Carton
Charles Haddon Chambers
Gilbert K. Chesterton
Hubert Henry Davies
[Sir Arthur Conan Doyle](#), creator of "[Sherlock Holmes](#)".
Herbert Albert Laurens Fisher
John Galsworthy
Anstey Guthrie (F. Anstey)
Sir Henry Rider Haggard
Thomas Hardy
Jane Ellen Harrison
Anthony Hope Hawkins (Anthony Hope)
Maurice Hewlett
Robert Hickens
Jerome K. Jerome
Henry Arthur Jones
Rudyard Kipling
William J. Locke
Edward Verral Lucas
John William Mackail
John Masefield
Alfred Edward Woodley
Gilbert Murray
Henry Newbolt
Barry Pain
Sir Gilbert Parker [Director of American Propaganda, British War Propaganda Bureau, Wellington House; editor and publisher of this propaganda piece]
Eden Phillpotts
Sir Arthur Wing Pinero
Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch
Sir Owen Seaman
George R. Sims
May Sinclair
Flora Annie Steel
Alfred Sutro
George Macaulay Trevelyan
Rt. Hon. George Otto Trevelyan
Humphry Ward
Mary A. Ward (Mrs. Humphry Ward)
H. G. Wells
Margaret L. Woods
Israel Zangwill

The new **British War Propaganda Bureau** had approached these authors earlier that month in a bid to secure the power of their pens—and the weight of their reputations—for the promotion of the empire’s cause throughout the world. The declaration provides a fascinating view of the period’s literary landscape; many of the authors listed are virtually unknown today, and some who remain popular are touted in the declaration for reasons that may now seem surprising. H.G. Wells, for example, is hailed not as the author of *The Time Machine* (1895) or *The War of the Worlds* (1898), but rather of *Tono Bungay* (1909) and *Ann Veronica* (1909).

Not to be outdone, German authorities responded to the declaration by bringing together an even larger assortment of artists, authors, and scientists to sign the **Manifesto of the Ninety-Three**, an astounding document which denied any German wrongdoing in Belgium and bewilderingly accused the Allies of “inciting Mongolians and negroes against the white race.”

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War Propaganda Bureau

Soon after the outbreak of the [First World War](#), in August 1914, the British government discovered that Germany had a Propaganda Agency. [David Lloyd George](#), the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was given the task of setting up a British War Propaganda Bureau (WPB). Lloyd George, appointed the successful writer and fellow [Liberal](#) MP, [Charles Masterman](#) as head of the organization.

On 2nd September, 1914, Masterman invited twenty-five leading British authors to Wellington House, the headquarters of the War Propaganda Bureau, to discuss ways of best promoting Britain's interests during the war. Those who attended the meeting included [Arthur Conan Doyle](#), [Arnold Bennett](#), [John Masefield](#), [Ford Madox Ford](#), [William Archer](#), [G. K. Chesterton](#), [Sir Henry Newbolt](#), [John Galsworthy](#), [Thomas Hardy](#), [Rudyard Kipling](#), [Gilbert Parker](#), [G. M. Trevelyan](#) and [H. G. Wells](#).

All the writers present at the conference agreed to the utmost secrecy, and it was not until 1935 that the activities of the War Propaganda Bureau became known to the general public. Several of the men who attending the meeting agreed to write pamphlets and books that would promote the government's view of the situation. The bureau got commercial companies to print and publish the material. This included Hodder & Stoughton, Methuen, Oxford University Press, John Murray, Macmillan and Thomas Nelson.

One of the first pamphlets to be published was [Report on Alleged German Outrages](#), that appeared at the beginning of 1915. This pamphlet attempted to give credence to the idea that the [German Army](#) had systematically tortured Belgian civilians. The great Dutch illustrator, [Louis Raemakers](#), was recruited to provide the highly emotionally drawings that appeared in the pamphlet.

The WPB published over 1160 pamphlets during the war. This included *To Arms!* ([Arthur Conan Doyle](#)), *The Barbarism in Berlin* ([G. K. Chesterton](#)), *The New Army* ([Rudyard Kipling](#)), *The Two Maps of Europe* ([Hilaire Belloc](#)), *Liberty, A Statement of the British Case and War Scenes on the Western Front* ([Arnold Bennett](#)), *Is England Apathetic?* ([Gilbert Parker](#)), *Gallipoli and the Old Front Line* ([John Masefield](#)), *The Battle of Jutland and The Battle of the Somme* ([John Buchan](#)), *A Sheaf and Another Sheaf* ([John Galsworthy](#)), *England's Effort and Towards the Goal* ([Mary Humphrey Ward](#)) and *When Blood is Their Argument* ([Ford Madox Ford](#)).

One of the first projects devised by [Charles Masterman](#) was the publication of a history of the war in the form of a monthly magazine. He recruited [John Buchan](#) to take charge of its production. Published by Buchan's own company, Thomas Nelson, the first installment of the [Nelson's History of the War](#), appeared in February, 1915. A further twenty-three editions appeared at regular intervals throughout the war. Given the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Intelligence Corps, Buchan was also provided with the documents needed to write the book. General Headquarters Staff (GHQ) saw this as good for propaganda as Buchan's close relationship with Britain's military leaders made it extremely difficult for him to include any critical comments about the way the war was being fought.

Only two photographers, both army officers, were allowed to take pictures of the [Western Front](#). The penalty for anyone else caught taking a photograph of the war was the firing squad. [Charles Masterman](#) was aware that the right sort of pictures would help the war effort. In May 1916 Masterman recruited the artist, [Muirhead Bone](#). He was sent to France and by October had produced 150 drawings of the war. When Bone returned to England he was replaced by his brother-in-law, Francis Dodd, who had been working for the A

As soon as [David](#)
the secret [War Pr](#)

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organisation. As a result of Donald's recommendations, the government established a Department of Information. John Buchan was put in charge on the department on an annual salary of £1,000 a year. Charles Masterman was given responsibility for books, pamphlets, photographs and war paintings and T. L. Gilmour dealt with cables, wireless, newspapers, magazines and the cinema.

In February, 1917, the government established a Department of Information. Given the rank Lieutenant Colonel, John Buchan was put in charge on the department on an annual salary of £1,000 a year. Charles Masterman retained responsibility for books, pamphlets, photographs and war paintings and T. L. Gilmour dealt with cables, wireless, newspapers, magazines and the cinema.

William Rothenstein offered his services to the WPB but because of his German connections he was initially turned down. He eventually went in December 1917. Soon after he arrived on the Somme front he was arrested as a spy. He stayed with the British Fifth Army in 1918 and during the German Spring Offensive, served as a unofficial medical orderly. He returned to England in March and his pictures were exhibited in May, 1918. Pictures by Rothenstein included The Ypres Salient and Talbot House, Ypres.

Early in 1918 the government decided that a senior government figure should take over responsibility for propaganda. On 4th March Lord Beaverbrook, the owner of the Daily Express, was made Minister of Information. Under him was Charles Masterman (Director of Publications) and John Buchan (Director of Intelligence). Lord Northcliffe, the owner of both The Times and the Daily Mail, was put in charge of all propaganda directed at enemy countries. Robert Donald, editor of the Daily Chronicle, was appointed director of propaganda in neutral countries. On the announcement in February 1918, David Lloyd George was accused in the House of Commons of using this new system of getting control over all the leading figures in Fleet Street.

Beaverbrook decided to rapidly expand the number of artists in France. He established with Arnold Bennett a British War Memorial Committee (BWMC). The artist chosen for this programme were given different instructions to those sent previously. Beaverbrook told them that pictures were "no longer considered primarily as a contribution to propaganda, they were now to be thought of chiefly as a record."

Artists sent abroad under the BWMC programme included John Sargent, Augustus John, John Nash, Henry Lamb, Henry Tonks, Eric Kennington, William Orpen, Paul Nash, C. R. W. Nevinson, Colin Gill, William Roberts, Wyndham Lewis, Stanley Spencer, Philip Wilson Steer, George Clausen, Bernard Meninsky, Charles Pears, Sydney Carline, David Bomberg, Austin Osman Spare, Gilbert Ledward and Charles Jagger.

David Lloyd George asked John Singer Sargent to paint a picture showing collaboration between British and US troops. Sargent rejected the commission and instead painted Gassed, that showed a group of soldiers suffering from the effects of gas.



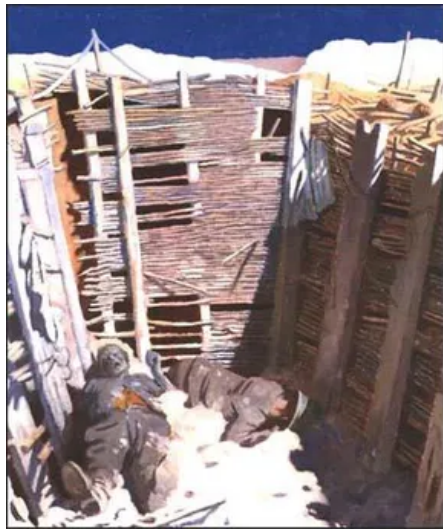
Overall, over ninety artists produced pictures for the government during the war. Many of the artists found the work very difficult. Some like Augustus John produced very little, whereas others, such as Paul Nash complained about the control over subject matter. Nash told a friend: "I am not allowed to put dead men into my pictures because apparently they don't exist". On another occasion he said: "I am no longer an artist. I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on for ever. Feeble, inarticulate will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth and may it burn their lousy souls."

At the end of the war, such as Sir Douglas Arnold, points out the war and its aftermath.

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that period, possibly the greatest war artist produced in Britain. Analysis of his war work, the major part of which is in the Imperial War Museum, London, shows a development in style and understanding, from the idealism which inspired him when he first arrived at the front to the disillusionment with the terrible ending to the war, and then the further dismay he and many felt at the direction taken by the peace deliberations. His paintings of the Somme battlefields are haunting recollections of anguish and chaos, of ruined landscapes baked in the summer sun, the torn ground white and rocky, the debris of the dead scattered and ignored." Orpen was shocked by what he saw at the front and also painted pictures such as *Dead Germans in a Trench*. Other paintings such as *The Mad Woman of Douai*, *Bombfire in Picardy* and *The Harvest*, "convey the stress and anguish he certainly felt about the war and its aftermath".

The fiercest critic of the propaganda scheme was Charles Nevinson. Some of Nevinson's paintings such as *Paths of Glory*, were considered to be unacceptable and were not exhibited until after the Armistice. He shared the feelings of Paul Nash who wrote at the time: "I am no longer an artist. I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on for ever. Feeble, inarticulate will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth and may it burn their lousy souls."



William Orpen, *Dead Germans in a Trench* (1917)

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By John Simkin (john@spartacus-educational.com) © September 1997 (updated January 2020).

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Primary Sources

(1) In his book *Falsehood in Wartime*, Arthur Ponsonby explained the role of wartime propaganda.

People must never be allowed to become despondent; so victories must be exaggerated and defeats, if not concealed, at any rate minimized, and the stimulus of indignation, horror and hatred must be assiduously and continuously pumped into the public minds of 'propaganda'.

(2) Hilaire Belloc, letter to G. K. Chesterton (12 December, 1917)

It is sometimes necessary to lie damnably in the interests of the nation. It wasn't only numbers that lost us Cambrai; it was very bad staff work on the south side. Things like thought oughtn't to happen.

(3) After the war William Beach Thomas wrote about his report on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in his book, *A Traveller in News* (1925)

I was thoroughly and deeply ashamed of what I had written, for the good reason that it was untrue. The vulgarity of enormous headlines and the enormity of one's own name did not lessen the shame.

(4) Philip Gibbs, *Adventures in Journalism* (1923)

We identified ourselves absolutely with the Armies in the field. We wiped out of our minds all thought of personal scoops and all temptation to write one word which would make the task of officers and men more difficult or dangerous. There was no need of censorship of our despatches. We were our own censors.

(5) C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (1922)

The average war correspondent - there were golden exceptions - insensibly acquired a cheerfulness in the face of vicarious torment and danger. Through his despatches there ran a brisk implication that the regimental officers and men enjoyed nothing better than "going over the top"; that a battle was just a rough jovial picnic, that a fight never went on long enough for the men, that their only fear was lest the war should end this side of the Rhine. This tone roused the fighting troops to fury against the writers. This, the men reflected, in helpless anger, was what people at home were offered as faithful accounts of what their friends in the field were thinking and suffering.

(6) Robert Donald, press release (February, 1918)

I have been asked to become the Director of of a section of propaganda work. I could not undertake work of this kind if it interfered with my editorial responsibilities or my political independence, or if it did not give me liberty of action within the sphere allotted to me. After all, this is a newspaper man's job. It consists simply of presenting the British case in neutral and allied countries in a form which is at once interesting and informative.

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