

# NO MAN'S LAND

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WOMEN'S PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

EXHIBITION GUIDE AND CAPTIONS

PLEASE REPLACE AFTER USE

**PLEASE NOTE:**

This exhibition includes a number of black and white historical images of dead soldiers in the First World War. If you are unsure of the suitability of the exhibition for you or your group, please ask at the Welcome Desk for more information.



## EXHIBITION GUIDE

# NO MAN'S LAND

## WOMEN'S PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Commemorating a hundred years since the First World War, *No Man's Land* presents rarely seen female perspectives on the conflict.

In 1914, when war was declared, women were not allowed to vote or to fight in the armed forces. However, many still wanted to be involved and volunteered to help. Some women used cameras to record their experiences of working and travelling in war zones. This exhibition features historical photographs by three such pioneering women: Mairi Chisholm, a First Aid nurse and ambulance driver in Flanders, Belgium; Florence Farmborough, a nurse with the Russian Red Cross; and Olive Edis, the UK's first officially commissioned woman photographer sent to a war zone. Many of their photographs have never been exhibited before.

The First World War has had a huge impact on society and ideas about roles for men and women. *No Man's Land* features images by three contemporary artists directly inspired by the conflict a century later: Alison Baskerville, Dawn Cole, and Chloe Dewe Mathews. Their work explores a wide range of themes: portraiture and gender roles; public and private histories; and landscape and memory.

Most people think of war photography as dramatic images of male soldiers made by photojournalists. However, *No Man's Land* shows that there are many ways to photograph war, and many different viewpoints to be seen.

To find out more, please feel free to browse the reading area or watch the specially made short film featuring artists Alison Baskerville, Dawn Cole and Chloe Dewe Mathews, with curator Dr. Pippa Oldfield.

## OLIVE EDIS

### Photographs from Northern France and Flanders, 1919

“ I felt very pleased that a woman should get that chance [to photograph] – it was hardly to be expected that they would allow a woman on the fighting line, but I had come in as soon as possible. ”

Olive Edis (1876–1955) was a high-profile portrait photographer, successful businesswoman, and a pioneer of autochrome technology, the first commercially-available colour process. In 1918, she was commissioned by the Women's Work Subcommittee of the Imperial War Museum to record women's work in the British Army's support services at the Western Front. After many delays to obtaining her permit, she travelled to the former battlefields of France and Flanders (Northern Belgium) in March 1919.

Edis used a large plate camera, the kind employed in her portrait studio in Norfolk, and often improvised darkrooms in hospital x-ray units to develop her photographic plates. As Britain's first official female photographer sent to a conflict zone, and one of the first anywhere in the world, her images provide an important record of women's participation in the First World War.

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Captions adapted from information in the collections of IWM, including Olive Edis's 1919 account of her work.



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Commandant Johnson and two other women of the General Service Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) Motor Convoy outside Nissen Huts, Abbeville, France, 1919.



© IWM (Q 8021)

Ambulance drivers of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) cleaning motor ambulances, Etaples, France, 1919.

Edis noted that the women's rooms in the camp featured 'a great many polished brass shell-cases' as ornaments, and that 'the girls took a great pride in getting them bright'.



© IWM (Q 8059)

Dr Gainsford dresses a wound on the hand of Miss Morrison, assisted by Sister Cooper, at a Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) surgery at Bourges, France, 1919.



© IWM (Q 8100)

Five Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) cleaning silver for No. 1 Wing Officers Mess at Harfleur, France, 1919.



© IWM (Q 8046)

French civilian women repairing tents using a treadle sewing machine and hand stitching under the supervision of Miss Philpots and Miss Leacock, Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC), No. 8 Ordnance Depot, Abbeville, France, 1919.

Edis wrote that 'the Imperial War Museum thought a woman photographer, living among the girls in their camps, was likely to achieve more intimate pictures, more descriptive of their everyday life, than a man photographer'.



© IWM (Q8061)

A Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) rest room at Bourges, France, 1919. Women photographed include Sister Cooper, Miss Aykroyd, Miss Ackland, Miss Bartels, Miss Bigge, Mrs Lloyd, Miss Corner and Miss Chapman.



© IWM (Q8051)

Miss Minns, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS), Matron of a Hospital on the Quay at Le Havre, France, 1919.

Edis wrote, 'I have always avoided flash exposures – and managed to get results under the most difficult conditions by daylight'.





© IWM (Q7980)

Commandant Crowdy, Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), in her office at the Hotel Christol, Boulogne, France, 1919.



© IWM (Q7991)

Dame Maud McCarthy, Matron in Chief of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS), 1919.



© IWM (Q 8082)

Miss Pye in a Ward of the Maternity Hospital, 1919. During the four years and ten months of the Mission's work there were 981 births and 1,909 infants and children were nursed.



© IWM (Q 8106)

The well stocked shelves of the Officers Expeditionary Force Canteen in Le Havre, France. A member of the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) stands behind the counter with another colleague and a young lieutenant in front, 1919.



© IWM (Q 8117)

A member of Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) acetylene welding at a Royal Air Force engine repair shop at Pont de l'Arche, France, 1919.





© Norfolk Museums Service

Ypres, Flanders, Belgium, 1919. Ypres was the site of some of the bloodiest battles of the First World War, including the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917.

This image did not form part of Edis's official commission to document women's work. She made a number of personal photographs of ruins, battlefields and No Man's Land, and her diary records the great impression these scenes made on her.



© IWM (Q 7962)

Ruined cottage in Pervyse formerly used as a First Aid station by Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm, 1919.

# ALISON BASKERVILLE

*Soldier, 2011–2016*

“ I looked at contemporary representations of women as war photographers and there were very few. I started to look back a bit further and saw that Olive Edis made these beautiful autochrome portraits. I realised that she was a real pioneer. ”

Alison Baskerville is a former soldier and military photographer who served for twelve years with the RAF in conflict zones, including Iraq. In a new commission, made especially for *No Man's Land*, she presents a series of portraits of women in the British Army today. Their roles range from logistics to frontline combat medics to artillery gunners. Many of the images were made while Baskerville was embedded with the British Army in Afghanistan, sponsored by the Royal British Legion.

Working in collaboration with digital consultant Ishan Siddiqui, Baskerville has produced a series of digital autochromes. This is a contemporary version of the early twentieth century colour process. Pioneered by Olive Edis, autochromes were originally produced as small glass plates viewed with a special 'diascope' device, which Edis patented. Baskerville's portraits are presented as large LED lightboxes.

*Soldier* is commissioned by Impressions Gallery, Bradford.  
Images © Alison Baskerville

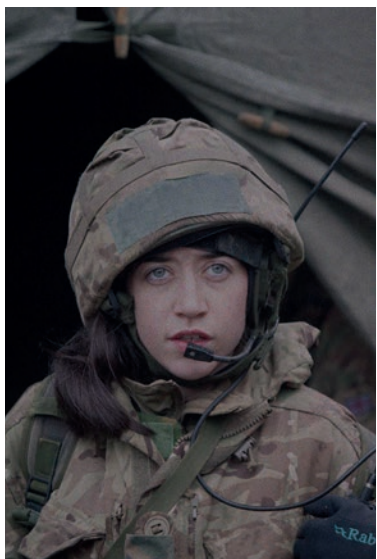
To see examples of Olive Edis's autochromes, watch the short film or browse the book *Fishermen and Kings: The Photography of Olive Edis* in the gallery reading area.



*Jessica*



*Baljit*



*Alex*



*Donna*



*Karri*



*Louise*



*Katherine*

# MAIRI CHISHOLM

## Snapshots from Pervyse, Flanders, 1914–1918

“ One sees the most hideous sights imaginable, men with their jaws blown off, arms and legs mutilated, and when one goes into the room one is horrified at the suffering. ”

Mairi Chisholm (1896–1981) was eighteen when she volunteered as a driver for The Flying Ambulance Corps, a medical unit in Belgium, with her friend and fellow motorcyclist Elsie Knocker. Shortly after, the two women set up their own independent First Aid post in the cellar of a bombed-out house in Pervyse, a village in West Flanders. Over the course of the next few years, they ran several First Aid posts in abandoned buildings in the area, raising funds to support their activities.

Using a small snapshot camera, Chisholm recorded their intense life close to the trenches until 1918, when they returned home after being poisoned in a gas attack. By that time, the two women had become known as ‘The Madonnas of Pervyse’ and were photographed by official photographers for national newspapers in France, Belgium, and Britain. Chisholm’s photo-albums, however, reveal her personal experience of war. The images on display have all been reproduced directly from these photo-albums. As well as photographs taken by Chisholm, they include snapshots made by Elsie Knocker and others.

Images © National Library of Scotland.

Captions have been informed by Chisholm’s own photo-albums, supplemented by information from the collections of IWM (Imperial War Museums); an oral history recording made by Peter Liddle in 1977, now held in Special Collections, University of Leeds; and Diane Atkinson’s biography *Mairi and Elsie Go To War: Two Extraordinary Women at the Western Front* (2010). Spelling of place names (e.g. Pervyse and Ypres) are consistent with the usage of the period, and Mairi Chisholm’s own captions.





Mairi Chisholm looks through a shell hole, over the rooftops of Pervyse.

The photograph image was probably taken by Elsie Knocker, who described Mairi Chisholm to a journalist for *Ladies' Pictorial* as 'just the noblest, pluckiest girl on earth! She is only nineteen: she hadn't even been trained for a nurse. I can't say enough about her.'



Mairi Chisholm with Jean Batiste, a Belgian Congolese soldier, born in Pala-Bala in the Freestate of Congo in 1897. Presumably he was a friend or colleague, as he features in at least two other snapshots. Chisholm's photo-albums record a number of soldiers from the French and Belgian colonies.

This image was made by an unidentified photographer, possibly Elsie Knocker.



Captioned 'The Punt' by Chisholm, who is seated on the left at the back of the boat, with Elsie Knocker at the front. Knocker later recalled 'We found this old punt and placed it in a shell-hole. When the day was quiet we would spend it at "Henley".'

Unknown photographer.



Irene 'Winkie' Gartside-Spaight in No Man's Land, c.1916. Gartside-Spaight was a volunteer and companion of Lady Dorothea Fielding who, along with Mairi Chisholm and Elsie Knocker, had worked as a driver for The Flying Ambulance Corps. The unit was established in August 1914 by Dr Hector Munro, who advertised for 'adventurous young women to equip an ambulance unit for service in Belgium'.



A dead German soldier by the River Yser, Flanders, date unknown.



Elsie Knocker, simply captioned 'Gipsy' in Chisholm's photo-album.



Mairi Chisholm with two cats. She and Elsie Knocker lived with a number of pets in their makeshift homes, including cats Dunkie, Chink, and Gros Gris, and a dog called Shot.

Unknown photographer.



Elsie Knocker, M. Shurmer [?], Helen Gleason and Marianne Van der Ghinst pose with snapshot cameras. Helen Gleason met Mairi Chisholm and Elsie Knocker while working for Dr Munro's Flying Ambulance Corps.



No Man's Land, Pervyse, December 1914.

Mairi Chisholm and Elsie Knocker would recover bodies from No Man's Land, so that officers and families could be informed of the deaths of those who went missing in action.





Shell burst at Pervyse, late 1914.



Captioned 'Major Georges Gibson' in Mairi Chisholm's photo-album.

She wrote in her diary, 'I don't think I shall ever forget my life at Pervyse, it is all so strange and weird and at times so lonely, and yet there are moments when you forget everything and laugh and giggle like children'.



A Senegalese soldier lies dead in the rubble of Dixmude, a city on the River Yser in Flanders, 1914. The city was the site of heavy fighting from 16 October 1914, and remained part of the front line throughout the war.



Captioned 'La Meir, Gipsy [Elsie Kocker] and Joseph' in Chisholm's photo-album.



Elsie Kocker leaning through a hole in a damaged building in Pervyse, 1915.

Mairi Chisholm later recalled, 'She was a very dominating character and I was twelve years her junior... She had a terrific temper... She had a formidable way of dealing with something that she thought was wrong and she would go down to headquarters and because her work was so brilliant they just listened to her'.



Lt. de Greeft [?], Mairi Chisholm and Elsie Kocker.

Unknown photographer.



Elsie Kocker and two Belgian soldiers, Lt. Aertz and Dr Lejeune, on a makeshift see-saw at Pervyse, 1917.

In her biography *Mairi and Elsie Go To War* (2010), author Diane Atkinson explains that 'it was a regular ritual to ask visiting staff officers, who spent a lot of time at headquarters and were rarely shot at, to get on it.'



Elsie Kocker (left) and Mairi Chisholm pose in a ruined church.

Unknown photographer.



'Gipsy', Mairi Chisholm's nickname for Elsie Kocker, seen outside their third First Aid post in Pervyse, 1915.

Chisholm later recalled, 'She was brilliant with wounds, quite brilliant... she would pick up a knife and just slice off the foot right off and clean the stump...She had this tremendous confidence...She worked like greased lightning but never a fumble, never a false move'.





## DAWN COLE

### *Adventures of a VAD Nurse, 2009 and ongoing*

“ I’m interested in reading between the lines – in exploring the gulf between public and private, and what goes unsaid.”

Dawn Cole was inspired by the discovery of a suitcase containing the photographs and diary of her great-aunt Clarice Spratling, a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) nurse posted to Northern France from 1915 to 1918. The suitcase and some of its contents can be seen in the display case next to Cole’s work.

Cole was struck by the contrast between Spratling’s cheerful and composed appearance in the photographs, and her private diary that hints at the horrific injuries of the patients in her care. In response, Cole has devised patterns for objects including lace collars and tea-tray cloths, using a combination of photo-etching and digital manipulation. The ‘lace’ is in fact formed from intricately woven phrases taken from her great-aunt’s diary, such as ‘men had eyes removed’.

Lacemaking is usually considered a domestic and feminine activity. However, during the First World War there was a small industry in lace-edged postcards and handkerchiefs to send to loved ones, often made by injured male soldiers or widowed French women.

Images © Dawn Cole

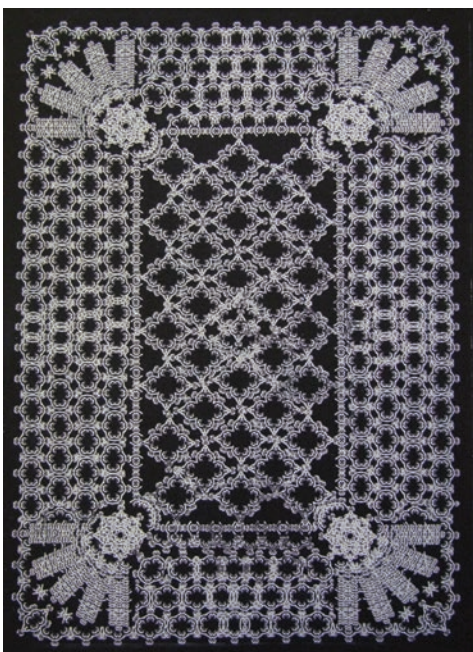


From *Reading Between the Lines*, 2009 and ongoing:

*Head case still bad*

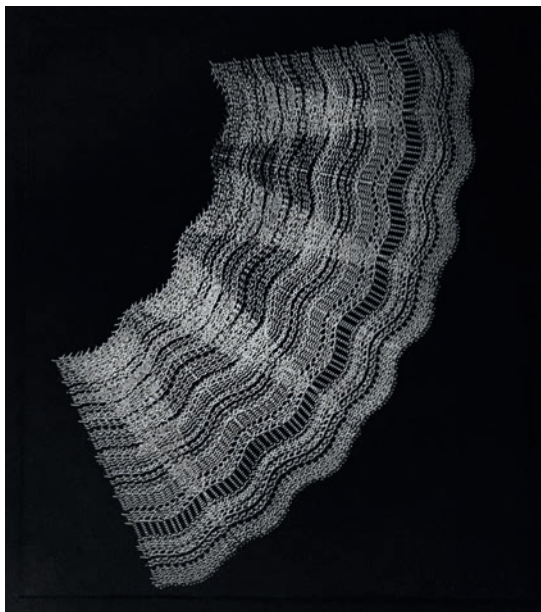


*Men had eyes removed*

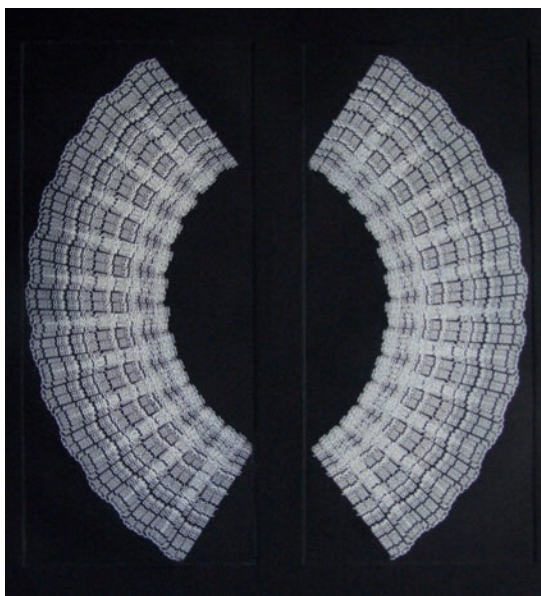


*Amputations etc.*

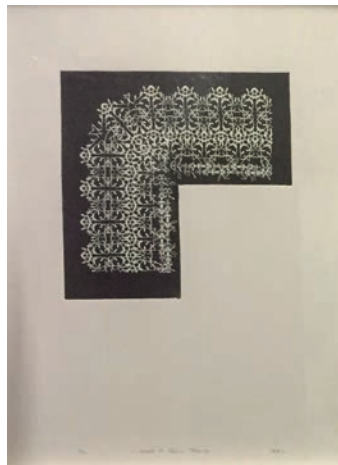




*Blue is better... but makes a terrible noise  
when leg is dressed*



*One man very very bad... nearly navy blue in  
colour*



*I shed a few tears 2009*



*Wound in back and bullets came out in front  
2009*

# CHLOE DEWE MATHEWS

## *Shot at Dawn, 2014*

“ As I stand in the 4a.m. darkness, at the edge of an empty field in Flanders, I know that there is an absurdity to what I’m doing. However the intention remains clear. By finding and photographing these places, I am reinserting the individual into that space, stamping their presence back onto the land, so that their histories are not forgotten.”

*Shot at Dawn* focuses on the sites where soldiers from the British, French and Belgian armies were executed for cowardice and desertion during the First World War.

Dewe Mathews spent two years researching and photographing twenty-three locations at which the soldiers were shot or held in the period leading up to their execution. All are seasonally accurate and were taken as close as possible to the precise time of day at which the executions occurred, usually at daybreak. Around a thousand men were executed by firing squads between 1914 and 1918, and it is likely that at least some of these men were suffering from psychiatric illness brought on by the horrors of trench warfare. Made a hundred years later, Dewe Mathews’ images show places forever altered by these traumatic events.

*Shot at Dawn* is commissioned by the Ruskin School of Art at the University of Oxford as part of 14–18 NOW, WW1 Centenary Art Commissions.

Images © Chloe Dewe Mathews





Soldat Ahmed ben Mohammed el Yadjizy  
Soldat Ali ben Ahmed ben Frej ben Khelil  
Soldat Hassen ben Ali ben Guerra  
el Amolani  
Soldat Mohammed Ould Mohammed  
ben Ahmed  
17:00 / 15.12.1914

Verbranden-Molen, West-Vlaanderen



Soldat Lucien Jean Baptiste Bersot  
Time unknown / 13.02.1915

Fontenoy, Aisne, Picardie



Private Joseph Byers  
Private Andrew Evans  
Time unknown / 6.2.1915

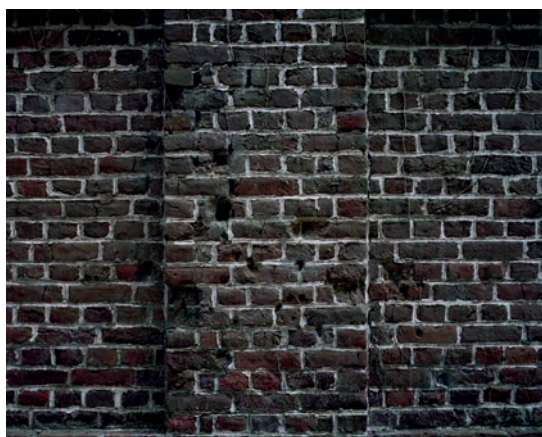
Private George E. Collins  
07:30 / 15.2.1915

Six Farm, Loker, West-Vlaanderen



Private Henry Hughes  
05.50 / 10.4.1918

Klijtebeek stream, Dikkebus, Leper,  
West-Vlaanderen



Private Herbert Chase  
04:30 / 11.6.1915

Sint-Sixtusabdij, Westvleteren,  
West-Vlaanderen

# FLORENCE FARMBOROUGH

## Photographs from the Eastern Front, 1914–1917

“ The devastation left by warfare was terrible to see and the loss of life appalling. Everywhere... were the macabre glimpses of the aftermath of battle. ”

Florence Farmborough (1887–1978) was a British woman who had travelled to Moscow to work as a governess to a Russian family. When war was declared, she volunteered for the Red Cross. She passed exams in Russian to become a surgical nurse, and was assigned to a mobile military unit of the Russian Army. As a result, Farmborough was very close to the fighting.

She travelled with the soldiers as they fought on the Eastern Front, at the borders of Romania and Galicia (present day Ukraine and Poland). Conditions were hard, and they often slept in field tents or simple dug-outs in the woods. A keen amateur photographer, Farmborough took along her plate camera and tripod to record her experiences. Her photographs are some of the very few made by a woman on the Eastern Front.

After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Farmborough was forced to abandon her camera and return home to the UK. A few years before her death in 1978, she held a small exhibition of her photographs and souvenirs in Heswall, Cheshire, and published her memoir *A Nurse at the Russian Front*. However, she remains little known.

Images reproduced by kind permission of IWM (Imperial War Museums) and Special Collections, University of Leeds.

Captions have been adapted from Farmborough's own descriptions in the publication *Russian Album 1908–1918* (1978), her memoir *A Nurse at the Russian Front* (1974), and from information in the collections of IWM (Imperial War Museums).





University of Leeds / OWLS000099

Military personnel and nurses of the 62nd Division celebrating Christmas with peasant families in a dug-out in Chertoviche, 1915. Farmborough is seated in the front row on the left.

‘The parties were a great success. Large dug-outs were draped with fir-branches, brightly decorated with tinsel, coloured streamers... the children’s eyes shone with delight’.



University of Leeds / OWLS000099

A sledge leaving for a dressing station, Chortkiv, Galicia (Ukraine), 1916.

‘Frost was very sharp during the early morning and my hair was soon stiffened and whitened with it’.



© IWM (Q98429)

Russian Cossack troops in winter uniforms outside their accommodation huts.



© IWM (Q97835)

A body of a dead Austro-Hungarian soldier in a destroyed dugout, made at the time of the Brusilov Offensive, 1916.



© IWM (Q97843)

Dead Russian soldiers being buried by their comrades, 1915.

‘The bodies of those who succumbed to their wounds were left aside till evening, and dusk had often fallen before the orderlies returned from their melancholy task of interring the dead’.



© IWM (Q97832)

Dead transport horses, probably belonging to the Red Cross unit where Florence Farmborough worked, during the Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive of 1915. She repeatedly wrote of her distress at seeing dead and dying animals during the war.



© IWM (Q98431)

‘Some of the dead lay where they had fallen in that landscape of horror and suffering, on the road to Monasterzhiska [Ukraine].’ An unknown soldier lying on the battlefield, 1916.





© IWM (Q97843)

‘Barbed wire entanglements had been intricately constructed to protect the Austrian trenches, sometimes in several rows.’ A deep field of Austro-Hungarian barbed wire, at the time of the Brusilov Offensive, 1916.



© IWM (Q98415)

Russian Army drivers, attached to the Red Cross unit of Florence Farmborough, pose with food bowls outside their shelters.

Farmborough’s photographic skills were in demand, and she made numerous group photographs, in a semi-official capacity, of the military units where she nursed. She later wrote that ‘My camera received a great welcome... the soldiers all insisted on being photographed at once’.



© IWM (Q98427)

‘A young soldier was hit by a stray bullet near our station [in Belopolye, Ukraine]. Sister Anna and one of the doctors soon had him bandaged and resting comfortably.’ July, 1915.



© IWM (Q97829)

Vaska, the mascot (a pet goat) of the 62nd Division, the military unit supported by Farmborough’s Red Cross team. Vaska had his right hoof slightly crushed by a vehicle and was treated by the Head Surgeon. Farmborough recalled, ‘The operation completed, he sped off as best he could on three legs’. 1915.





© IWM (97851)

'A tiny mite, Gheorghi by name, only two-and-a-half years old, had had an arm blasted off by shrapnel.' A Red Cross nurse tends a child after fighting at Seret on the Romanian Front, 1917.



University of Leeds / OWLS0000099

Nurses pose outside a field tent of the 62nd Division, 1915. Farmborough is seated on the far left.

'One of the greatest trials of a Red Cross unit at the front was the complete lack of regular sleep. So it was a real delight to find a tent provided for us in an orchard, where we could snatch some rest'.



University of Leeds / OWLS0000099

The war sparked a refugee crisis in 1915.

'All over Western Russia the homeless were swarming, Poles and Lithuanians as well as Russians. Taking what they could of their livestock and other possessions, uprooted and helpless, they could but trudge on at random. This family was typical; even their horse had collapsed under the strain. It was an exodus almost too pitiable to contemplate'



© IWM (Q98444)

'We rested where we could; near Folvark Volka, it was under a haystack', c.1915.

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*No Man's Land* is curated by Dr. Pippa Oldfield and is a co-production by Impressions Gallery, Bradford; The Turnpike, Leigh; Bristol Cathedral; and Bishop Auckland Town Hall, County Durham.

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