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Press/Journalism

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Word War I had a significant impact on the evolution of the European media scene. Before the start of the war, newspapers in Europe were increasingly popular, free and independent, and transnational. With the outbreak of the war in 1914 this came to an abrupt end due to censorship. Furthermore, all belligerent states attempted to use their respective presses for propaganda and mobilisation purposes to varying degrees of success. Nevertheless, deep as the impact was, the trend that had been developing up till the start of the war was quickly taken up again after the end of the war.

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Introduction

European societies in 1914 were better informed than any previous generation. The "media revolution" of the 19th century brought with it a significant rise in newspapers and journals as well as increased circulation. Anyone interested could inform himself or herself about what was going on both domestically and world-wide. Newspapers reached even the most remote areas, where, due to an increase in literacy, most people could read them. The large European states and smaller countries such as Ireland were affected by this development.

Additionally, the legal situation for newspapers and journalists improved during the second half of the 19th century. Censorship had been abolished in most European states, and in a general atmosphere of economic prosperity, a (more or less) free and independent press was established. The forerunner of this development was Great Britain, where the press self-confidently defined itself as the Fourth Estate of the realm. In other countries, such as Germany and Austria, the change did not go as far, as the press was still closely linked to the political parties.

World War I was a setback to this development. While circulation figures continued to increase, the number of newspapers on the market decreased. This was due to the re-introduction of strict censorship in all belligerent countries. However, while Great Britain and, after a certain delay, France successfully used the press for propaganda and mobilization purposes, Germany and Austria-Hungary failed to do so due to these states' antagonistic relationship with their press.

Though the significance of World War I for the 20th century cannot be stressed enough, this article will also show that transnational communication structures, which had been established in the decades before the war, were not completely destroyed by the war and were swiftly re-established in its aftermath.

European Societies in 1914: "Better informed than any Previous Generation"

The second half of the 19th century was a "golden age for journalism." Growing literacy, new technical possibilities (the first telegraph between Europe and Britain was set up in 1851; between Europe and the US in 1866), the foundation of the nation state and new legislation concerning taxes and press rights laid the ground for new dynamics in journalism and press. Newspapers all over the western world gained a unique increase in circulation figures and in most cases independent national presses were established. At the outbreak of World War I, the press had the potential to reach every household and every literate person in Europe.

Great Britain was the forerunner in this development. Britain has no doubt always been a pioneer in the field of media; the country abolished taxes on paper in 1853; 1855 saw the end of stamp tax; and from 1861 advertising in newspapers and journals became tax-free.

This development happened several decades later in Germany (with the foundation of the nation state in 1871) and other European states such as France and Austria-Hungary. The German *Reichspressegesetz* of 1874 improved the legal situation of the press significantly; as one major aspect, freedom of the press, was granted by law for most newspapers. These developments, combined with innovations in communication technologies, prepared the ground for the press all over Europe to step into the age of mass communication by the start of the 20th century.^[1] One obvious result was that from the second half of the 19th century both the number of newspapers as well as their readership grew significantly. This development reached its peak just before World War I.

Great Britain

The amount of daily newspapers sold went up by a factor of ten, and sometimes more, between the mid -19th century and 1914. In London alone the figure increased from 151 to 472. Outside London, the rise was even more dramatic; from fifteen newspapers in 1856 to 1,475 at the beginning of the 20th century. This shows that the growth of the press did not just affect the capital, but also reached the more distant, rural areas of the country, including those the furthest away from London.^[2] Similar developments, though to a slightly lesser degree with regard to the circulation figures, could be observed in most European states.

Germany

In Germany, around 4,200 newspapers and 6,400 journals were published on a regular basis in 1914. The vast majority were conservative. Most of the remaining favoured liberal or national liberal parties and only less than 100 stood in the socialist, or social democratic, camp. Fifty years earlier, there had been only about 300 newspapers on the German media market. Leading publications such as the conservative *Neue Preußische Zeitung* (*Kreuzzeitung*), the national-liberal *Allgemeine Zeitung* or the influential *Vossische Zeitung* reached between 10,000 and 20,000 households while the popular *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* sold up to 100,000 copies a day and the *Berliner Tageblatt* almost 250,000.

Compared to British standards, however, German figures were rather small. With its readership of an estimated 150,000, the London *Times* would have qualified as a large broadsheet in 1914 Germany; the British *Daily Chronicle* or *Daily Telegraph* already had a readership of up to 500,000, and tabloids like the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* sold more than 1 million copies per day. In Germany, only popular family journals, such as the weekly *Die Gartenlaube*, with an estimated readership of around 300,000, were able to come close to these figures.^[3]

France

France's newspaper circulation saw a similar expansion in the years running up to 1914. Like in

Britain and Germany, many newspapers were founded in the first half of the 19th century and swiftly increased their circulation. *La Presse*, for instance, set up in 1836 by Émile de Girardins (1802-1881), quickly reached a circulation of 30,000 a day. By the early 20th century, newspapers like *Le Figaro* or *Le Petit Journal* sold more than a 100,000 daily, while popular tabloids such as *Le Matin* sold over 600,000 copies. *Le Petite Parisien*, on the eve of World War I, crossed the mark of 1 million copies per day.^[4]

Austria-Hungary

In the two decades preceding World War I, the overall number of daily newspapers printed in Austria-Hungary tripled, from 400,000 to 1.2 million. Like in most other European states, the revolution of 1848 created a new dynamic in the newspaper market. The legal conditions for the press had improved since the 1870s; taxes were reduced, and the freedom of the press increased. It was not until World War I that new restrictions such as censorship were imposed on the press in Austria-Hungary, like in all other European states. The most popular daily Austrian newspapers in 1915 were the tabloid *Illustrierte Kronen-Zeitung* (ca. 235,000), the Catholic *Neue Zeitung* (ca. 125,000), and the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* and the *Neues Wiener Journal*, each with a circulation of 90,000.^[5]

Ireland

A telling example of the rapid development of the press in the years leading up to World War I is Ireland. In the middle of the 19th century Irish newspapers were dominated by London, but by 1914 the picture had fundamentally changed. From the 1870s onwards, a vast number of new newspapers were founded in Ireland. Most of them were nationalist, in opposition to the British controlled unionist papers, which marked "a major watershed in the history of Irish newspaper publishing"^[6] and came along with increased Irish representation in Westminster.^[7] During World War I nationalist Irish newspapers, such as the *Freeman's Journal* or the *Irish (Daily) Independent*, each with a daily circulation of about 100,000, reached even the most distant Irish counties, and within forty years, they had outstripped their unionist counterparts in terms of circulation by far, including the formerly leading *Irish Times*.^[8] On the eve of the First Wold War, the Irish could choose between 180 daily newspapers, including those in the Gaelic language, such as *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the official newspaper of the influential Gaelic League, which also had a readership abroad.^[9] Therefore, by 1914, Dublin based, mostly nationalist newspapers had replaced London in setting the Irish agenda.

What Donald Read once stated with regard to Edwardian England can easily be applied to all other European societies on eve of World War I; they were significantly "better informed than any previous generation."^[10] The "media revolution" of the late 19th century had turned news and opinions into something that could be accessed by the majority of people on a daily basis and the fact that not just the Great Powers, but small and periphery countries like Ireland, were affected, shows how far-Press/Journalism - 1914-1918-Online

reaching these developments were.

The Media Revolution

Though the "media revolution" led to an expansion of the press in all western countries, in 1914 there were still significant distinctions between newspapers in the various European states. As Jörg Requate has pointed out, whether a newspaper addresses a clearly defined, more or less homogenous readership, or aims for a large, anonymous audience that stretches beyond the frontiers of established party politics, makes a significant difference.^[11] At the outbreak of World War I, the former scenario was the case in most European states, where newspapers functioned primarily as "loudspeakers" for a political party while the latter matched the self-perception of the British press, which defined itself rather confidently as the state's "Fourth Estate".^[12]

In most cases newspapers in Europe could easily be linked to a political party. For instance, in Germany, the *Kreuzzeitung* had close ties with the conservatives; *Germania* functioned as a loudspeaker for the Catholic *Zentrumspartei* and *Vorwärts* as well as the weekly *Die Neue Zeit* represented the positions of the socialists. The German liberal milieu was to some extent an exception, as it was rather loosely organised. However, even though the *Vossische Zeitung* claimed to be politically independent, it kept close ties with the *Fortschrittspartei*, while the *Kölnische Zeitung* as well as the *Allgemeine Zeitung* favoured national-liberal positions.

English newspapers, on the other hand, defined themselves as independent actors in the political system, or, as David George Boyce wrote, "an indispensable link between public opinion and the governing institutions of the country."^[13] Obviously, this does not mean that British newspapers did not take a political line, however "none of them would have dreamt of taking orders from a party political office."^[14] Behind this stood the idea that direct political involvement was a liability; newspapers that acted as an organ of a party had only limited circulation, which meant their existence was precarious and costly.^[15] Therefore, in the decades before World War I, British newspapers cut themselves off from the state apparatus like nowhere else in the world.^[16] Instead, they aimed for political independence by gaining a mass audience and commercial success. The most prominent examples of this so-called 'new journalism' were the Daily Mail and Daily Mirror, which, in 1914, both reached a circulation of up to 1 million copies a day and were owned by Alfred Charles William Harmsworth, Lord Northcliffe (1865-1922), who in 1908 had also bought The Times and tripled its circulation by 1914. However, the result of this development was not a depoliticised press, but a blending of public opinion and politics, as well as the extension of the political sphere beyond the traditional frame of party politics - a process which no politician could afford to ignore. This concept of the press as the "Fourth Estate" of the realm differed from other European societies in the years before World War I and granted British newspapers the status of a largely independent and powerful player in the political circuit.^[17]

The years before 1914 were not only a time of media expansion but also intensified transnational communication. This concerned not just the press but a range of sectors and human activities. Emily S. Rosenberg's essay on transnational currents of internationalism between 1870 and 1945 offers an excellent introduction to the topic. It covers, among other things, the fields of law, sport, arts, labour and transnational social and religious movements.^[18] Surprisingly, however, Rosenberg pays hardly any attention to the press, even though she acknowledges the importance of the "revolution of print-media" as a development "that cannot be valued highly enough."^[19]

In fact, the "media revolution" of the late 19th century did not only change the face of newspapers, but also set the scene for a broad, transnational European media. Newspapers covered important international events and placed correspondents abroad, who sent first-hand reports, impressions and opinions about what was "actually" going on. In addition, newly established news agencies, Havas, Reuters and the Wolffsche Telegraph Office to name just a few, set up international news communication networks, which all major European newspapers used. However these agencies stood in close contact with their respective foreign offices, making a truly free exchange of news sometimes difficult.^[20] Most impressive of all, was the constant discourse between newspapers in different countries, creating a genuinely transnational media. By 1914, the European media was a platform for exchanges between newspapers, with, for example, Berlin newspapers commenting on the latest national and international coverage in London newspapers, and vice versa. The outbreak of World War I brought an abrupt end to this remarkable achievement that had been developing since the late 19th century.

Newspapers, Censorship and Mobilization during World War I

Throughout World War I, the press was the principal medium of news distribution, even though photography was already well established and film was on its way to becoming a commonly used technique. Along with the war came another unprecedented rise in the sale of newspapers and journals.^[21] However, there was, simultaneously, a drop in newspaper titles on the market compared to the pre-war years. In Germany, the overall amount of newspapers went down from 4,200 at the beginning of the war to 3,200 at its end. This was partly due to a lack of resources, both in material and people. Yet, the main reasons were the strict and costly censorship measures, which were imposed on all newspapers from the beginning of World War I.^[22] The evolution of an approximately free and independent European press since the mid-19th century had suddenly come an end.

Moreover, the international and transnational trends that had become popular and influential in the years before the war also reached a sudden interruption in summer 1914. Besides the media, this was the case for various other fields of cooperation and exchange, for example, the world of sports. In 1894, the "International Olympic Committee" was founded by Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937), and in 1896 the first Olympic Games of modern times took place in Athens. The "Fédération Internationale de Football Association" (FIFA) came into existence just a few years later, in 1904, Press/Journalism - 1914-1918-Online

with the task of organising regular international football competitions, the first of which took place during the London Olympics in 1908. In the years before 1914, countries such as Argentina, South Africa, Chile, Canada and the USA joined FIFA. However, these international sport networks were put on hold with the outbreak of World War I. National hatred, travel restrictions and, of course, the recruitment of sportsmen for their respective armies, made an open competition impossible. The Olympic Games, scheduled to be held in 1916 in Berlin, were cancelled, as were all FIFA football matches. It was not until after the war that international collaboration in the field of sports – as well as in many other areas – could be taken up again. This development also shows that the bonds that had been tightened in the years before 1914 were strong enough to be re-established rather quickly after the war, as the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris proved.^[23]

Germany and Austria-Hungary

On 31 July 1914, Germany became a nation at war. On this day, the power structure within the Reich shifted in favour of the military. The "*Reichspressegesetz*", which forty years before had granted the press relative freedom and independence, was torn apart. Instead, a long catalogue of restrictive wartime rules and strict censorship measures for the press was released on the very first day of war. A central agency to enforce press compliance was established just a few weeks later. However, all these measures were not to the full satisfaction of the military leadership, and therefore, a good year after the outbreak of the war, in October 1915, a War Press Office (*Kriegspresseamt*) was founded to take charge of control of the media. One main method of informing the media were "press-information-meetings" (*Pressebesprechungen*) during which officials of the War Press Office informed accredited journalists about the alleged goings on of the war, and answered (or refused to answer) journalists' questions.^[24]

Germany and her main ally Austria-Hungary shared certain similarities concerning their dealings with the press. As in Germany, freedom of the press and the ban on censorship, guaranteed by law in 1867, were abolished in Austria-Hungary with the outbreak of the war. A strict regime of press control was introduced and jointly enforced by political and military authorities, which journalists soon referred to as a "war dictatorship" (*Kriegsdiktatur*). According to German media historian, Jürgen Wilke, due to the rigid system of press censorship, the Austrian readership even preferred German newspapers as their source of information, though, of course, the availability of these were also limited by the military authorities.^[25] On 27 July 1914, a War Surveillance Office (*Reichsüberwachungsamt*), later renamed Ministerial Commission, was set up in the War Ministry (*Ministerialkommission im Kriegsministerium*) to execute and enforce any measures of censorship considered necessary.

The Hungarian part of the empire, which took its independent status seriously and therefore refused to join under the roof of the War Surveillance Office, set up its own agency to control the press, called the War Surveillance Commission (*Kriegsüberwachsungskommission*). A liaison officer was installed to make sure both agencies worked according to the strict standards set by the political and

military authorities of the Habsburg Monarchy. The guideline was that nothing could be released or published that might shed a negative light on the social, national and political situation of the empire.^[26]

What was lacking in both Germany and Austria-Hungary throughout the war was a coherent strategy of how to deal with the press. The vast majority of German and Austrian newspapers and journalists were willing to play their role in the war, which they saw not just as informing the public, but also as undertaking patriotic educational work. This became obvious in the first weeks of the war, when Austrian journalists spoke out for hard measures against Serbia and their German colleagues overwhelmingly demanded German support for their Austrian ally.^[27] However, official disinformation and strict measures of censorship, including the closing down of disagreeable newspapers, like, most prominently, the German social-democratic Vorwärts, led to a growing distance between journalists and state officials, and subsequently, a decrease of "patriotic reporting" in the newspapers. One example of worsening relations was the growing tension during regular "pressinformation-meetings." Whereas journalists in the early period of the war acted as collaborators of the regime, even trying to give advice on military steps, they increasingly criticised both political and military personnel for withholding and even spreading false information at these sessions during the second half of the war. Among those suffering from growing disillusionment was Georg Bernhard (1875-1944), chief editor of the German Vossische Zeitung from 1914 and member of the board of publishing house Ullstein, to which the paper belonged, who on one occasion, in accordance with his colleagues, threatened to boycott the information meetings if the suppression of the press continued.^[28] While in the first weeks after the outbreak of the war the vast majority of German and Austrian newspapers supported national mobilisation, their enthusiasm waned in the following months and years due to rigid censorship and a lack of compromise in all related issues by the military and political officials. The result in both countries was, as Petronilla Ehrenpreis pointed out in her article, "in the first two years of the war the patriotic newspapers were prevented from deploying their mobilization potential, whereas in the second half of the war, when authorities realized more than ever before the mobilization power of the press, these very newspapers were no longer willing to lend their support."

Great Britain and France

On the other side of the western front, in Great Britain and France, equally strict measures were imposed on the press with the start of the war. The British and the French press, unlike the press in Germany and Austria-Hungary, had always been clustered in their respective capital cities, making them easier to manage by the state. In August 1914 Westminster passed the "Defence of the Realm <u>Act</u>" (DORA) without debate, giving the government extensive powers to take any steps necessary to win the war. This included censorship of the press as well as a general ban on discussions of any war related topic in public places; some newspapers, like the pacifist *The Tribunal*, were even forced to shut down. Simultaneously, a Press Bureau was set up, under the control of Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850-1916), the newly appointed Secretary of the State for War, to prevent the publication Press/Journalism - 1914-1918-Online

of anything "that would depress the public, assist the enemy, disclose movements of the army or navy or otherwise imperil the national safety."^[29] To complete the task, the Press Bureau also took control of the Central Telegraph Office and examined every message to and from the newspapers. However, in a clear breach of DORA-regulations, British newspapers regularly avoided censors by quoting from US newspapers. The authorities hesitated to press charges against the respective newspaper or its owner, who in most cases was Lord Northcliffe. In late 1914, Northcliffe wrote directly to Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith (1852-1928) and offered his services to improve recruitment and mobilization of the public. Owning 40 percent of the morning and 45 percent of the evening press in London, he was well aware of his unique position and did not hesitate to make his press available to the government. However, the price the government had to pay was that Lord Northcliffe and his newspapers played an active role in creating the "home front."^[30] As a result, the majority of the British press self-censored during the course of World War I. In return leading press figures played an important role in creating the political and public life in Britain, a role they had aimed for before 1914, when pursuing the concept of the "Fourth Estate."

The importance of the British media in maintaining war support culminated in 1918 in the government's decision to appoint Lord Northcliffe, whose newspapers accounted for more than the half of London's daily circulation during war time, to the new post of Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, and Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook (1879-1964), owner of the *Daily Express*, as head of the equally new Ministry of Information. Despite angry Unionist reactions, Home Rule was granted to Ireland on 18 September 1914. However, Prime Minister Asquith tried to satisfy the Irish Unionists by suspending the actual implementation of the Home Rule Bill until the end of the war. John Redmond (1856-1918), leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party in Westminster, as well as a majority of Irish nationalists accepted the undertaking, as they expected a short war and the long desired final settlement of the "Irish Question" in its immediate aftermath. Obviously, Redmond's position was a challenge to the more radical nationalists, including the members of the secretive Irish Republican Brotherhood, a forerunner organisation of the IRA. These groups discussed the possibility of exploiting the European war to organize an insurrection in Ireland.^[31]

The vast majority of Irish newspapers were in support of Redmond and Home Rule. The *Irish Independent* explained to its readers that Ireland's political and economic interests lay with the empire and that a German victory would be far more costly for the island than the war loans for London. Additionally, the newspaper encouraged staff and readers to join the ranks of the British army, which between 1914 and 1918 more than 200,000 Irishmen did. In numerous comments and cartoons, the *Independent* celebrated the successes of the Allied forces and ridiculed the Central Powers. A similar coverage of the war was pursued by the *Freeman's Journal*, and occasionally the *Independent*, and *Freeman's Journal* even accused each other of provoking anti-war sympathies by not reporting "patriotic" enough.^[32] Only very few separatist Irish newspapers and journals openly challenged British censorship, which, of course, also applied to Ireland, and demanded an Irish-German alliance to overcome British dominion. One of these journals was the monthly *Irish*

Freedom, which was banned early on in the war. Press/Journalism - 1914-1918-Online By 3 August 1914, the French War Ministry had also installed a press bureau in order to censor military information. By 5 August, a law regulating all reporting of the war was in place. Through the *Section d'Information* (SI), military authorities wanted to ensure that they were the only source of information about the war. Journalists and newspapers very much relied on an average of three communiqués per day, issued by the SI for news about the war. However, the situation of censorship, including the ban on correspondents from accessing most parts of the front, was generally accepted by the newspapers, which reported with great loyalty and patriotism, and played a major role in creating what the journalist <u>Thomas Ferenczi</u> called a "patriotic lie."^[33] One result of this strict censorship was that it was not before the early 1920s that the extent of French losses were publicly acknowledged.

It was not until 1917 that changes took place regarding the strict policy of French censorship, though the main aim of the undertaking was, following the British example, to use journalists and newspapers more actively for propaganda and mobilization purposes. As a result, French journalists were granted the same rights as their British colleagues, which included, among other things, more open access to the theatres of war, albeit under the strict control of a press officer.^[34]

A remarkable example for the understanding of the British and French approach towards censorship on the Western Front was given by the renowned British war correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett (1881-1931) who in 1916 worked as a correspondent with the French Army for the British press. On one occasion he described the correspondents' working conditions as equally sheltered and wellinformed:

they are informed of every intended movement and are told the correct spot from which to witness it [...] They are invariably shown the same thing so that every paper each morning has the same tale told in a different writer's language. Every word they write is carefully censored, not a note of criticism is ever allowed to creep in, and only successes gained over the enemy are ever allowed to be commented on."^[35]

The result of this system was, as another leading war correspondent, Philip Gibbs (1877-1962), pointed out after the war, that

we identified ourselves absolutely with the Armies in the field [...] We wiped out of our minds all thoughts of personal scoops and all temptation to write one word which would make the task of officers or men more difficult or dangerous. There was no need of censorship of our despatches. We were our own censors.^[36]

Conclusion

The "media revolution" of the 19th century led to a significant increase in newspapers and journals, their circulation figures and their reach in all European states, including small countries such as Ireland. Additionally, a mostly free and independent press was established, to the extent that in

Britain, the press referred to themselves as the "Fourth Estate" of the realm.

The outbreak of World War I was a set-back to this development. While circulation figures continued to increase, the number of newspapers on the market decreased due to the re-introduction of strict censorship measures in all belligerent countries. While Great Britain and, later France successfully used the press for propaganda mobilization purposes, Germany and Austria-Hungary were unable to do so. One reason for this was that in Germany and Austria, the press before 1914 was still mostly a party-press while in Britain they were financially independent due to their high circulation figures as well as politically independent. Both politicians and newspaper owners such as Lord Northcliffe recognised the power the press had to shape public opinion, and therefore worked together.

However, as deep as the impact of World War I was on the media, it did not permanently put a stop to a trend that had been developing decades before the war. Transnational communication structures were re-established soon after the war – until the outbreak of the Second World War two decades later.

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Notes

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- 26. † For Details see Petronilla Ehrenpreis' contribution: Ehrenpreis, Petronilla: Press/Journalism (Austria-Hungary), in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.154633/ie1418.10130.
- 27. † See Koszyk, Kurt: Deutsche Pressepolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg, Düsseldorf 1986, p. 13f.
- 28. † Wilke, Presseanweisungen im 20. Jahrhundert 2007, pp. 100-101.
- 29. † Thompson, J. Lee: Politicians, the Press and Propaganda. Lord Northcliffe and the Great War, Kent/London 1999, p. 28.
- 30. ↑ Thompson, Politicians, the Press and Propaganda 1999, pp. 35f. and 3f.
- 31. † See Bew, Paul: Ireland. The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006, Oxford 2007, p. 371.
- 32. ↑ Maume, The Irish Independent and empire, in: Potter (ed.), Newspapers and Empire 2004, p. 139.
- 33. ↑ Quoted from Quinn, Tom: Dipping the Pen into the Wound. Albert Londres French War Correspondent, in: McEwen/Fisken, War, Journalism and History 2012, p. 57.
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- 36. † Ibid., p.39.

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