**Assignment Brief**

*The impact of warfare on combatants*

We are marking the passing of a century since the beginning of the First World War. In the UK, after that war memorial were erected across the country, in villages, towns and cities, to commemorate those who had died. Much less attention was given at the time to those who suffered terrible wounds, physical and psychological, on a massive scale, in the battlefields of the First World War.

Historians are learning more about how it led to important changes in fields such as medicine and psychology. Over the last twenty years, there has been a real growth in the medical history of the war and much has been written about medical procedures, training and medical progress. What has received less attention has been the way in which men responded to the extreme violence of combat and yet it is this violence that is at the heart of the war experience.

Personal accounts of wounding are rare because men often did not have the time or the energy to write about their immediate responses to pain and disfigurement. Yet for most men the moment of wounding was the most important moment of their war, possibly the most important moment of their lives. Descriptions of personal injuries highlight the most terrible aspects of warfare: there was the man trapped in no man’s land who was in such pain that he ate his own hands, the man whose facial injuries were so severe that his friends were unable to help him and just stared in horror. Nevertheless, at the time most combatants were dismissive of men who failed to demonstrate suitably masculine courage and were especially hostile towards those who brought injury or disease upon themselves.

Today, events such as the Invictus Games highlight the plight of military veterans who have suffered as a result of warfare, and continue to do so through recent and ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. How have changes in medicine, technology and in social values led to different approaches to the consequences of warfare whose lives have been dramatically transformed by their direct experience of it?

**Contacts**

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