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Opening Extract from...

Don't You Know There's a War On?

Written by Nigel Rees

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INTRODUCTION

The naming of wars is an odd business. It usually depends which side you are on, of course. I believe that the Boers referred to what we know as 'the Boer Wars' as Vryheidsoorloeë (literally, 'freedom wars'). The Vietnamese called the Vietnam War 'the American War', understandably enough.

Sometimes the war does not have to be over before the name is applied. The Gulf War was being called by that name in January 1991 and the war was not wrapped up until March of that year.

And then there is the question of when a war is not a war. I still note a general hesitation in referring to 'the Falklands conflict' of 1982 as a war. So where does that leave the late unpleasantness, not really over yet, in Iraq? 'The Iraq War' may be winning the day. 'The Iraqi Regime Change'? 'The American Invasion of Iraq'? Only time will tell.

Looking back to the world wars that are the source of this book's words and phrases, it is remarkable to discover just how soon both of them came to be given their grandiloquent but ominous titles. The term 'world war' is defined by the OED, a touch loosely you might think, as a 'war involving many important nations'. It was first recorded in 1909. Five years later there came the real thing.

Initially, of course, the First World War was not known as this. It was being called the European War as early as 14 September 1914, a mere few weeks into the fray. On that day, the Lima Daily News in Ohio was offering 'Latest European War Map Given by the News to every reader presenting this coupon and 10 cents ... '

A book of poems by H.D. Rawnsley was given the title The European War 1914–15 as early as 1915. It is, however, a satisfactorily accurate name because, although nations strictly speaking beyond Europe, like Turkey, were involved, and in due course Australia, New Zealand and, above all, the United States joined in, the cause and focus of the war were very much European.

The term 'European War' was still being invoked in the 1920s – as the phrase's use on numerous war memorials attests. To this day, the London Library categorizes books like Winston Churchill's The World Crisis under the heading 'H[istory]. European War I' and his The Second World War under 'H. European War II'.

Almost as rapidly, the conflict became chiefly known as the Great War – and why not? In terms of scale and mortality there had certainly never been anything like it before. As early as October 1914, Maclean's Magazine (in the US) was stating, 'Some wars name themselves … This is the Great War'. Previously, the name had been given to the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars of 1793–1815. As Arnold Toynbee pointed out, the British kept on using this name until the fall of France in 1940 'in order to avoid admitting to themselves that they were now again engaged in a war of the same magnitude.'

By 10 September 1918 – i.e. just before the Armistice was signed – Lieut. Col. C. à Court Repington was referring to it in his diary as the 'First World War', thus: 'I saw Major Johnstone, the Harvard Professor who is here to lay the bases of an American History. We discussed the right name of the war. I said that we called it now The War, but that this could not last. The Napoleonic War was The Great War. To call it The German War was too much flattery for the Boche. I

suggested The World War as a shade better title, and finally we mutually agreed to call it The First World War in order to prevent the millennium folk from forgetting that the history of the world was the history of war.' Repington's book entitled The First World War 1914–18 was published in 1920. Presumably this helped popularize the name for the war, while ominously suggesting that it was the first of a series.

There is rather more to the naming of the Second World War than that. After the First World War, what could be more natural than to have the Second World War? But, of course, it was not immediately recognized as such. At first, some tried to refer to it, once again, as 'the war in Europe', but Time Magazine was quick off the mark in 1939: 'World War II began last week at 5:20am (Polish time) Friday, September 1, when a German bombing plane dropped a projectile on Puck, fishing village and air base in the armpit of the Hel Peninsula ... '

Soon after this, Duff Cooper published a book of his collected newspaper articles entitled The Second World War. When it quite clearly was a world war, by 1942, President Roosevelt tried to find an alternative appellation. After rejecting 'the Teutonic Plague' and 'the Tyrants' War', he settled for 'the War of Survival'. But that did not catch on. Finally, in 1945, the US Federal Register announced that, with the approval of President Truman, the late unpleasantness was to be known as World War II. In the Soviet Union, the Second World War was known as Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voyna, the Great Fatherland War. Another name for it there: the Great Patriotic War.

One name has not, however, endured – the Unnecessary War. In Winston Churchill's preface to The Gathering Storm, the first volume of his history of The Second World War (1948), he wrote: 'One day President Roosevelt told me that he was asking publicly for suggestions about what the war should be called. I said at once "The Unnecessary War". There never was a war more easy to stop than that which has just wrecked what was left of the world from the previous struggle.'

I think it would be true to say that 'World War I' and 'World War II' are probably the preferred way in the US to refer to what we in the UK still tend to call 'the First World War' and 'the Second World War'. But I may be wrong about this. As for world war III, that seems to be an American concept anyway.

On the other hand, some hold that there has only ever been one world war to date. A view attributed to Lieut. Col. A.D. Wintle MC (1897–1966) – a brave and gloriously eccentric soldier who fought in both of them – was: 'There's only one war with the Germans. It's lasted thirty years with a lull in the middle while they regrouped.'

In fact, that is a line from a TV film in which he was portrayed by Jim Broadbent. To see if Wintle had actually said any such thing I managed to track down a rare copy of his posthumously published memoir, The Last Englishman (1968). All he writes on the matter, when referring to what he usually calls 'the Kaiser's War' and 'Hitler's War', is that they were 'Parts One and Two of the World War'. He then adds: 'Whatever the rest of the world thought, I knew that the war with Germany was not over. They were merely lying low … with hindsight I still regard the two world wars as one.' Similarly, in 1941, the cartoonist David Low stated in his foreword to Europe at War: A History in Sixty Cartoons with a Narrative Text: 'The war, after an interval of twenty years for a change of moustache, is now resumed.'

*

In the course of writing this book, there are several sources I have made use of and/or to which I refer quite frequently. Sometimes I use these abbreviations:

IHAT
Stuart Berg Flexner, I Hear America Talking (1976)

McLaine
Ian McLaine, Ministry of Morale (1979)

OED
The Oxford English Dictionary (online edn)

Partridge/Catch Phrases
Eric Partridge, A Dictionary of Catch Phrases (2nd edn, ed. Paul Beale, 1985)

Partridge/Long Trail
John Brophy and Eric Partridge, The Long Trail (1965 edn) – based on their Songs and Slang of the British Soldier 1914–18 (1930)

Partridge/Slang
Eric Partridge, A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English (8th edn, ed. Paul Beale, 1984)

Safire
William Safire, Safire's Political Dictionary (1978)
Note that the entries are listed in 'letter by letter' order rather than 'word by word' order – that is to say, in alphabetical order of the letters as they appear within the whole phrase exactly as it is written.

Cross-references to other entries are made in small capitals.

There is a keyword index beginning on page 223.

I should like to record my appreciation of the contribution made to this book by several correspondents and contributors to The Quote ... Unquote Newsletter, a quarterly electronic publication available from the Quote ... Unquote website (www.btwebworld.com/quote-unquote): Marian Bock, Dr John Campbell, Mark English, Howard M. Jones, Joe Kralich, Tony Percy, the late Vernon Noble, and many others. My thanks to them all.

Nigel Rees

A

(air) ace
'The air war and many other of our air warfare terms were coined or popularized by the British in 1915, including: war ace or ace, a pilot who had shot down at least five enemy planes' – according to IHAT. The OED, however, defining an 'ace' as 'a crack airman' and providing a citation from The Times of 14 September 1917, puts the qualifying tally higher – at 'ten enemy machines'. The origin of the term may lie in its use to describe an 'expert' in late 19th-century America and/or it could reference the ace in a pack of cards.

ack-ack
In telephone communications, a system of pronunciation guides had been established by 1898. The idea was to make clear whichever letter was being spoken and thus to prevent any misunderstanding. Thus, in the First World War, telephone code for the letter 'a' was 'ack', so 'A.A.' – the abbreviation for 'anti-aircraft (gun)' was 'ack-ack' (by 1917). 'Ack' was replaced by 'able' in December 1942, but such a gun was not renamed an 'able-able' ...

action this day
Instruction phrase, for office use, by the time of the Second World War. 'ACTION THIS DAY', 'REPORT IN THREE DAYS' and 'REPORT PROGRESS IN ONE WEEK' were printed tags that Winston Churchill started using in February 1940 to glue on to memos at the Admiralty (where at that time he was First Sea Lord). Subtitled 'Working with Churchill', the book Action This Day (1968) is a collection of the reminiscences of those who had been closely associated with Churchill during the Second World War. 'She [Margaret Thatcher] had the draft of that circular on her desk that night. She said "Action this day" and she got it. We didn't stop to argue' – Hugo Young, One of Us, Chap. 6 (1989).

Adler Tag [Eagle Day]
This was the German code phrase that would have signalled the invasion of Britain, mooted in 1940 but never launched. The main attack plan was known as Adlerangriff [attack of the eagle]. The overall operation was code-named Seelöwe [sea lion].

all over by Christmas
At first, it was thought that the European War would not last very long. Having started in August 1914, it would be 'over by Christmas', hence the unofficial, anti-German slogan 'Berlin by Christmas'. The phrase 'all over by Christmas' was used by some optimists as it had been in several previous wars – none of which was over by the Christmas in question. The fact that this promise was not fulfilled did not prevent Henry Ford from saying, as he tried to stop the war a year later: 'We're going to try to get the boys out of the trenches before Christmas. I've chartered a ship, and some of us are going to Europe.' He was not referring to American boys because the United States had not joined the war at this stage. An alternative version of his statement is: '[The purpose is] to get the boys out of the

trenches and back home by Christmas.' The New York Tribune announced: 'GREAT WAR ENDS CHRISTMAS DAY. FORD TO STOP IT.'
In her Autobiography (1977), Agatha Christie remembered that the South African War would 'all be over in a few weeks'. She went on: 'In 1914 we heard the same phrase, "All over by Christmas". In 1940, "Not much point in storing the carpets with mothballs" – this when the Admiralty took over my house – "It won't last over the winter".' In Tribune (28 April 1944), George Orwell recalled a young man 'on the night in 1940 when the big ack-ack barrage was fired over London for the first time', insisting, 'I tell you, it'll all be over by Christmas.' In his diary for 28 November 1950, Harold Nicolson wrote, 'Only a few days ago [General] MacArthur was saying, "Home by Christmas," and now he is saying, "This is a new war [Korea]".' IHAT has the comment: 'The war will be over by Christmas was a popular 1861 expression [in the American Civil War]. Since then several generals and politicians have used the phrase or variations of it, in World War I, World War II, and the Korean war – and none of the wars was over by Christmas.' (Clever-clogs are apt to point out, however, that all wars are eventually over by a Christmas ...)

all quiet on the Western Front
A familiar phrase from military communiqués and newspaper reports on the Allied side in the First World War – also taken up jocularly by men in the trenches to describe peaceful inactivity. It was used as the title of the English translation of the novel Im Westen nichts Neues [From the Western Front – Nothing to Report] (1929; film US 1930) by the German writer Erich Maria Remarque. The title is ironic – a whole generation was being destroyed while newspapers reported that there was 'no news in the west'. Partridge/Catch Phrases hears in it echoes of 'All quiet on the Shipka Pass' – cartoons of the 1877–8 Russo-Turkish War that Partridge says had a vogue in 1915–16, though he never heard the allusion made himself. For no very good reason, Partridge rules out any connection with the American song 'All Quiet Along the Potomac'. This, in turn, came from a poem called 'The Picket Guard' (1861) by Ethel Lynn Beers, a sarcastic commentary on General Brinton McClellan's policy of delay at the start of the Civil War. The phrase (alluding to the Potomac River, which runs through Washington DC) had been used in reports from McLellan's Union headquarters and put in Northern newspaper headlines. 'All quiet along the Potomac' continues to have some use as a portentous way of saying that nothing is happening yet.

(the) Allies
Featuring in both the world wars, these were the forces or states that banded together to fight against the central powers in the war of 1914–18, or against the axis (powers) in that of 1939–45. In the First World War, the term was being used in The Times by 2 November 1914. The Allies included, at one time or another, Russia (until the Revolution of March 1917), France, the British Commonwealth, Italy, the United States, Japan, Romania, Serbia (defeated in 1915), Belgium, Greece (from July 1917), Portugal and Montenegro (defeated by the end of 1915).

Anderson (shelter)

A British prefabricated air-raid shelter in the Second World War, named after Sir John Anderson, Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (1939–40). Compare morrison shelter. It was created by (later Sir) William Paterson, a Scottish engineer. From the New Statesman 3 June 1939: 'Goats sheltered from high explosive in Anderson shelters were claimed to be quite unhurt.' From War Illustrated (29 December 1939): 'An Anderson shelter [is] erected in a kitchen because there is no garden space available.'

Angel of Death
A nickname bestowed in the Second World War upon Dr Joseph Mengele, a notorious German concentration-camp doctor who experimented on inmates – 'for his power to pick who would live and die in Auschwitz by the wave of his hand' (Time Magazine, 17 June 1985). It is not clear at what point or by whom this nickname was applied. 'Angel of death' as an expression to describe a bringer of ills is not a biblical phrase and does not appear to have arisen until the 18th century. Samuel Johnson used it in The Rambler in 1752. From Byron's The Destruction of Sennacherib (1815): 'For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast.'

angels one-five
In Royal Air Force jargon, 'angels' means height measured in units of a thousand feet; 'one-five' stands for fifteen, so '20 MEs at angels one-five' means 'twenty Messerschmitts at 15,000 feet'. Angels One Five was the title of a film (UK 1952) about RAF fighter pilots during the Second World War.

Any gum, chum?
Remark addressed to American GIs based in Britain during the Second World War. 'Crowds of small boys gathered outside American clubs to pester them for gifts, or called out as American lorries passed: "Any gum, chum?" which rapidly became a national catchphrase' – Norman Longmate, How We Lived Then (1971).

Anzac
An acronym. 'Anzacs' were members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps who fought in the First World War, initially (and especially) at Gallipoli. Anzac Day in both countries is 25 April, commemorating the landing on the beaches there, exposed to Turkish fire, in 1915. The term was first used in military communiqués in that year. Up to that point British troops had tended to use the words 'Aussie' or 'digger', but American forces picked up the new coinage after 1917. Hence, 'Anzac Day' is still used to describe the anniversary of the Gallipoli landings of the Corps on 25 April 1915.

appeasement
A name given to the policy of conciliation and concession towards Nazi Germany, around 1938. The word had, however, been used in this context since the end of the First World War. On 14 February 1920, Winston Churchill said in a speech: 'I am, and have always been since the firing stopped on November 11, 1918, for a policy of peace, real peace and appeasement.' The word may have become fixed following a letter to The Times (4 May 1934) from the 11th Marquess of Lothian:

‘The only lasting solution is that Europe should gradually find its way to an internal equilibrium and a limitation of armaments by political appeasement.’ Often used disparagingly with reference to the attempts made by Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, to make a peaceful accommodation with Nazi Germany before the outbreak of war in 1939.

Après la guerre [After the war]
Title phrase from an anonymous song of the First World War sung to the tune of ‘Sous les ponts de Paris’. The first line of each verse is actually ‘Après la guerre finie’ [After the war is over] and the song suggests to a Frenchwoman that, as she is in the family way – presumably by a British soldier – they will get married ... after the war is over, i.e., given how long it was lasting, never.

Arbeit macht frei [work makes you free/liberates]
Motto/slogan over the entrance to the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau, Bavaria, by 1933. Also later at Auschwitz, Poland, and other concentration camps.

Are we downhearted? – No!
A morale-boosting phrase connected with the early stages of the First World War but having political origins before that. The politician Joseph Chamberlain said in a 1906 speech: ‘We are not downhearted. The only trouble is, we cannot understand what is happening to our neighbours.’ The day after he was defeated as candidate in the Stepney Borough Council election of 1909, Clement Attlee, the future Prime Minister, was greeted by a colleague with the cry, ‘Are we downhearted?’ (He replied, ‘Of course we are.’) On 18 August 1914, the Daily Mail reported: ‘For two days the finest troops England has ever sent across the sea have been marching through the narrow streets of old Boulogne in solid columns of khaki ... waving as they say that new slogan of Englishmen: “Are we downhearted? ... Nooooo!” “Shall we win? ... Yessss!”’ Florrie Forde sang a song with the phrase as title (written by W. David and Lawrence Wright) in 1914; ‘Are We Downhearted?’ by Ernest Lees and ‘Here We Are, Here We Are, Here We Are Again (The British Army’s Battle Cry)’ by Charles Wright and Kenneth Lyle were also songs that included the phrase (both also in 1914).

’Arf a mo’, Kaiser! [Half a moment/wait a moment, Kaiser!]
The drawing or cartoon by Bert Thomas which had this as caption first appeared in the London Evening News, in about 1914. It showed a British ‘Tommy’ pausing to light his pipe prior to going into action or during a break in it. Subsequently, the drawing may have been used as a 1915–16 recruiting poster. Partridge/The Long Trail suggests that a ‘half a mo’ subsequently became the slang term for a cigarette. A photograph of a handwritten sign from the start of the Second World War shows it declaring, ‘’Arf a mo, ’itler!’ In 1939, there was also a short documentary produced by British Paramount News with the title ’Arf a Mo’ Hitler.

armed neutrality
Though the phrase had existed before – in the 18th century in a Russian context – it was resurrected in the US towards the beginning of the First World War.

President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed US neutrality on 19 August 1914. However, both sides in the European War violated American neutrality; the US became pro-Allies and anti-German, and eventually joined the war.

Armistice Day
This designation of the day on which the armistice was concluded and the First World War came to an end – 11 November 1918 – may first have come about in the US on the first anniversary in 1919. Not until 1938, however, did the day become a federal holiday by law. In 1954, the name was changed to 'Veteran's Day' to honour all US veterans including those of the Second World War and the Korean War.

In Britain, perhaps the more frequently used term has been Armistice Sunday – for the Sunday closest to 11 November – when commemorations are held at the Cenotaph in London and at war memorials throughout the nation. Since the Second World War, it has been subsumed into Remembrance Day. See also two minutes' silence.

ARP [air-raid precautions]
Though perhaps more closely associated with the Second World War, this official term for measures to limit the risk of air raids, or the damage they might cause, was in use early in the First World War. A heading in The Times on 24 June 1915 was: 'Air-raid Precautions. Use And Abuse Of The Fire Alarm'. By 1924, a department of the Home Office with this name (though usually referred to by its initials) had been created to organize the protection of civilians from air raids. By 1937, The Lancet was commenting: 'A.R.P. These sinister initials are being made more and more familiar by a spate of books on air-raid precautions.' By 1939, the term had been officially superseded by 'Civil Defence', though as The Times Weekly observed on 6 September (note the date, just five days after the war officially began): 'It is impossible now to say where air-raid precautions end and where civil defence begins.' 'ARP' lived on in popular parlance but after 1945 gave way completely to 'Civil Defence'.

arsenal of democracy
Phrase used by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in a radio 'fireside chat' on 29 December 1940, one year before the US entered the Second World War: 'We must be the great arsenal of democracy.'

Asdic
Acronym for 'Anti-Submarine Detection and Investigation Committee' – an early British sonar/echo-sounding device for locating enemy submarines, introduced in the First World War. In December 1939, War Illustrated was reporting: 'Asdic … mentioned by Mr. Churchill in one of his speeches ... [is] a type of secret apparatus now used by the Navy.'

Auf nach Berlin [On to Berlin]
A German nationalist cry current from 1919–24.

AWOL [absent without leave]

Unwarranted absence from the military for a short period, but falling short of actual desertion. The acronym dates from the American Civil War, when offenders had to wear a placard with these initials printed on it. During the First World War, the initials were still being pronounced individually. Not until just before the Second World War was it pronounced as the acronym 'AWOL'. The term does not mean 'absent without official leave', indeed sometimes it was just put as 'A.W.L.' This form of the abbreviation may have been more popular with the British and Australian armies; 'AWOL' with the Americans.

Axis (Powers)
Originally there were only two in the Second World War – Germany and Italy. 'The name was coined and made common by Mussolini who, after signing an agreement with Hitler in 1936, called Berlin and Rome "an axis around which all European states ... can assemble"' – IHAT. Finally, the 'enemy' powers included Germany, Italy, Japan, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Finland (though the latter never declared war on the US). 'The "Rome-Berlin axis" is a conceit which has its momentary attractions' – The Times (3 November 1936).

Axis Sally
Nickname of Mildred Gillars (1900–88), an American citizen who went to Germany to study in the 1930s and took a job as an announcer with Radio Berlin in 1940. She broadcast propaganda to the Allies and was given her nickname by American troops – though the name was also applied to Rita Zucca, who broadcast from Italy. After the war was over, Gillars was repatriated to the US and given a long prison term for treason.