

The Clean British Tommy: Personal Hygiene and Civilian Perceptions of Soldier Masculinity in the First World War.

While the study of First World War masculinity is fairly extensive (Bourke, 1996; Higate, 2003; Meyer, 2009), little attention has been paid to the everyday aspects of war and how these banalities contributed to the development of soldier identity and masculinity (Duffett, 2012; Ugolini, 2014), and how they influenced contemporary perceptions of this identity and masculinity. By concentrating on what can be considered a relatively mundane aspect of warfare - the performance of personal hygiene and cleanliness - this paper will address this lack of academic focus, and will highlight how significant personal hygiene was to soldier masculinity, challenging this contemporary perception of mundanity. In order to achieve this, the paper will make use of a range of empirical data; including soldier diaries and memoirs.

Further to this, the paper will argue that the civilian preoccupation with personal hygiene at the front was linked to contemporary societal values around masculinity and morality, and will also discuss how this preoccupation with cleanliness highlights an attempt to introduce an aspect of the domestic sphere to the front line. The paper will also consider how civilian attitudes towards the cleanliness of the soldier shifted throughout the course of the conflict, demonstrating how traditional views relating to masculine and moral ideals were blurred and altered by war. Again, the paper will make use of a variety of primary source material to augment these arguments, including examples of commercial and private war publicity.