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Leonora Raines And Cecil Dorrian Cover The Great War (1914-1919)

By: Elisabeth Fondren and **Carolyn Edy**

Abstract

In the spring of 1915, American war correspondent Leonora Raines visited Western front battlefields as the guest of a French military unit. "With the latest and most improved method of killing," she wrote, "the trenches for more than 300 miles are nothing more than a double line of slaughter pens." On this tour she saw intense shelling, but she also discovered camaraderie—and hope. "These men are all soldiers," she explained, "fighting for their beloved land. And they are also human beings." Raines not only provided New York Evening Sun readers with first-hand observations of belligerent troops, but she also revealed how civilians across Western Europe were struggling to cope with loss, despair, and uprooted lives.

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“Barred from Firing Line, Harried by Censors, Must Even Have Pass to Leave Town”

In the spring of 1915, American war correspondent Leonora Raines visited Western front battlefields as the guest of a French military unit. “With the latest and most improved method of killing,” she wrote, “the trenches for more than 300 miles are nothing more than a double line of slaughter pens.” On this tour she saw intense shelling, but she also discovered camaraderie—and hope. “These men are all soldiers,” she explained, “fighting for their beloved land. And they are also human beings.”^[1] Raines not only provided *New York Evening Sun* readers with first-hand observations of belligerent troops, but she also revealed how civilians across Western Europe were struggling to cope with loss, despair, and uprooted lives.

For more than a century, scholars have considered how journalists bore witness to the Great War, often drawing from the most prominent and readily available sources—in other words, often relying upon the works of white, male journalists and the largest news organizations that employed them. These studies have been invaluable, but any attempt to present an overview tends to portray a portion of the story as though it is the complete and final record. In our own scholarship, we have continually been struck by the exceptions, by how many questions remain

unanswered, and by the many individuals whose lives and stories remain unexamined and untold.

Our research on Leonora Raines and another all-but-forgotten war correspondent, Cecil Dorrian, explores their interactions with government propagandists, military censors, official sources, and the people they met along the way. Though Raines and Dorrian worked separately and might not have even known each other, each woman's war reporting reveals a commitment to viewing the battle through a wide range of perspectives and circumstances. Rather than bringing home the news of Americans abroad, Raines and Dorrian provided their readers with a multi-layered look at the conflict, on the home front and in the trenches. Dorrian's articles, for instance, balanced the voices of the military official with the shopkeeper, the young mother with the soldier, the refugee with the statesman.

In the summer of 1914, Raines was 48 years old, divorced, and living in Paris, where she had been writing about fashion, art, and music for several years. She was part of a prominent Atlanta family, educated in private schools and fluent in French. Soon after the war began, the *New York Sun* commissioned Raines as its Paris-based special correspondent, syndicating her stories throughout the United States. Her hometown paper, the *Atlanta Constitution*, also featured her writing while providing readers with updates about Raines' whereabouts.^[ii] Among other findings, Fondren's analysis of Raines' reporting from 1914–1919 shows that tepid interactions with military officials and foreign censors shaped her wartime coverage from France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany.

Dorrian was 32 and living with her mother in England when she began covering the war as a European news correspondent for the *Newark Evening News* in the spring of 1915. A Barnard College alumna who grew up in Manhattan, Dorrian had previously been on the staff of the *New York Tribune* as its dramatic editor. Her early articles often relied upon theater news as one lens, among many, through which to view the war. Edy's analysis of Dorrian's war coverage also shows that although Dorrian did not visit war zones beyond the Western Front until 1917, even when she was based in London, France, or Belgium, she provided a transnational perspective, considering causes, consequences, and concerns relating to nearly every country involved. Dorrian's in-depth articles drew from such a broad range of expert, civilian, military, and international sources that her *Evening News* editors often reminded readers of the value of Dorrian's exclusive reports. At war's end the Allied Expeditionary Forces (AEF) recognized her as one of sixteen visiting war correspondents of longest service, commending her coverage of Army operations.^[iii]

A Fresh Look at WWI Reporting, Source Materials, and Access

AEF records from 1918 and 1919 include several references to Raines and Dorrian for their credentialed work as war correspondents, and both women wrote for leading metropolitan daily newspapers that featured their articles prominently, often on the front page. Although few secondary histories published before 2017 even mention Raines or Dorrian, they were just two among several dozen women whose prolific war reporting reached hundreds of thousands of readers nationally and across the globe.^[iv]

Any study that seeks to uncover nontraditional subjects must rely upon nontraditional sources, a premise that was key to the work of the first historians who sought to help the true majority—women and other disenfranchised individuals—reclaim their past.[\[v\]](#) Our respective studies on Raines and Dorrian depend largely on nontraditional sources, including correspondence, scrapbooks, passenger logs, passport applications, as well as materials from digitization projects that have made it far easier to access a wider range of historical publications.[\[vi\]](#)

Recent World War I historiographies laud a shift that began at the end of the twentieth century, toward social and cultural histories that expand our understanding of the war to include gender analyses, power structures, and transnational perspectives.[\[vii\]](#) Fortunately, the move toward digitization of archival records and news collections complements the need for diversification in our field, while helping to democratize access to the widest array of materials.

The broadest consideration of source materials benefits all historians, but it is particularly important, as noted above, for historians who seek to understand a broader spectrum of society. Similarly, it seems to have been the approach that Raines and Dorrian took in their own work. The fact the two women themselves were disenfranchised might well have contributed to a need to consult a wider range of sources. Likewise, their newcomer or outsider status, as women in a male-dominated profession writing about a traditionally male domain, might also have led sources to open up to them more fully and less formally. In our analysis of international government and military records in addition to news articles, we observed intriguing similarities and differences, not only comparing Raines' and Dorrian's articles, but in the context of their contemporaries as well.

“A Jig-Saw Puzzle Picture Still in the Box”: Piecing Together ‘Truth’ in War

Both reporters frequently described their creative measures to overcome obstruction by military officials who withheld information, prevented their access to sources, and then scrutinized, redacted, and delayed their work.[\[viii\]](#) In a 1918 article datelined “WITH THE AMERICAN ARMIES, VESLE FRONT,” Cecil Dorrian explains that the story of the war “is a jig-saw puzzle picture still in the box.” When she asks a lieutenant whether they are on the main road of supply, he tells her, “quite truthfully, that he doesn’t know,” Dorrian explains. When she asks a lorry driver, he tells her, “with perfect candor: ‘Why, I don’t know who gets it, and I don’t really know what it is I’ve got here. I only know I’m to put my load down at a house in Fere.’” All of which, Dorrian concludes, goes to show “how it is that the full story, in detail, of operations is not available yet.”[\[ix\]](#)

OCT 24 1915

Paris Is Cut Off From Letters Of Troops Fighting in Trenches; Real News Arrives From Abroad

**American Papers Get More Details of War's Events Than
French Capital Is Permitted to Know—Fear of Spies
Is Still Intense—Censor Watches Writers—New
Bomb a Ghastly Murder Weapon.**

By LEONORA RAINES.

Special Correspondence of The Washington Post.

Paris, Sept 29.—Paris has been without letters from the trenches for more than a week and every one is asking questions. Some say the reason the post is stopped is because the heads of the War Department do not want the public to become familiar with the exact position of the companies.

Others say that the soldiers are too occupied to write; still others believe their purpose is to keep the enemy in the dark as regards the 500-mile line.

Perhaps all three reasons are correct, but the third leads. Many soldiers were recalled to active service beginning the 1st of September. The massing of so many men certainly was significant.

Many Arrests; Few Spies.

There are accounts in news sheets every day of spy arrests, but it is doubtful if such a thing as a real spy

There are a few Germans and Austrians residing in France, but they are naturalized French citizens. In Paris these people keep in a discreet background. They realize that one French word pronounced in the unmistakable German tongue would give them dead away and might cause trouble.

An authentic story is on the rounds of what happened the other day in a hospital where a French fantassin, brought in unconscious, lay on his cot. Nurse and surgeon were noiselessly occupied with the patient. It happened to be visiting day at the ambulance, and a naturalized Austrian passing the hall and seeing the anxious looks directed toward the soldier, bent over him and asked: "Za va bien, mon brave?" The wounded man sighed despairingly as he muttered: "Sapristi! Then I'm taken prisoner!"

Thought Himself a Prisoner.

"Paris Cut Off from Letters of Troops Fighting in Trenches," Leonora Raines, *Washington Post*, October 24, 1915. World War History: Daily Records and Comments As Appeared in American and Foreign Newspapers (1915 October 22–25). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Raines' story about German soldiers as people with feelings—and fears—stood in stark contrast to the Allied propaganda of the cruel and cold-blooded German fighter. German military

officials, as records show, monitored Raines' work and considered American journalists particularly influential in the fight for global public opinion before the U.S. entered the war in April 1917.^[x] Raines, on a press tour through the Kaiserreich, traveled to Berlin and interviewed the fiancée of a Prussian soldier stationed at the Eastern Front. This woman shared love letters that portrayed the dread and hopefulness of trench warfare with Raines, and the *New York Evening Sun* published these accounts in July 1915.^[xi]

As scholars of journalism history, we can learn from war correspondents' techniques and continue to diversify our sources and perspectives. For this research essay, we combined our respective expertise—and our access to primary documents—relating to the history of gender, military-press relations, and international propaganda. While our two projects are in progress, this interdisciplinary, cooperative approach has allowed us to construct stories that are more complex and, therefore, more revealing.

About the authors:

Elisabeth Fondren is an assistant professor of journalism at St. John's University in New York. She received her Ph.D. in Media & Public Affairs from Louisiana State University. Her research explores the history of international journalism, government propaganda, military and media relations, and freedom of speech during wartime. She is the winner of the 2022 Covert Award for best mass communication history article and the 2022 Sweeney Award for best article in Journalism History.

Carolyn Edy is an associate professor of journalism at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. She received her master's and doctoral degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her book, "The Woman War Correspondent, the U.S. Military and the Press, 1846–1947," received an honorable mention for the best journalism history book in 2018 from the American Journalism Historians Association.

Featured Image: *Newark Evening News* war correspondent Cecil Dorrian, second from left, poses with Red Cross and YMCA workers at a celebration to honor American troops July 4, 1918, in Alsace, Germany. Source: Signal Corps, U.S.A., National Archives.

Notes

[i]. Leonora Raines, "No Monopoly of Barbarity Says Atlanta Woman," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 16, 1915.

[ii]. "Mrs. Leonora Raines, War Correspondent, Returns to America," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 3, 1915.

[iii]. Carolyn M. Edy, *The Woman War Correspondent, the US Military, and the Press: 1846–1947* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 35–36.

[iv]. For further discussion, see Edy, *The Woman War Correspondent*.

[v]. Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 172–174.

[vi]. Raines' scrapbook is archived at the Atlanta History Center; her extensive war coverage for the *New York Evening Sun* and other daily papers is available at the U.S. Library of Congress; and German diplomatic records relating to her work are housed at the Politisches Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt, in Berlin. Dorrian's scrapbook is archived at Stanford University's Hoover Institution Archives; her cables and redacted articles are contained in censorship files within Record Group 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I) at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland; and her *Newark Evening News* articles are available at the Newark Public Library.

[vii]. Susan R. Grayzel and Tammy M. Proctor, "The Scholarship of the First World War," in eds. Grayzel and Proctor, *Gender and the Great War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[viii]. Leonora Raines, "War Correspondence in France Has Hard Lot: Barred from Firing Line, Harried by Censors, Must Even Have Pass to Leave Town," *New York Evening Sun*, November 2, 1914; and "Censor Causes Woe," *Editor & Publisher*, March 27, 1915, 857.

[ix]. Cecil Dorrian, "'Camping Out' with America's Fighters on Battle-Scarred Marne-Aisne Road," *Newark Evening News*, September 11, 1918.

[x]. See Elisabeth Fondren, "Fighting an Armed Doctrine: The Struggle to Modernize German Propaganda During World War I (1914–1918)," *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 23, no. 4 (2021): 256-317.

[xi]. Leonora Raines, "Soldier Pours Out his Woes in Letters to War Fiancée," *New York Evening Sun*, July 6, 1915.