

Why Blackadder Goes Forth could have been a lot funnier



A fascinating look at Tommy Atkins' hidden tactics to avoid combat on the western front in World War I, or why 'Blackadder Goes Forth' could have been a lot funnier (and more subversive)...

A young Army, but the finest we have ever marshalled; improvised at the sound of the cannonade, every man a volunteer, inspired not only by love of country but by a widespread conviction that human freedom was challenged by military and Imperial tyranny, they grudged no sacrifice however unfruitful and shrank from no ordeal however destructive... If two lives or ten lives were required by their commanders to kill one German, no word of complaint ever rose from the fighting troops. No attack, however forlorn, however fatal, found them without ardour. No slaughter however desolating prevented them from returning to the charge. No physical conditions however severe deprived their commanders of their obedience and loyalty. Martyrs not less than soldiers, they fulfilled the high purpose of duty with which they were imbued. The battlefields of the Somme were the graveyards of Kitchener's Army^[1]

- Winston Churchill speaking of British soldiers slaughtered during the Battle of the Somme (1916)

From now on the veterans, myself included, decided to do no more than was really necessary, following orders but if possible keeping out of harms way^[2]

- A Tommy speaks in the aftermath of the Somme (1916)

Hatred of the enemy, so strenuously fostered in training days, largely faded away in the line. We somehow realized that individually they were very like ourselves, just as fed-up and anxious to be done with it all^[3]

- The view from the front-line late in the war, a Tommy reminisces...

About four weeks ago about 10,000 men had a big racket at Etaples and cleared the place from one end to the other, and when the General asked what was wrong, they said they wanted the war stopped.^[4]

- Letter from a Tommy (1917)

Introduction

Much of the media discussion concerning WW1 over the last few years has been centred on the Courts-Martial and executions of so-called 'cowards' from the British Infantry between 1914-1918. This debate has been focussed on getting pardons for those who were shot (often in front of their comrades) on the basis they were 'shell-shocked' or suffering from 'post-traumatic stress disorder' rather than being 'cowards'^[5]. This victim-orientated narrative (there were 300 posthumous pardons issued by the state in 2006) implies that on the whole the issue of desertion and disobedience was limited to relatively isolated incidents^[6]. Arguing about those who 'refused' the slaughter of WW1 on the basis of 'cowardice' or 'mental illness' provides both an exception to the rule (of supposed generally good discipline) and takes away the agency of soldiers, instead presenting the few miscreants as either embarrassing 'gibbering weak-willed wrecks' or deserving our sympathy as 'damaged lunatics'. In contrast, very little attention has been paid to the mass of mutineers, strikers, agitators, shirkers and skulkers who were *consciously* and *actively* refusing and/or avoiding front-line combat and the war in general.

Mass refusals, disobedience, mutinies, strikes and out-right rebellion were all part of the British armed forces experience in WW1^[7]. These were all fairly explicit events and to a certain extent these hidden narratives are becoming part of the historical record despite the attempts of contemporary military censors and government 'D' notices on the press as well as the 100 year rule in suppressing military documents. Subsequent post-war collective memory loss related to dominant patriotic ideologies served to smother these events even further, but in the 1960s/70s a critical historical reappraisal of WW1 began, marked in the cultural sphere by the biting satire of the musical *'Oh What a Lovely War'*^[8]. This reassessment of WW1 led to a series of historical and sociological examinations of the 'life in the trenches' in the succeeding decade. Some of these works provide a new and interesting angle on the subterranean (but at the same time mass) collective tactics British (and German) soldiers used for avoiding combat.

It is no surprise that in historical studies that examine tactics for refusing or avoiding warfare, the classical 'lefty' researcher will be drawn towards explicit (and often momentary) events, such as the mutiny or strike. Despite the taboo nature of such events for *any* nation-state it is hard for the authorities to completely suppress or 'air-brush' such important histories from the record. However, these explicit 'waves' of incidents (such as in 1917-19) often mask a much greater 'sea' of more discrete discontent, disobedience and refusal which contextualise the subsequent mutinies. By way of example, it is as if criminal activity was only marked in the media by spectacular *bank robberies*, whilst many more instances of banal, clandestine and consequently unknown illegality such as *fraud* were successful and rife in the population. Searching for repertoires of tactics based on non-explicit *fraudulent* type activities, that achieve their success by their 'hidden' and 'unwritten' nature (else they would have been discovered and probably failed), is obviously problematic for the researcher. The widespread and successful use of such tactics necessarily implies an unrecorded subterranean form.

However, a pioneering sociologist and two historians touched on these tactics of refusal and avoidance in WW1 in a couple of excellent papers separated by ten years; the 1968 *'The Sociology of Trench Warfare'* and in 1978 *'Jack, Tommy, and Henry Dubb: the Armed Forces and the Working Class'*^[9]. These two papers provide the basis of this article.

The unwritten 'agreement'

The first of the two studies, based upon participant accounts, battalion histories and military records, considers some interesting evidence for informal and collective collusion between British, French and German front-line troops on a mass scale. The form of this activity was effectively a 'live and let live' doctrine in complete opposition to army protocols and direct orders^[10] on both sides of 'No Man's Land'. The author describes this strategy as:

'The Live and Let Live principle was an informal and collective agreement between front-line soldiers of opposing armies to inhibit offensive activity to a level mutually defined as tolerable.'

Some primary source examples given in the paper of the tactics involved in this *doctrine of refusal* are presented below:

Refusal to engage on a daily basis

The first item has interest on two accounts. It suggests an extreme case in which all offensive activity is absent from the front. Secondly, the author is a staff captain, a member of the military elite, and his recorded reactions indicate the elite attitude to this phenomenon.

'We were astonished to observe German soldiers walking about within rifle range behind their lines. Our men appeared to take no notice. I privately made up my mind to do away with that sort of thing when we took over; such things could not be allowed. These people evidently did not know there was a war on. Both sides apparently believed in the policy of Live and Let Live.'^[11]

'Search and ignore' patrols^[12]

'All patrols-English and German-are much averse to the death and glory principle, so on running up against one another . . . both pretend that they are Levites and the other is a good Samaritan, and pass by on the other side, no word spoken. For either side to bomb the other would be a useless violation of the unwritten laws that govern the relations of combatants permanently within a hundred yards' distance of each other'^[13]

Suspension of 'sniping'

Sniping, however, like other offensive activity was on occasion regulated by the Live and Let Live principle. In the example below an artilleryman is in the trenches with an infantryman as guide. His mission is to take him within 20 yards of the German line. He is cautious upon hearing this until his guide assures him 'that they [the battalion holding the line] had a complete understanding with the Hun infantry and that we should not be sniped'^[14]

Refusal to rudely interrupt the 'enemies' daily life

In addition the norm regulated activities of a non-offensive nature; thus by mutual agreement working parties between the lines were often un-molested-these might include soldiers who emerged in daylight to cut grass in front of their trenches. Similarly each side would often allow the other to deliver the front-line rations without interference. One infantryman observes that 'it is only common courtesy not to interrupt each other's meals with intermittent missiles of hate', while on occasion game was shot in no-man's-land and retrieved with complete confidence in daylight'^[15]

Ritualization of offensive activity

Firstly, sniping: 'The only activity with which the battalion had to contend was sniping ... not all of this was in deadly earnest. On the left the Germans amused themselves by aiming at spots on the walls of cottages and firing until they had cut out a hole'

Secondly, in relation to machine-gun operations, an infantryman observes, 'all was quiet save for the stammer of a Lewis gun firing at the enemy's rear line to conceal our lack of activity'

Finally, an unusual example in which ritualization occurs by explicit verbal contact. 'Some of our saps are less than ten yards apart. At first we threw bombs at each other, but then we agreed not to throw any more ... if a Frenchman had orders to throw bombs several times during the night he agreed with his "German comrade" to throw them to the left and right of the trench.'^[16]

Routinization of offensive activity

Offensive activity would often follow a regular and unvarying pattern in terms of time and volume. A certain amount of ritualized and predictable activity was mutually accepted without the application of negative sanctions. Such episodes were referred to as the 'morning hate' or the 'evening strafe'. A typical description of a routinized front is as follows: 'in the middle of the morning a dozen or so 5.9 shells come over at regular half-minute intervals, and then the front nearly always remains quiet until stand-to at sunset, when there is usually some rifle-firing and a machine gun in Gommecourt shows us what it can do'^[17]

These examples of a collective and cooperative 'doctrine of refusal' could be dismissed as merely exceptions to the rule, but the author follows this up with evidence from a study of two battalions of the British Army from 1915-18^[18]. Often whole sections of the combat zone were considered 'quiet fronts', where tactics such as those outlined above were in operation. Ashworth notes that this study demonstrated that, outside of major offensives, somewhere between 35-50% of front-line sectors were considered 'quiet' whilst only 20-25% were considered 'active', with the remainder 'inconclusive'. So the clandestine philosophy of 'live and let live', in all its diverse forms, may have been replicated by troops on both sides for large sections of the front-line and for considerable periods of time^[19].

Non-verbal communication between the 'lines'

So how was it possible that the British soldier was able to enact and organise the 'live and let live' philosophy with the 'enemy'? Ashworth explains that this did not necessarily involve direct verbal communication between the opposing forces:

This understanding was tacit and covert; it was expressed in activity or non-activity rather than in verbal terms. The norm was supported by a system of sanctions. In the positive sense it constituted a system of mutual service, each side rewarded the other by refraining from offensive activity on the condition, of course, that this non-activity was reciprocated.

So an 'understanding' was reached, by careful study of action and reaction by the troops on both sides, about acceptable levels of violence. This was enforced by a negative sanction if the unwritten and non-verbalised 'agreement' was infringed as one British soldier recounted:

*...the incident related occurred during an un-certain period during which the Germans appeared to be exceeding the existing level of offensiveness. 'The Germans about this time also fired minenwerfers [Minenwerfer ('mine launcher') was a class of short range mortars used extensively during the First World War by the German Army. The weapons were intended to be used by engineers to clear obstacles including bunkers and barbed wire; that longer range artillery would not be able to accurately target. See Fig.1.] into our poor dragged front line; this in-humanity could not be allowed and the rifle grenades that went over no-man's-land in reply, for once almost carried out the staffs' vicarious motto: give them three for every one. One glared hideously at the broken wood and clay flung up from our grenades and trench-mortar shells in the German trenches, **finding for once that a little hate was possible.**' The arrival of the minenwerfer made clear the violation of the norm. The term 'inhumanity' is either a reference to the in-formal norm or else it is meaningless. The sanction*

was immediate: the maximum and officially prescribed offensiveness. The author, however, makes clear that such retaliation was not the rule.^[20]

The disapproval (and reply) of the British troops to this unusual transgression was an attempt to re-establish the ‘quiet front’, rather than deal death to the ‘enemy’ as the Generals wanted on a day to day basis. Interestingly this negative sanction also reciprocally applied to their own actions and those of their officers as was explained by another ‘Tommy’:

*‘The most unpopular man in the trenches is undoubtedly the trench mortar officer, he discharges the mortar over the parapet into the German trenches . . . for obvious reasons it is not advisable to fire a trench mortar too often, at any rate from the same place. **But the whole weight of public opinion in our trench is directed against it being fired from anywhere at all**’^[21]*

In this case the decisions of the trench mortar officer could seriously damage the unwritten ‘agreement’ by unleashing the negative sanction, this time from the German-side, and in so doing endanger British lives.



Fig. 1: German soldiers loading a 25 cm Minenwerfer, World War I

Such tacit ‘agreements’ as ‘live and let live’ combined with the ritualization and routinization of offensive activity had to remain partially or wholly ‘hidden’ from the upper echelons of military command on both sides, else the ‘agreements’ would be forcibly broken by these powers. It had to ‘look’ and ‘sound’ like something was happening for the benefit of the ‘brass’, even if the troops themselves were in little danger. Ashworth notes:

*We have here a curious and paradoxical situation in which a ritualized and routinized structure of offensive activity functioned within the informal structure as a means of indirect communication between antagonists. The intention to Live and Let Live was often communicated by subtle yet meaningful manipulation of the intensity and rhythm of offensiveness. The tacitly arranged schedule which evolved established a mutually acceptable level of activity. **To the uninitiated observer such a front line would appear to show a degree of offensive activity compatible with officially prescribed levels;** for the participants, however, such bombs and bullets were not indicators of animosity but rather its contrary.^[22]*

So it was necessary that the collective ‘fraud’ was tacitly accepted by all (including front-line officers) and kept secret from the ‘brass’, as this was in the interests of both the British and German combatants.

Ashworth concludes his paper by noting that such forms of cooperation by supposed front-line adversaries began to undermine the nationalist propaganda which was intended to divide them from ‘the enemy’ and motivate them to kill each other. He argues:

The experience of tacit co-operation came as a reality shock to combatants. It demonstrated to each side that the other was not the implacably hostile and violent creature of the official image. The latter eroded and was replaced, as we have seen, by an indigenous definition based on common experience and situation. This deviant image stressed similarities rather

than differences between combatants. The institutionally prescribed and dichotomous WE and THEY dissolved. The WE now included the enemy as the fellow sufferer. The THEY became the staff.^[23]

This change in relationship may provide significant background context for the mutinies and strikes which ripped through the Russian, French, German and British armies to varying degree from 1917-19.

Skulkers, shirkers and deserters

Another ‘hidden’ aspect of the ‘Tommy’s’ war resistance is examined in the second of the two papers by David Englander and James Osborne. *Desertion* is generally understood to mean ‘running away’ from the front and it is certainly true that the official desertion rate in WW1 was significantly higher^[24] than WW2 despite the serious nature of the offence during the former conflict. However, in which direction you ‘run’ is also an interesting point. According to the British Army Council:

‘desertion to the enemy....was a serious and growing problem particularly after Passchendaele’ [June-Nov 1917]

And they added in March 1918 that:

‘During the present war a large number of surrenders have taken place, which if evidence could be produced, would be found to have been without any justification’

A contemporary right-wing military historian, a Colonel, stated that he had:

‘direct evidence’ that British troops deserted to the enemy ‘in considerable numbers’ during the battle of the Ancre in August 1916, as they were again to do the following October.^[25]

What was the attraction of ‘deserting to the enemy’ to become a POW? On the face of it, not much. So were these miscreants ‘cowards’ and/or ‘traitors’, or was something else going on, another collective ‘fraud’ perhaps? A clue to the wiles of the ‘Tommy’ war resister were noted in this statement by a War Office Committee:

*‘The recent **exchange of prisoners** while the war is in progress and the campaign largely undertaken in the Press of this country, in order to influence the nation to look upon prisoners of war indiscriminately as objects of sympathy, and indeed, **almost as heroes**, will in the opinion of the Army Council go far towards undermining the fighting discipline of the Army.*^[26]

So it appears many late-war battle-weary British combat troops chose the option of ‘deserting to the enemy’ and becoming a POW for self-preservation. Knowing that their stay in an enemy prison camp (surely better and safer than the trenches?) would be fairly short as the war was coming to an end and the great British press was campaigning for their ‘exchange’; consequently the option of ‘running in the wrong direction’ became very attractive. In fact an added bonus was, with a prisoner exchange, they could return to ‘Blighty’ as a ‘war-hero’ and of course very much *alive*. This area of military research is notoriously difficult to ascertain as it is of course a taboo subject, but the comments of the Army Council alone suggest something significant and *collective* was going on at the front which could seriously undermine the morale and effectiveness of the British Army.

Self-incarceration as a ‘hidden’ *collective survival strategy* also had an interesting parallel behind friendly lines. Consider this statement from General Childs who spotted the following in 1915 when on a visit to G.H.Q. St Omer:

‘I met about 120 soldiers being marched under escort through the streets. They were singing and whistling and in very good humour. I ascertained that they were all on their way to the

base to **undergo punishment in the military prisons** there. It was pretty obvious, at once, that such a state of affairs could not be allowed to continue, as it was evident that certain types of men **would commit crimes solely to avoid duty at the front**^[27]

This may have been a ‘hidden’ strategy to avoid front-line combat but it was not a new problem for the British Army, as Englander and Osborne note:

During the Boer War, for example, front-line troops deliberately flouted the law, confident that misbehaviour would entail their withdrawal to the base for punishment^[28]

In fact the ‘problem’ of self-incarceration as a means to avoid combat created significant difficulties, particularly for stretched armies undergoing intensive fighting. If troops committed misdemeanours then they should be Court Martialled and typically sent to Military Prison. However, this *removed* them from the front-line and depleted numbers, especially if a *collective* strategy of refusal was in operation. Consequently, a series of changes to Army policy were introduced both before and during WW1.

‘Field punishments’ were introduced into the British Army in the 1880s to combat such strategies by keeping the ‘criminals’ in the front-line. Rather than the costly and depleting Courts Martial-Military prison route, ‘Field Punishments’ were typically aimed at public suffering and humiliation for soldiers who had committed fairly minor offences. Wikipedia states:

Field Punishment Number One [see Fig. 2]...consisted of the convicted man being placed in fetters and handcuffs or similar restraints and attached to a fixed object, such as a gun wheel, for up to two hours per day. During the early part of World War I, the punishment was often applied with the arms stretched out and the legs tied together, giving rise to the nickname "crucifixion"^[29]

Unsurprisingly such sanctions were very unpopular amongst the troops and although they may have stemmed the tide of self-incarceration it was a ‘double-edged’ sword for the Military as it bred further resentment. In addition to the Field Punishment system, General Childs (who had spotted the happy prisoners in St Omer), drafted up a new protocol, the Army Suspension of Sentences Act. Englander and Osborne note that the Act:

‘fulfilled the basic tenet of military law in that the penalty did nothing to precipitate a manpower shortage. In consequence, an offender might remain on active service despite conviction, the army reserving the right to acquit or impose sentence at will’^[30]

The interest of the historian in these revised punishment measures should not be primarily concerned with their effect, rather, why they were being introduced and enforced during WW1. They are a sign that something ‘hidden’ was underway; in fact it appears the reformed punishments were probably a counter-response by the Army Council to a *collective strategy* for avoiding combat.

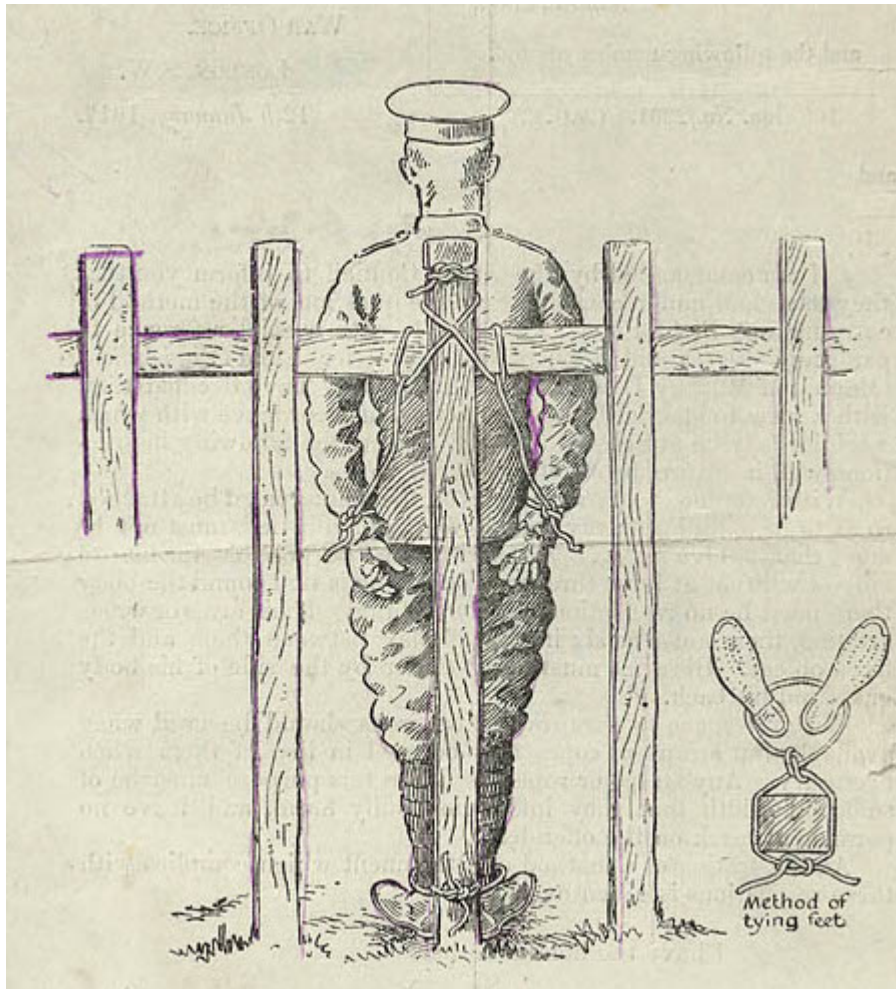


Fig. 2: Illustration of Field Punishment No.1

For many British soldiers (perhaps the less desperate) the object was to avoid the misery of either the *trench* or *incarceration* in Military prison as a result of a court martial or as a POW. These ‘shirkers’ and ‘skulkers’, as they were labelled by the army leadership, practised covert, subtle tactics which trod the line between both of these unpalatable options. The ‘base camps’ (such as Etaples, see Fig. 3), effectively staging points through which tens of thousands of troops heading to combat on the front-line passed, became crowded, chaotic and unruly as the war progressed. These massive, sprawling logistic centres were perfect for ‘*professional malingerers and shirkers*’ who ‘*refined the practice of [avoiding front-line combat] to an art*’.^[31] It is difficult to gauge the extent of such practices for obvious evidential reasons but Englander and Osborne use an indirect approach to gain some evidence for the existence of a chronic ‘problem’. The authors note that the numbers of military police per serviceman grew at almost an exponential rate during the four years of war. In 1914 there was approximately one MP for every 3,000 soldiers; by 1918 this had grown to one MP for every 300 servicemen; an increase by a factor of ten^[32]. So something was happening; and it appears like a serious increase in ‘criminality’, ‘disorder’ and a significant breakdown in discipline were occurring. Perhaps a large part of the repressive effort was aimed at ‘ferreting out’ the growing numbers of invisible ‘skulkers’, ‘shirkers’ and ‘deserters’?



Fig. 3: The British Army Base Camp at Etaples, France showing a hospital section

If our 'Tommy' could now not avoid combat by being sent to Military prison or the opportunities for day-to-day 'shirking' and 'skulking' were reduced by increased repression by the Military Police, then there were, other, more pleasurable ways to get out of the 'front-line'. Most of us are aware of self-mutilation as a strategy for avoiding war, through the proverbial expression 'shooting oneself in the foot'. However, according to British Army sources, less than 1% of courts-martial offences accounted for such acts of self-mutilation.^[33] A much more favourable strategy for 'Tommy' was self-inflicted *Venereal Disease*. The equivalent of approximately two divisions of the British Army in WW1 (about 20-30,000 troops) were 'out-of-action' at any one time with this affliction^[34]. Once again the *consciousness* of this act is hard to prove, but it is not unreasonable to assume that lots of unprotected *sex* and subsequent *disease* was a more attractive way out of the misery of the front-line than a 'heroic' *death or serious injury*.

Conclusion: Tommies, 'apathetic victims' or 'cunning foxes'?

It is no surprise that the 'combat avoidance' tactics outlined by the two papers, ranging from tacit co-operation on the front-line between opposing forces, through self-incarceration or desertion to the enemy to shirking, skulking and self-imposed VD, remained the concealed 'unwritten rules' for survival in the military environment. But why were they not exposed in the social sphere during the relative security of post-war civilian Britain? There is probably a simple reason for this. The supposed 'victory' of Allied Forces in WW1 and attempts to rally the British population around this nationalist rejoicing (which was vital during the industrial and political upheavals of 1919) effectively smothered these 'hidden' tactics. The post-war 'hero' culture was not an environment where you would be likely to admit to 'avoiding combat' as a veteran of the trenches. It was much easier to keep 'mum' and remain a silent 'hero', than to admit to the unpatriotic reality. So Tommy's hidden 'knowledge', the repertoire of tactics that enacted this 'doctrine of refusal' during WW1, declined in the same way as a 'dying language' or a 'thieves kant', with fewer and fewer demobilised adherents admitting to speaking its tongue.

The perceptions of the WW1 British soldier by establishment historians and military commentators range from the optimistic (and fantastical) of Winston Churchill (see quote above), as loyal, brave and steadfast through to the negative and derogatory which argued that the Tommy was driven by the war to ‘*self-regarding and indolent apathy*’ or ‘*reduced to a perpetual state of morbid introspection and incipient breakdown*’^[35]. In each case ‘Tommy Atkins’ is individualised, lacks agency and is unable or unwilling to act against his miserable condition. Ashworth and Englander and Osborne’s excellent papers provide some counter-evidence for these views. The authors’ demonstrate that British resistance to WW1 on the Western Front was not just the province of the spectacular (and momentary) mutiny, strike or rebellion, but in fact also took an every-day subterranean form which evaded both the military authorities and the historian. Rather than seeing Tommy Atkins and his comrades as ‘apathetic victims’ perhaps they should be viewed as a collective of ‘wily foxes’ avoiding both their misery and potential demise with a ‘cunning plan from the University of Cunning’.

Notes

1. ^[1] Quoted from *Jack, Tommy, and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class* David Englander and James Osborne (1978) *The Historical Journal*, 21, p.593-4
[↵](#)
2. ^[2] Quoted from Englander and Osborne (1978) p.598. [↵](#)
3. ^[3] Quoted from *The Sociology of Trench Warfare 1914-18* A. E. Ashworth *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Dec., 1968), p.418. [↵](#)
4. ^[4] Quoted from Englander and Osborne (1978) p.597. [↵](#)
5. ^[5] See for example <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4796579.stm> [↵](#)
6. ^[6] About five million British people were under arms in the latter part of the war. About 3,000 British soldiers were condemned to death by Courts Martial; the majority of sentences were commuted to imprisonment. *Jack, Tommy, and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class* David Englander and James Osborne (1978) *The Historical Journal*, 21, p.595. [↵](#)
7. ^[7] Putkowski states that there were over 300,000 courts martials between 1914 and 1920 and he estimates that about 250,000 British troops were involved in ‘*strikes, demonstrations and other forms of direct action on an unprecedented scale*’ towards the end of the war; *A2 and the ‘Reds in Khaki*’ (J. Putkowski *Lobster* 27 1994). Other secondary sources of interest are: *The Soldiers Strikes of 1919* (A. Rothstein Journeyman 1980), *Mutinies* (D. Lamb Solidarity 1975), *The Unknown Army* (G. Dallas & D. Gill Verso 1985), *Mutiny* (L. James Buchan & Enright 1987), *British Army Mutineers 1914-22* (J. Putkowski Francis Boutle 1998) and *The Apathetic and the Defiant* (Edt. C. Mantle Dundurn Group 2007). [↵](#)
8. ^[8] *Oh, What a Lovely War!* originated as a radio play, *The Long Long Trail* in December 1961, and was transferred to stage by communists Gerry Raffles and Joan Littlewood in their *Theatre Workshop* created in 1963. Both were under surveillance by the British State as ‘subversives’ in the 1960s. [↵](#)
9. ^[9] *The Sociology of Trench Warfare 1914-18* A. E. Ashworth *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Dec., 1968), pp. 407-423. *Jack, Tommy, and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class* David Englander and James Osborne (1978) *The Historical Journal*, 21, pp. 593-621 [↵](#)
10. ^[10] Ashworth outlines British military offensive doctrine in stating ‘*In all situations the soldier was expected to use the weapons at his disposal for aggressive action*

against the enemy. The exemplary soldier, in terms of elite values, was the soldier who, on his own initiative, instigated action likely to cause the enemy deprivation. The object of war was to eliminate the enemy both physically and morally. In short the soldier should be saturated with what in military jargon was termed the 'offensive' or 'fighting' spirit. Offensive activity was the product of the soldier; as far as the military organization was concerned, offensive activity was to be restricted or limited only by fatigue, orders to the contrary or the shortage of weapons and ammunition' Ashworth (1968) p.409. [↵](#)

11. ^[11] Ashworth (1968) p.411-2 [↵](#)
12. ^[12] This is a reference to a 'search and avoid' missions, a similar mass refusal tactic in the Vietnam War. G.I.'s would be ordered to go on 'Search and Destroy' missions (i.e. find and engage the enemy). In reality the patrols would aim to *avoid the enemy and combat* at all costs. See the excellent pamphlet on armed forces resistance to the Vietnam War, '*Olive Drab Rebels*' at: <http://www.prole.info/texts/olivedrabrebels.html>. Also this authors introduction to the film '*Sir, No Sir*' at <http://www.brh.org.uk/site/events/sir-no-sir/>. [↵](#)
13. ^[13] Ashworth (1968) p.412 [↵](#)
14. ^[14] Ashworth (1968) p.412 [↵](#)
15. ^[15] Ashworth (1968) p.412-3 [↵](#)
16. ^[16] Ashworth (1968) p.413 [↵](#)
17. ^[17] Ashworth (1968) p.414 [↵](#)
18. ^[18] Two Battalions were studied, the 7th Royal Sussex and the 2nd Royal Welch over the period June 1915-Jan 1918. Ashworth (1968) p.422 Note 16. [↵](#)
19. ^[19] Of course, direct fraternisation between opposing troops is part of our collective memory as 'The Christmas Truce of December 1914'. This event however was neither momentary nor localised as outlined by the following piece: <http://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/balls-to-war/> [↵](#)
20. ^[20] This author's emphasis in bold. Ashworth (1968) p.414. [↵](#)
21. ^[21] This author's emphasis in bold. Ashworth (1968) p.415. [↵](#)
22. ^[22] This author's emphasis in bold. Ashworth (1968) p.414. [↵](#)
23. ^[23] This author's emphasis in bold. Ashworth (1968) p.421. [↵](#)
24. ^[24] In WW1 the rate was approximately 10.3%, with 6.9% in WW2. Englander and Osborne (1978) p.595. [↵](#)
25. ^[25] Englander and Osborne (1978) p.596. [↵](#)
26. ^[26] This author's emphasis in bold. Englander and Osborne (1978) p.596. [↵](#)
27. ^[27] This author's emphasis in bold. Englander and Osborne (1978) p.597-8. [↵](#)
28. ^[28] Englander and Osborne (1978) p.597. [↵](#)
29. ^[29] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_punishment. According to this Wiki page, Field Punishment No.1 was employed over 60,000 times in WW1. A commanding officer could award field punishment for up to 28 days, while a court martial could award it for up to 90 days. [↵](#)
30. ^[30] Englander and Osborne (1978) p.598. [↵](#)

31. ^[31] Englander and Osborne (1978) p.598. Of course the controversial 1980s TV series, *The Monocled Mutineer*, drew attention to Percy Topliss as an impersonator of British officers and fraudster at Etaples and elsewhere, something which was apparently easy to achieve in the 'organised chaos' of these logistic camps. ↵
32. ^[32] Englander and Osborne (1978) p.595. ↵
33. ^[33] 273 cases of self-mutilation out of one million British casualties were recorded. Englander and Osborne (1978) p.598. ↵
34. ^[34] Englander and Osborne (1978) p.598. ↵
35. ^[35] Quoted from Englander and Osborne (1978) p.594. ↵

Taken from <http://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/why-blackadder-goes-forth-could-have-been-a-lot-funnier/>