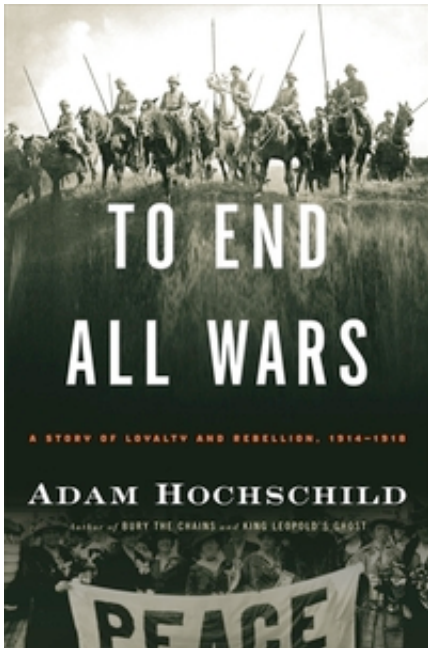


# WWI: A Moral Contest Between Pacifists And Soldiers

by MAUREEN CORRIGAN



**To End All Wars**  
By Adam Hochschild  
Hardcover, 480 pages  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt  
List price: \$28

[Read An Excerpt](#)

May 4, 2011

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Adam Hochschild frames his pensive narrative history about the first World War with accounts of his own walks through what once was the Western Front. He describes it as "a thin band of territory, stretching through northern France and [a] corner of Belgium [that] has the greatest concentration of young men's graves in the world."

Amid the cemeteries and the monuments, the undetonated explosives and helmets, belt clips and other rusted metal — some half-million pounds of which continue to be unearthed from farmers' fields *every year* — Hochschild stumbles upon something singular. A few miles outside of the Flemish town of Ypres, he spots a homemade, chest-high wooden cross, and next to it, blown over by the wind, a small potted fir tree with some silver balls attached. This ragged tribute stands in memory of the impromptu Christmas Truce of 1914, when

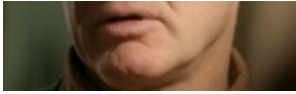
thousands of British and German soldiers and officers put down their arms, traded cigarettes and canned food, and even staged soccer matches in no man's land. Hochschild says this is the one monument along the entire Western Front "celebrating anyone for doing something other than fighting or dying."

Hochschild's new book, *To End All Wars*, can be thought of, in metaphorical terms, as something like both a traditional war monument and that pacifist Christmas tree. His book traces the wellsprings of the fervent patriotism that seemed to instantly materialize in Great Britain in the summer of 1914, as well as the patchy but persistent British resistance to the war.

"By conflict's end," Hochschild says, "more than 20,000 British men of military age refused the draft. ... More than 6,000 served prison terms under harsh conditions: hard labor, a bare-bones diet, and a strict 'rule of silence.'" This is the kind of investigatory history Hochschild pulls off like no one else. As he demonstrated in his last book, *Bury the Chains*, about the 18th-century movement to end slavery in Great Britain, Hochschild is a master at chronicling how prevailing cultural opinion is formed and, less frequently, how it's challenged.



Although Hochschild doesn't aim to write yet another comprehensive history of World War I, the military aspect of his narrative is undeniably gripping. Other historians have discussed the horrors that innovations like barbed wire, tanks and chlorine gas wrought on a British army that, in the early years of the war, still placed its highest confidence in horses and



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Adam Hochschild is the author of seven books, including *King Leopold's Ghost* and *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. He teaches at the graduate school of journalism at the University of California, Berkeley.

### Hear An Interview



### WWI: The Battle That Split Europe, And Families

does society mete out? What apologies does posterity sometimes offer to those courageous enough to see things differently?

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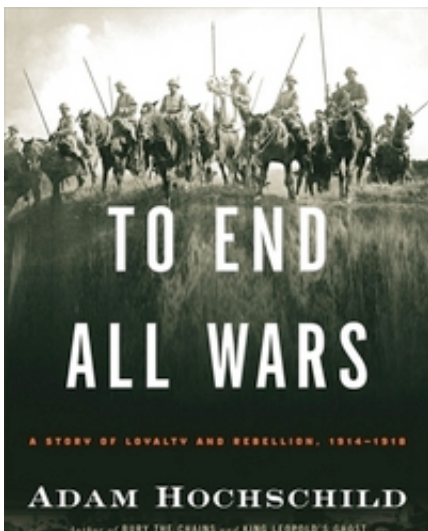
But, through eye-witness accounts and official correspondence, Hochschild makes a reader feel anew the shock of modern technological warfare. The much less familiar World War I story that Hochschild uncovers is that of the resisters. To his credit, Hochschild renders the pacifists' tales no less compelling than those of the soldiers in the trenches. It's an oddity of history — and a boon to Hochschild's narrative — that some of the most vocal critics of the war were closely related to its most ardent supporters. Suffragist and pacifist Charlotte Despard was the sister of Sir John French, commander in chief on the Western Front. The famous Pankhurst family of suffragists was so torn apart by vicious disagreements about the war that its matriarch, Emmeline, broke off all contact with her pacifist daughter, Sylvia.

The price others paid for resisting was, of course, even harsher. Hochschild writes that in 2006, the British government granted a blanket posthumous pardon to more than 300 executed World War I soldiers who had refused to fight.

In *To End All Wars*, Hochschild gives readers much more than an account of dissension in the trenches and on the British home front. He enlarges on the deeper question that has engrossed him throughout most of his writing: Namely, what does it take for a person to shake off the shackles of conventional wisdom and think for him or herself? What punishments

### Excerpt: 'To End All Wars'

by ADAM HOCHSCHILD



The city had never seen such a parade. Nearly 50,000 brilliantly uniformed troops converged on St. Paul's Cathedral in two great columns. One was led by the country's most beloved military hero, the mild-mannered Field Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar, a mere five feet two inches in height, astride a white Arabian horse like those he had ridden during more than 40 years of routing assorted Afghans, Indians, and Burmese who had the temerity to rebel against British rule. Mounted at the head of the other column, at six feet eight inches, was the tallest man in the army, Captain Oswald Ames of the Life Guards, wearing his regiments traditional breastplate, which, with the sunlight glinting off it, seemed as if it might deflect an enemy's lance by its dazzling gleam alone. His silver helmet




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### *To End All Wars*

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topped with along horsehair panache made him appear taller still.

It was June 22, 1897, and London had spent £ 250,000 — the equivalent of more than \$30 million today — on street decorations alone. Above the marching troops, Union Jacks flew from every building; blue, red, and white bunting and garlands adorned balconies; and lampposts were bedecked with baskets of flowers. From throughout the British Empire came foot soldiers and the elite troops of the cavalry: New South Wales Lancers from Australia, the Trinidad Light Horse, South Africa's Cape Mounted Rifles, Canadian Hussars, Zaptich horse-men from Cyprus in tasseled fezzes, and bearded lancers from the Punjab. Rooftops, balconies, and special bleachers built for this day were packed. A triumphal archway near Paddington station was emblazoned "Our Hearts Her Throne." On the Bank of England appeared "She Wrought Her People Lasting Good." Dignitaries filled the carriages that rolled along the parade route — the papal nuncio shared one with the envoy of the Chinese Emperor — but the most thunderous cheers were reserved for the royal carriage, drawn by eight cream-colored horses. Queen Victoria, holding a black lace parasol and nodding to the crowds, was marking the 60th anniversary of her ascent to the throne. Her black moire dress was embroidered with silver roses, thistles, and shamrocks, symbols of the united lands at the pinnacle of the British Empire: England, Scotland, and Ireland.

The sun emerged patriotically from an overcast sky just after the Queen's carriage left Buckingham Palace. The dumpy monarch, whose round, no-nonsense face no portrait painter or photographer ever seems to have caught in a smile, presided over the largest empire the world had ever seen. For this great day a clothier advertised a "Diamond Jubilee Lace Shirt," poets wrote Jubilee odes, and Sir Arthur Sullivan, of Gilbert and Sullivan, composed a Jubilee hymn. "How many millions of years has the sun stood in heaven?" said the *Daily Mail*. "But the sun never looked down until yesterday upon the embodiment of so much energy and power."

Victoria's empire was not known for its modesty. "I contend that we are the first race in the world," the future diamond mogul Cecil Rhodes declared when still an Oxford undergraduate, "and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race." Later, he went on to say, "I would annex the planets if I could." No other celestial body yet sported the Union Jack, but British territory did cover nearly a quarter of the earth. To be sure, some of that land was barren Arctic tundra belonging to Canada, which was in effect an independent country. But most Canadians — French-speakers and native Indians largely excepted — were happy to think of themselves as subjects of the Queen this splendid day, and the nation's prime minister, although a Francophone, had made a voyage to England to attend the Diamond Jubilee and accept a knighthood. True, a few of the territories optimistically colored pink on the map, such as the Transvaal republic in South Africa, did not think of themselves as British at all. Nonetheless, Transvaal President Paul Kruger released two Englishmen from jail in honor of the Jubilee. In India, the Nizam of Hyderabad, who also did not consider himself subservient to the British, marked the occasion by setting free every tenth convict in his prisons. Gunboats in Cape Town harbor fired a salute, Rangoon staged a ball, Australia issued extra food and clothing to the Aborigines, and in Zanzibar the sultan held a Jubilee banquet.

At this moment of celebration, even foreigners forgave the British their sins. In Paris, *Le Figaro* declared that imperial Rome was "equaled, if not surpassed," by Victoria's realm; across the Atlantic, the *New York Times* virtually claimed membership in the empire: "We are a part, and a great part, of the Greater Britain which seems so plainly destined to dominate this planet." In the Queen's honor, Santa Monica, California, held a sports festival, and a contingent of the Vermont National Guard crossed the border to join a Jubilee parade in Montreal. Victoria was overwhelmed by the outpouring of affection and loyalty, and at times during the day her usually impassive face was streaked with tears. The overseas cables had been kept clear of traffic until, at Buckingham Palace, the Queen pressed an electric button linked to the Central Telegraph Office. From there, as the assorted lancers, hussars, camel troopers, turbaned Sikhs, Borneo Dayak police, and Royal Niger Constabulary marched through the city, her greeting flashed in Morse code to every part of the empire, Barbados to Ceylon, Nairobi to Hong Kong: "From my heart I thank my beloved people. May God bless them."

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