

# JF Ptak Science Books

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## WWI News Photo Service Photographic Archive



Offered here are 525 World War I news photo service photographs. All were printed in 1918--many are first generation images, and a number of them seem to be 1918 copies of the 1918 originals. They range in size from 3x4" to 8x10". A large percentage of the images are accompanied by descriptive text printed on a separate sheet; some have the text stamped on the back of the photo, though these are a small minority. All of the images were stored at some point for decades in their cylinder shipping tubes which have given the photographs a certain curl. The great majority of the images are in VG condition; the overwhelming majority are at least in Good condition.

If you follow this link it will take you to the blog's WWI Photo site, which list more than 70 of these images--these have been offered for sale individually but are included in the price for the entire archive.

The collection of 525 photographs: \$15,000.

A more detailed list is available on request; inspection of the collection can be arranged.

From the WWI Photo blog from the JF Ptak Science Books blogsite:

This section of the blog is dedicated to photographs made during World War I--the official photographs, because the control of military images during the 1914-1919 period was very nearly complete.

Photographs were made by pools of photographers working for several different photographic news agencies. The content of the images were generally secured and approved by the [Committee for Public Information](#) (CPI), which came into existence by [executive order](#) under President Woodrow Wilson on April 13, 1917, and which was charged with the task of winning the hearts and minds of the people of the U.S., to gain public support for the war and for American participation.

It is somewhat both ironic and not terribly uncommon for Wilson to have run for the presidency for one thing and then doing exactly the opposite, as he did with his 1916 re-election campaign slogan "He Kept Us out of War".

The way that many newspapers obtained the war images that they published in their papers was via a semi-centralized pool of war images. The newspaper would request, say, a photo of German prisoners, and would contact one of these photographic agencies—for example, say, the Central News Photo Service of 26-28 Beaver Street, NYC—and purchase the rights for republication, and then print it in the newspaper along with the story. In almost every case the photo would be accompanied by a caption mimeographed onto an attached piece of cheap paper, or have the information stamped on the reverse.

Photography was just one aspect of the information distribution and control by CPI--there were also thousands of Newspaper articles, public speakers (the famous "Four Minute Men" who would give some 7 million pepper talks at the beginnings of movies and public events), radio broadcasts, films, posters, demonstrations and anti-demonstrations, and other public displays.

The samples:

Found-Portraits Within Portraits, 1918



Original photograph, 1918. 9x6 inches. Good condition.

In my collection of WWI News Photo Service Agency photographs I would say that half or so of them show scenes like this--semi-informal group portraits of military support groups. 250 portraits like this seem to be a lot, and I'm not sure why these images are so well represented. Except of course that there weren't that many images (overall) of active-battle scenes.

These bakers, working at a front-line support station, from my read were probably taking a break, and the photographer took the opportunity to draw them together for the portrait. I don't know why they're separated so, but they do look as though they have a real camaraderie--it is just a wonderful picture, full of friendship and loyalty, and I'm sure it has never been published before.





Volunteer Efforts to Aid the Wounded, 1918



This is another magnificent group portrait from my collection of News Service Photographs from World War I. This image is from mid-1918 and depicts nurses, wounded and recovering soldiers and an assortment of volunteers preparing relief packages for other wounded soldiers in field hospitals. My experience with these images is that there are many levels of portraits within the larger group portrait--looking at them under magnification is an addictive process, and quite often there are some lovely surprises.

Image: 9x6 inches. Good condition.





Relaxed time at a Sentry Post, 1918

Another interesting portrait within a photograph--this is one in a long series of images from the blog's WWI News Photo Service Photography section, which can be found [here](#) and which will explain the purpose of pool photography during the War. This image (explained in the original paper caption below) was made somewhere along the front at the intersection of French and Belgian lines. The soldiers are gathered around a sentry post, enjoying some light time.







WWI News Photo Service Photograph, 1918. 5.5x7.75", with the original paper caption. Good condition. \$125

And another detail:





## The French Blue Devils at West Point, 1918

I really enjoy looking at old photos with a magnifying glass, finding the pictures within the picture, until it is micro-images all the way down. It is odd "coming out" of them, sometimes, and then looking at the full image, and in some sense feeling utterly at a loss to try and find where you had just been in great detail.

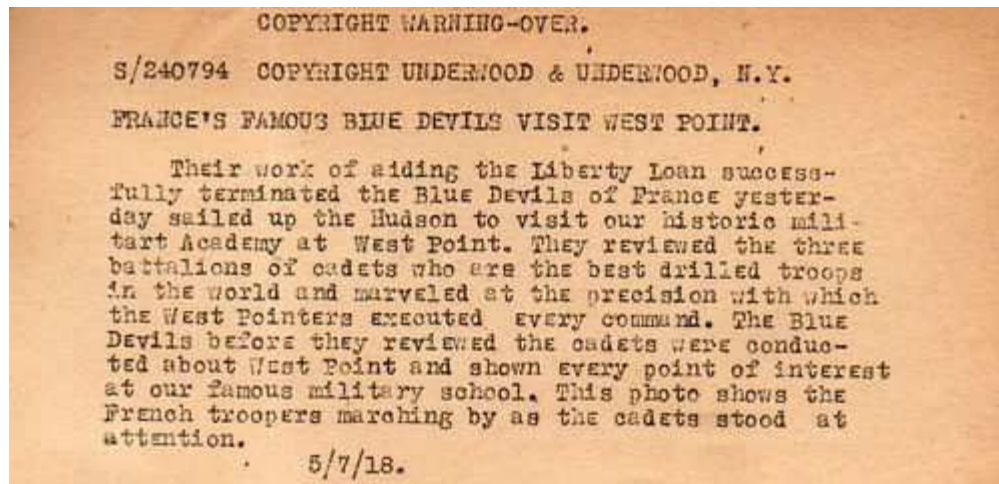
Here's an example with this great photo of the French Blue Devils on parade at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. These soldiers were and are elite mountain infantry, the Chassons Alpains, "Alpine Hunters", and nicknamed "the Blue Devils", and who saw their fair share of combat during WWI. They made a tour of the U.S. at the beginning of the War in a fund raising drive, and evidently did so again, at least in this instance, showing up in New York in May 1918.



- Image 7.5x9.5". The black mark/tear appears in the photographic negative itself and not in the paper print. The photo is accompanied by the text sheet (below).

This is a news photo service photograph (see [here](#) for the story) and is accompanied by this text which was

supposed to be used along with the image when purchased for publication in a newspaper or magazine.



### Tired, Wounded, and Underground, 1917

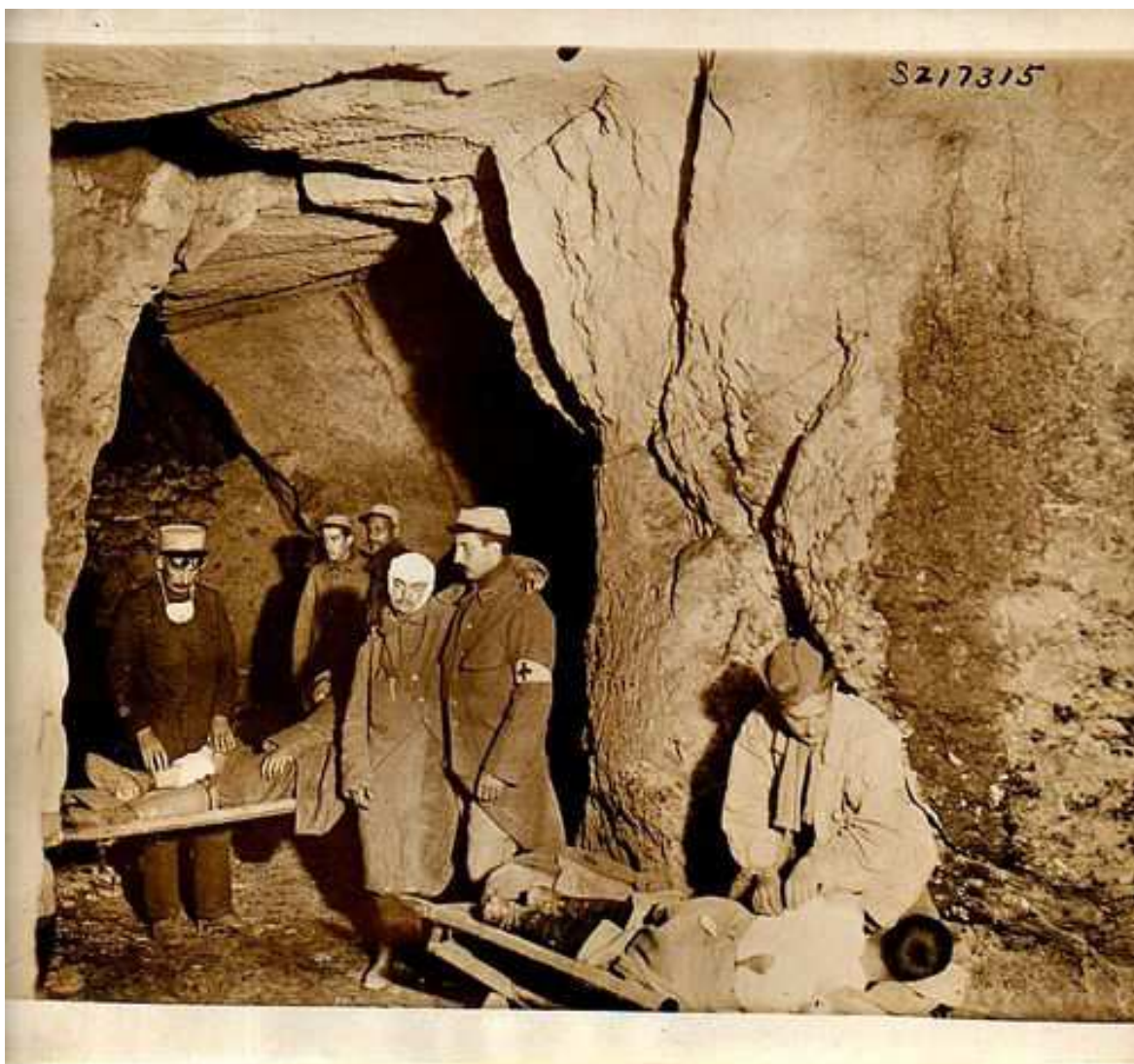
This is a photograph of an aid station somewhere along the Western Front, 1917. Given the amount of digging going on throughout the course of the war, with the construction of hundreds of thousands of miles of trenches, and then the sapper war to tunnel underneath the tunnels and so on, it is quite possible that this underground shelter was dug out by hand. This is also an insight to the duration of some of those battles--to construct such a station impervious to possibly semi-continuous bombardment meant that the lines of battle were static, with many of the major engagements of hundreds of thousands of soldiers lasting for months, and in some cases, years.

The expressions here are difficult, and difficult to actually recognize as anything that isn't exhaustion. There is a lot of "blankness" in the faces, a deep weariness.



This scene is a detail from the larger and full image:





CREDIT WARNING ..... (OVER).  
 S/217315 PHOTO FROM UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD, N.Y.

NEWS FEATURE.

# AN UNDERGROUND AMBULANCE STATION IN FRANCE.

Treating wounded French soldiers under ground. This is but one of the many similar dressing stations organized by the French Red Cross along the battle fronts. Located far underground, the doctors and injured are seldom the target for enemy shells. In the case of serious injury the men are given temporary treatment in these subterranean hospitals and then removed to the hospitals in the rear as quickly as possible. Only those with slight wounds are permitted to remain in these underground hospitals.

5/4/17...

WWI News Photo Service photograph, 9x7 inches, with the accompanying caption text.



WWI Snow Parade, 1917/18



Original news photo service photographic image, 8x10 inches, ca. 1917/1918.

This news photo service image--stamped "Hearst-Pathe News Agency" on the back--is from the winter of 1917/1918 and shows a patriotic snow parade somewhere in the United States. The snow looks prodigious, judging from the piles in the foreground and also the accumulated snow on the windowsills, and I imagine that all of the snow floats were sculpted mainly out of existing snow in the street. It is a delightful scene, to me, and hosts a variety of smaller, lovely images in vignette. For example:



The man in shadow and sleeping figure (boy) in the buggy complement the white-mustachioed bowler-wearing man to the left; the men looking on in the foreground are interesting, too--plus there's that laundry in the background. Given that the laundry is out (and wasn't just left out during the storm) and that no one seems to be particularly bundled up against cold, I'm going to guess that there was a break in the weather that pushed the temperature higher than normal, with almost everyone taking advantage of the warm snap, as people do everywhere, all the time. I also like the tiny American flag on the tall pole at left.

And so:



And again:





I'm not sure what the flag is on the side of the Dreadnought, and it seems as though someone has stoked a small smoking fire in the metal tubes functioning as the ship's smokestacks--a nice touch!

German Soldier, Worn and Worked, November 18, 1918

It is unknown what this photo depicts specifically but in general it sends an image of exhaustion and wear. The caption for the image says that it shows "the condition of the Hun troops" and that the subject "Herr Professor" is learning "a good many things not hitherto found in books". Maybe he was a teacher, maybe not. Macht nichts. His pants looks velour-like and his boots (if that's what his footwear was) look very thin. He is ragged, his double-fold glasses look like they're at their limit, his face looks swollen behind his beard, and he just looks "done", in general.





I'm not sure what he is doing, or where he is. He may be trying to figure out local currency to purchase whatever it is the vendor-woman has on the tray at her hip--she is holding out her hand, and looking at his. The soldier definitely has something there, and he looks basically too weary to comprehend it. The hand language is ambiguous to me. He may have received something already, some sort of food, and he is staring at it now, thinking perhaps how little of it there was. He's eating, and already has taken a bite of whatever bread-like thing is in his left hand. I'm not sure what attracted the attention of the boy in the center--perhaps it is simply the camera, and he wanted to be in the shot.



Original photograph, good condition, 5x8". 1918.

There's a shadow in the foreground-left of what looks like someone making a photograph of the scene--probably not our photographer, but another, with a brownie or some such smaller camera.

At the end of years of fighting every general soldier deserves respect and, at least, some free food--I hope this guy got his.

And the accompanying text to the news photo service image, to be used if published:

PLEASE WATCH YOUR CREDIT LINE.  
PHOTO BY CENTRAL NEWS PHOTO SERVICE, N.Y.  
10382-S "KULTUR" IN THE RANKS.  
An interesting photo showing a Professor as a soldier. The Herr Professor is doubtless learning at first hand a good many things not hitherto found in German books. This photo gives one an idea of the condition of Hun troops just before they stopped fighting.  
11/18/18.



## Camouflage on the Belgian Front, 1918



Item: 7x5 inch original photograph, 1918. Camouflage on the Belgian Front. With original text. Very good condition.

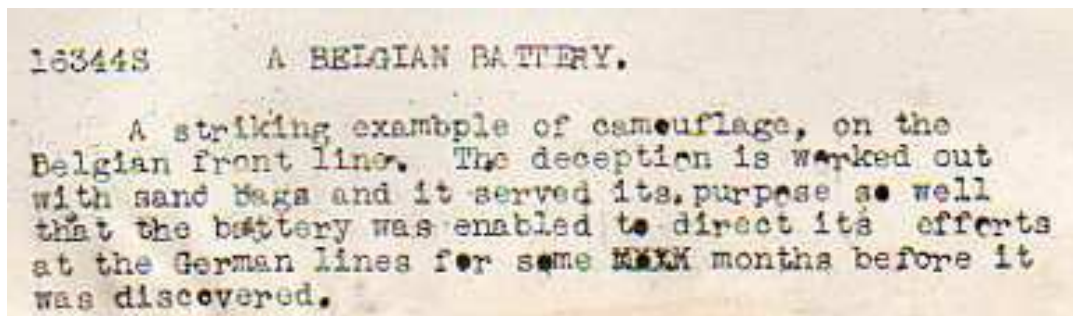
It's a little difficult to think of Ellsworth Kelly, Jacques Villon, Grant Wood, Laslo Moholy-Nagy and Thomas Hart Benton as painters-for-war. But it's true, and true for many of hundreds of other artists in the 1915-1918 era. It's not as though they were in the trenches gunning down the enemy or lobbing hand grenades into the swirling gunsmoke. They were camofleurs, camouflage<sup>1</sup> experts, artists employed as magicians, Wartime Magi, employed/drafted to make ships and such disappear.

Ever since it was (sort of) first noticed in 1915 that designs odd to the environment, stark geometric patterns and such, were capable of fooling the eye, people with design capacity were pressed into service, rendering offensive and defensive instruments of war optically semi-impervious with variations of the then-five-year-old modern nonrepresentational art. That must've been a very odd position to wake up to every morning.



have been blending into their environment for eons, and I'm sure too that early hominids did their fair share of walking behind brush. But the idea of hiding great amalgamations of very heavy metal with paint is really quite modern.

In this photograph the camouflage is more a more futuristic conception of art than the abstract and cubist approaches that were taken during the war, this looking more like assemblages of found material more than anything else. And, according to the text that accompanied the photograph (which comes from 1918, from the Underwood & Underwood news photo service agency), the camouflage--empty sandbags thrown on a barbed wire fence) successfully concealed a gunnery emplacement for months on end.



#### Notes

1. A fine bibliography on camouflage appears [here](#), at Leonardo Online.

The definition of "camouflage" from the *Oxford English Dictionary* shows that it is a young word, in English:

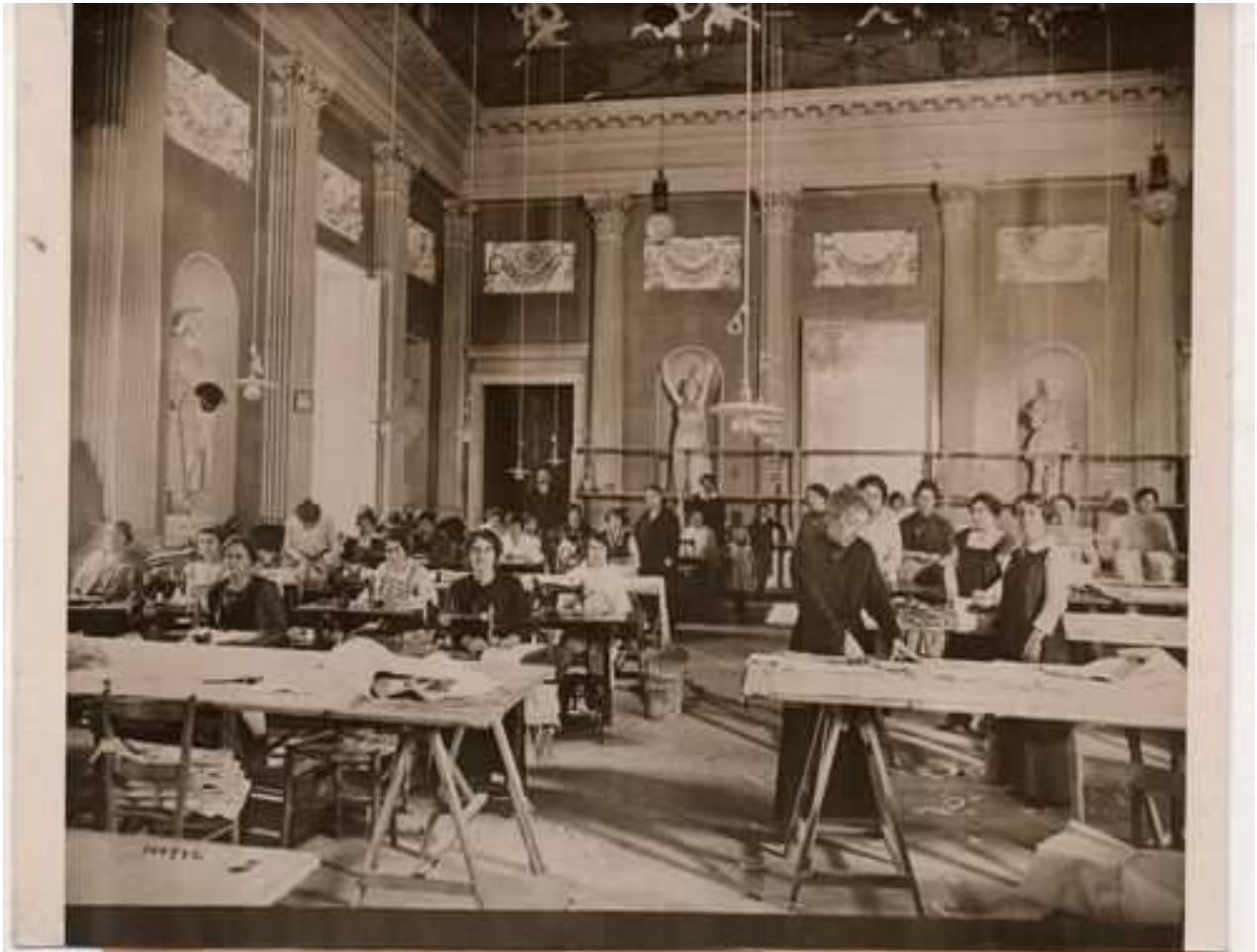
"(n) The disguising of any objects used in war, such as camps, guns, ships, by means of paint, smoke-screens, shrubbery, etc., in such a way as to conceal it from the enemy; also, the disguise used in this way; freq. attrib.

1917 Daily Mail 25 May 4/4 The act of hiding anything from your enemy is termed 'camouflage'.

1917 Daily Mail 16 July 5/3 The King paid a visit to what is called a camouflage factory.

1922 C. E. Montague *Disenchantment* viii. 108 A French aerodrome across which the French camouflage painters had simply painted a great white high-road.

On the Home Front: Italy



WATCH YOUR CREDIT LINE.....  
Italian Official Photograph, Copyright by  
Western Newspaper Union Photo Service

1047 PC THE SPIRIT BEHIND THE ITALIAN LINE  
8

Not all the fighting is done on the front. Here you see wives, mothers, sisters, and sweethearts engaged in work for the soldiers who are on the fighting line or have come back from the firing line disabled. This work is carried on under the auspices of the National Federation of the Committees for the assistance to the blind, crippled, and mutilated soldiers. The beautiful room in which the women are working is in one of the ancient palaces of Rome. 6/25/18

Trench Consultation, 1918



WATCH YOUR CREDIT LINE -----  
British Official Photograph  
From Western Newspaper Union

#### A TRENCH CONSULTATION

RP-2      Officers of an English regiment consult a map in  
the trenches. Note the gas mask carried by each.

A Trench Consultation, 5.5x7 inches. Original News Photo Service photograph, a British Official Photo, from the Western Newspaper Union.

## A Million Miles of Barbed Wire (1918)

The following photos were found in my small collection of World War I news photo service images, all of which were made in 1918. They show the preparation of barbed wire entanglements--these were devilish things, made to grab a soldier and suck them in into a deeper hold when resisted, like a sort of sharp, metallic quicksand. Since there were something like 12-25,000 miles of trenches dug during WWI, I think that it might be a safe bet to say that there were a million miles of barbed wire fencing laid down--that would be equal to about 75 feet of wiring for every soldier who served, or about 200 feet for every person killed. Given the tactics, the trenches, the barbed wire, the machine guns, the gas, and so on, it is no wonder that there was very little advancement over battlefields that stretched for miles and involved hundreds of thousands of troops, costing (sometimes) hundreds of thousands of casualties. It would have been just insane-nasty to have to charge through fields of this stuff while being bombed and shot at by people in holes. No gloves, here, not for the soldier weaving the wire or for the spinner in the background:



I notice that in this photograph the only person wearing gloves is the lead model, front-and-center:









### The Business-End of a Captured German Three-Inch, 1918

The American soldier in this new service photo is having a good hard look at the business end of a captured German Hinniewerfer, a three-inch field gun used to devastating effects throughout the war. We are told via the supplied typed caption that the display was installed on Coney Island (Brooklyn) as part of a Red Cross fund-raising exhibit.

8x5", fine condition. \$125



The French War Exhibit.  
Relics captured from the Germans. A three inch  
German field gun and a German Miniewerfer, at  
the Red Cross exhibit atoney Island.  
See other photograph for general caption.



## Tree and Telephones, 1918

During World War I battlefields that began as forests ended as plains. And since telephonic communications depended upon wires, and since the wires needed to go somewhere, anything that survived that was head-and-shoulders above the ground was of particular use, especially to the telephone corps and especially for the use of telephone wires. This news service photo (provided by the Western Newspaper Union) shows a rather desolate scene, with Canadian engineers working the wreck of a lone tree for all it was worth...as is plainly visible, there is nothing else like it in the near or remote vicinity.

