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978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

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## Behind the Front

Until now scholars have looked for the source of the indomitable Tommy morale on the western front in innate British bloody-mindedness and irony, not to mention more material concerns such as leave, food, rum, brothels, regimental pride and male bonding. However, re-examining previously used sources alongside never-before consulted archives, the author shifts the focus away from battle and the trenches to times behind the front, where the British intermingled with a vast population of allied civilians, whom Lord Kitchener had instructed the troops to 'avoid'. Besides providing a comprehensive examination of soldiers' encounters with local French and Belgian inhabitants which were not only unavoidable but also challenging, symbiotic and uplifting in equal measure, the author contends that such relationships were crucial both to how the war was fought on the western front and, ultimately, to British victory in 1918. What emerges is a novel interpretation of the British and Dominion soldier at war.

CRAIG GIBSON has published widely on Allied relations in the First World War and the role of military discipline in troop/inhabitant relationships. He has received awards from the Historial de la Grande Guerre, Péronne, Somme; the Australian War Memorial, Canberra; and the Camargo Foundation, Cassis, Bouches-du-Rhône.

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*British Soldiers and French Civilians,  
1914–1918*

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Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

In memory of my paternal great-grandparents,  
Rhoda Ann (1879–1971) and Edward Samuel Smith  
(1880–1916)

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Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

---

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of maps</i>	xi
<i>List of tables</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xviii
<i>Maps</i>	xxii
Prologue	1
Introduction	4
<b>Part I Mobile warfare, 1914</b>	<b>27</b>
1 The first campaign	29
<b>Part II Trench warfare, 1914–1918</b>	<b>63</b>
2 Land	65
3 Administration	90
4 Billet	109
5 Communication	147
6 Friction	157
7 Farms	188
8 Damages	222
9 Money	243
10 Discipline	273
11 Sex	309
	vii

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii Contents

<b>Part III Mobile warfare, 1918</b>	<b>347</b>
12 The last campaign	349
Conclusion	376
<i>Epilogue</i>	385
<i>Appendix 1</i>	389
<i>Appendix 2</i>	390
<i>Appendix 3</i>	392
<i>Appendix 4</i>	393
<i>Sources consulted</i>	410
<i>Index</i>	443



## Illustrations

---

- |    |   |         |
|----|---|---------|
| 1  | Life and death on the western front. William Orpen, <i>Harvest</i> , 1918. Credit: © Imperial War Museums, London (Art. IWM ART 4663)   | page 20 |
| 2  | The Entente Cordiale, August 1914. <i>Le bon gîte</i> , <i>L'Illustration</i> 144, no. 3731 (29 August 1914), p. 176. Credit: Mary Evans Picture Library  | 35      |
| 3  | British officers hare-hunting in France, 1915. Cover, <i>Illustrated London News</i> 146, no. 3955 (6 February 1915). Credit: <i>Illustrated London News</i> Ltd/Mary Evans   | 44      |
| 4  | An elderly French couple living in Croix-du-Bac. Credit: © Imperial War Museums (Q 634)   | 72      |
| 5  | A British Army Intelligence Sergeant checking the details of a civilizin in the town. Béthune, France, c. 1918. Credit: Australian War Memorial H09663  | 104     |
| 6  | Domesticity. Enjoying refreshment at an estaminet near Bois-Grenier. Credit: Australian War Memorial EZ0032   | 135     |
| 7  | Friendly fields? Trench journal parodies the BEF's dilemma. 'Terrors of War', <i>The Listening Post</i> , <i>7th Canadian Infantry Battalion</i> , <i>1st British Columbia Regiment</i> , no. 31 (July 1918), p. 3. Credit: Canadian War Museum | 154     |
| 8  | 'Spy Mania.' Cover, <i>Illustrated London News</i> , 146, no. 3974 (19 June 1915). Credit: <i>Illustrated London News</i> Ltd/Mary Evans  | 160     |
| 9  | Up the line. Troops on the march near Dickebusch, West Flanders. Credit: Australian War Memorial E02022   | 162     |
| 10 | Total war, 1917. Troops help with the haymaking near Winnezele, September 1917. © Imperial War Museums (Q 2840)   | 217     |
| 11 | Dealing with civilians behind the lines, <i>Spanish Farm</i> author Mottram experienced a different war. Ralph Hale Mottram. Credit: Norfolk Record Office MOT 69.  | 225     |

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x	List of illustrations	
12	Children selling to troops in Bailleul © National Library of Scotland C.2396	247
13	Propaganda spurred enlistment but created unrealistic expectations. ‘Remember Belgium’. Credit: © Imperial War Museums (Art. IWM PST 11422)	284
14	Arthur Murray Jarvis with NWMP © Lord Strathcona’s Horse Museum, Calgary	294
15	Tommy humour. Cartoon – ‘French girl as imagined at home. As she is’, <i>The Outpost Magazine of the 17th Service (Glasgow Chamber of Commerce) Battalion Highland Light Infantry</i> , 4, no. 4 (February 1917), p. 136 © Royal Highland Fusiliers Museum, Glasgow	311
16	Canadian troops enter Mons, 11 November 1918. Credit: National Library of Scotland X.25007	374
17	Commemorative plaque, Poperinge. © the author	387

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Maps

---

1	Political boundaries	<i>page</i> xxii
2	The Flanders front	xxiii
3	The Somme front	xxiv
4	France, Belgium and the western front, 1914–18	xxv

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Tables

---

1	Estimated strength, British Expeditionary Force in France	<i>page</i> 66
2	The British share of the western front (miles)	67
3	Movements of 31st Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1 October 1915–31 March 1916	121
4	Vehicular accidents involving BEF personnel, 1915–18	171
5	Weekly statement of claims received by the Claims Commission during week ending 7 November 1917. Personal Injuries	241

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Acknowledgments

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For graciously allowing me to reproduce copyright material that first appeared in their pages I should like to thank *War in History*, the *International History Review*, *Past & Present*, and *History Workshop Journal*. For permission to quote from copyright material held in their name by the Department of Documents, the Imperial War Museum, London, I offer my sincere thanks to Mike Durham (the papers of Garnet William Durham); Charles Kirke (the papers of Walter Kirke); C. Spence (the papers of H. M. Allen). While every effort has been made to trace other copyright holders, these have so far proven unsuccessful. My apologies to anyone who feels I have infringed upon their copyright and if they are good enough to bring the omission to my attention I shall ensure that in any future editions acknowledgment is duly accorded.

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All books are the culmination of a personal journey. Mine began with a graduate reading course generously supervised by Modris Eksteins at the University of Toronto. When I subsequently embarked on doctoral studies at the University of Leeds, two institutions shaped my experiences. At the School of History, Hugh Cecil made me aware of the writings of, among others, R. H. Mottram, provided research leads and welcomed me into his West Hampstead family home as I began research.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## xiv Acknowledgments

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Attracting students from around the world, Mary Morris International Residence in Headingley was both a stimulating and a happy home for two years. The friends made there later proved invaluable when it came time to undertake research in London. During my first summer of research in 1995, Duncan Davidson's family welcomed me into their Chiswick home and expected very little in return. Harold Bush-Howard arranged accommodation in Bayswater in the summer of 1996, as he did again in Camden in 1997. On several occasions during my post-doctoral life, Tom Fleming's Golders Green flat became my home away from home. With Chris Morris I shared something exceedingly sublime in the life of a Torontonion of my generation. From the Mary Morris television room we watched as the Toronto Blue Jays' Joe Carter belted a World Series winning home run in the early hours of an October 1993 morning, a memory that is as fresh and as sweet today as it was twenty years ago.

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vaste' with a shocked look on his face, put my efforts in proper and at the same time somewhat sobering perspective.

Aside from the staffs at those institutions mentioned in my bibliography, to which I now take the opportunity to offer a profound thank you, I should like to acknowledge the assistance of the staffs at the John P. Robarts Research Library and Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, both at the University of Toronto; the Mary Evans Picture Library, London; the Canadian War Museum, Ottawa; Archives Départementales de Loire-Atlantique, Nantes; Archives Départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, Marseilles; Environment Canada Library, Toronto; the National Army Museum, London; Lord Strathcona's Horse Museum, Calgary; The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; the Royal Highland Fusiliers Regimental Museum, Glasgow; the Service Historique de la Gendarmerie Nationale, Fort de Charenton and National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

The process of finishing this book has been a rather uneven business, with life often getting in the way. It has been made infinitely easier, however, by a John Treloar Grant-in-Aid which afforded me the rare privilege of consulting the marvellous holdings of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra; and by a grant from the Trent University, Ontario, Professional Development Fund, which allowed me to build on my research in French archives. The Camargo Foundation, Cassis, France, stepped in with a crucial term-length writing fellowship on the shores of the Mediterranean, an award that more than any other provided me with the impetus to begin the process of turning a dissertation into a book. Actually finishing the final manuscript would have been impossible, however, without the indulgence of my employer, Canada Post, which granted several recent spells of unpaid leave, often on very short notice. Those of my co-workers who were aware of my outside interests were exceptionally generous in their support. Their consideration and kindness has certainly made my life easier.

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978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## xvi Acknowledgments

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Sadly, Guenter Job, Rick Lockwood and John Hughes did not live to see the book's publication. I never met John Hughes in person but only corresponded with him via email as he prepared the papers of his 'granddad', who served as an Agriculture Officer on the western front, for publication. With John, ours was certainly a mutually beneficial relationship. Whereas I was delighted to learn of the existence of this fascinating memoir, he was simply relieved to learn of my own research on British involvement in French agriculture, which, as he put it, confirmed 'that Granddad hadn't just made the whole thing up'!

My association with Cambridge University Press has been an extremely pleasant one. Beginning with Elizabeth Howard and Isabelle Dambricourt but continuing more recently with Michael Watson, Chloe Dawson and Samantha Richter, they have been remarkably patient while this manuscript has been in preparation. They, along with anonymous readers, have made it a better work. For suggesting that I delve more deeply into Mottram's writings, as well as for other critiques, Jay Winter, the series editor, has improved the final product immeasurably. More recently, during a final round of editing that verged on the overwhelming, Caroline Howlett calmly and skilfully guided me through the process.

The support of my parents, siblings, and relatives has been unwavering. My aunt, Barbara Gibson, granted me access to her father's wartime



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978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

xvii

letters. With her blessing, a copy of Wilbert ‘Squib’ Webster’s correspondence has been deposited with the Liddle Collection, the University of Leeds.

Though cancer claimed my sister Brooke before the book’s publication, I hope that she would have been simply happy, as I am, that it is finally in print. My memories of her are daily and extremely dear.

By way of conclusion, a little family history. When my paternal great-grandfather, Edward Samuel Smith, emigrated to Canada from England at the turn of the last century, he settled in Peterborough, a burgeoning town just north-east of Toronto.

With more than his share of mouths to feed – eight, to be exact – returning so soon to fight for his birth country as a new Canadian was undoubtedly a decision that neither he nor his wife, Rhoda Ann, took lightly. Enlist he did, however, in May 1915, joining the 39th Battalion.

According to his service file (<http://data2.collectionscanada.gc.ca/cef/9001-10000/9030-58.pdf>), he arrived in France as a member of the 4th Machine Gun Company in February 1916, was briefly hospitalized, but rejoined his unit and eventually took part in the Flers-Courcelette attack in September 1916, where he was killed in action.

Though I paid my respects to Pte Smith at Pozières Cemetery in July 1993, it somehow seems an insufficient gesture, as does, I hasten to add, the dedication of this book to his memory.

This dedication, however, is not made to Smith solely but rather to Smith *and* his widow jointly. Too often those whose sacrifices and responsibilities continued after the end of the hostilities, often women, usually out of history’s gaze, for years, sometimes decades, are overlooked. This is my opportunity to ensure that Rhoda Ann’s are not.

## Abbreviations

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a/APM	acting Assistant Provost Marshal
A&Q	Adjutant and Quartermaster General
AAT	Archives de l'Armée de Terre, Château de Vincennes, Paris
ADN	Archives départementales du Nord, Lille, France
ADPC	Archives départementales du Pas-de-Calais, Arras, France
ADP	Archief De Panne, Brugge, Belgium
ADS	Archives départementales de la Somme, Amiens, France
ADSM	Archives départementales de la Seine-Maritime, Rouen, France
AEF	American Expeditionary Force
AG	Adjutant General
AGR	Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels, Belgium
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
AMVA	Archives Municipales, Ville d'Amiens, Somme, France
AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
ANZAC	Australia and New Zealand Army Corps
AO	Agriculture Officer
APM	Assistant Provost Marshal
Appx	Appendix (pl: apps)
ARO	Army Routine Order
ASC	Army Service Corps
Aust	Australian
AWM	Australian War Memorial, Canberra, ACT
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
bn	Battalion
Br. Gen.	Brigadier General
BRO	Branch Requisition Office
Capt	Captain

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## List of abbreviations

xix

CB	Confined to Barracks
CC	Claims Commission
CCAm	Commission de Contrôle d'Amiens
Cdn	Canadian
CEF	Canadian Expeditionary Force
CO	Commanding Officer
Col.	Colonel
coy	Company
Cpl.	Corporal
CQMS	Company Quartermaster Sergeant
CRO	Corps Routine Order
CSM	Company Sergeant Major
DA	<i>Direction de l'Arrière</i>
DAA&QMG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General
DA&QMG	Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General
DAG	Deputy Adjutant General
DCO	Divisional Claims Officer
Div	Division
DMO	Director of Military Operations
DRO	Divisional Routine Order
FGCM	Field General Courts Martial
FO	Foreign Office Files, The National Archives, Kew, Surrey
FP no. 1	Field Punishment Number 1 [i.e. 'crucifixion']
GAN	<i>Groupe des Armées du Nord</i>
Gen.	General
GHQ	General Headquarters, British Expeditionary Force, France
GOC	General Officer Commanding [plural: 'GOsC']
GQG	<i>Grand Quartier Général</i>
GRO	General Routine Order
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
ILN	<i>Illustrated London News</i>
Inf	Infantry
IWM	Department of Documents, Imperial War Museum, London
LAC	Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa
LofC	Lines of Communication
L.-Cpl.	Lance Corporal
LC	Liddle Collection, University of Leeds Library, Leeds, England

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## xx List of abbreviations

LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LRB	London Rifle Brigade (5th City of London Regiment)
Lt	Lieutenant
Lt.-Col.	Lieutenant Colonel
Lt.-Gen.	Lieutenant General
MAE	Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Quai d'Orsay, Paris
Maj.	Major
Maj.-Gen.	Major General
MFP	Military Foot Police
MMF	<i>Mission Militaire Française attachée à l'Armée Britannique</i>
MMP	Military Mounted Police
MO	Medical Officer
MP	Military Police
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NRO	Norfolk Record Office, Norwich
NZEF	New Zealand Expeditionary Force
OC	officer commanding [plural: 'OsC']
OH	<i>British Official History of the Great War: Military Operations</i>
OHA	<i>The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918</i>
Outpost	<i>The Outpost Magazine of the 17th Service (Glasgow Chamber of Commerce) Battalion Highland Light Infantry</i>
OMFC	Overseas Military Forces of Canada
O/I	<i>Officier/Interprète</i>
PCC	President, Claims Commission
PI	<i>Illustration (La Petite Illustration)</i>
PM	Provost Marshal
PPCLI	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
pref	<i>préfet</i>
Prév.	<i>prévôté</i>
Pte	Private
QMG	Quartermaster General
QMS	Quartermaster Sergeant
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAVC	Royal Army Veterinary Corps
RBr	Rijksarchief, Brugge, Belgium
RE	Royal Engineers
RFA	Royal Field Artillery
RG	Record Group

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83761-3 - Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918

Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## List of abbreviations

xxi

RMO	Regimental Medical Officer
RO	Routine Order
RRD	<i>Réponse aux rapports décennaires des Sous-Direction du Service Numéro</i>
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
RWF	Royal Welsh Fusiliers
SAI	Stadsarchief, Ieper, Belgium
SDS	<i>Sous-Direction du Service, Mission Militaire Française</i>
Sgt.	Sergeant
s-pref	<i>sous-préfet</i>
SRA	<i>Section de Renseignements aux armées, contrôle Postal</i>
STD	sexually transmitted disease
TM	Town Major
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, Surrey
WO	War Office Files, The National Archives, Kew, Surrey
ZA	<i>zone des armées</i>

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Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Map 1. Political Boundaries

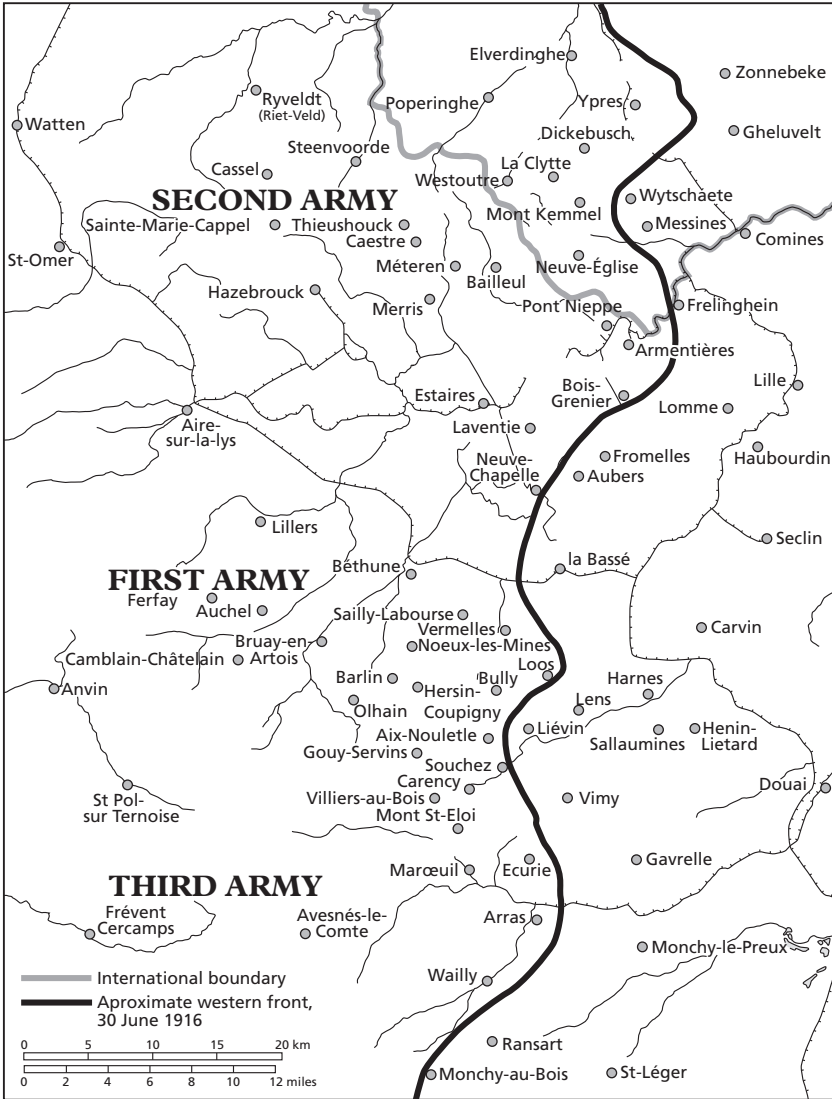
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Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Map 2. The Flanders front

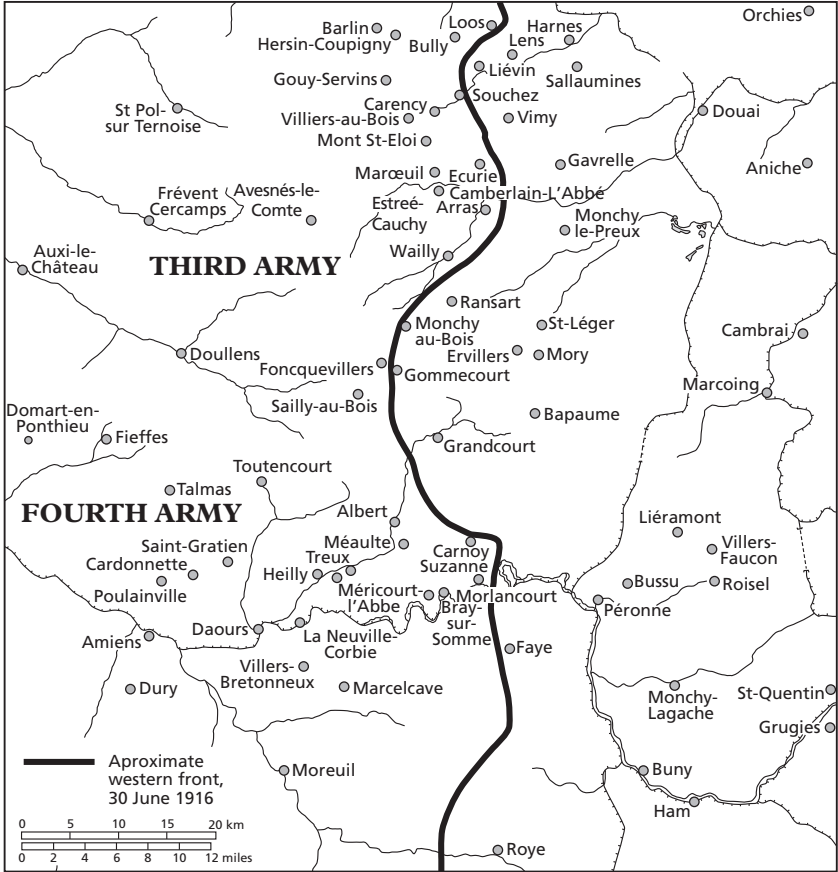
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Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Map 3. The Somme front



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Craig Gibson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Map 4. France, Belgium and the western front, 1914–18