

Session Plan 10

Home Front communications and propaganda posters

This session looks at how people on the Home Front communicated during the First World War and how the government disseminated information through propaganda posters.

The activities are designed to support the National Curriculums in England, Wales and Northern Ireland at Key Stage 2 and are suitable for pupils in Scotland following the broad general education phase of the Curriculum of Excellence. They are relevant for the KS2 'Local History Study' in England and Wales, 'The World Around Us' at KS2 in Northern Ireland, and support experiences and outcomes in Social Studies at Levels 2–4 in the broad general education of the Curriculum for Excellence.

The activities are also tailored for youth groups such as Young Archaeologists' Clubs, Scouts and Guides.

Session aims

- For your group to learn more about people's personal experiences on the Home Front.
- For your group to write their own letters from the Home Front.
- For your group to compose and send 'telegrams' using Morse Code.
- For your group to learn about censorship and how it affected the news that was received on the Home Front from the front lines.
- For your group to produce their own Home Front propaganda posters.

Session outcomes

Your class or group will have explored the experiences of people on the Home Front through writing role play and will have produced their own creative writing pieces based on First World War communications. Your class or group will have learnt about methods of communication during the First World War, including using Morse Code to send messages by telegram. Your class or group will have discovered how letters sent to the Home Front from the trenches were censored. They will have



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investigated Home Front propaganda posters and the language and imagery used to encourage certain behaviours; they will have had the opportunity to create their own First World War propaganda posters.

Resources required

Illustrations:

The Home Front Legacy project commissioned five special illustrations that depict aspects of life on the Home Front 1914-18.

The illustrations show different aspects of the Home Front Landscapes of the United Kingdom during the First World War. They can be downloaded as A3-sized PDFs using the links below:

- [Town](#)
- [Air](#)
- [Army Camp](#)
- [Countryside](#)
- [Coast](#)

The illustrated landscapes are imagined, but all the buildings, military activity and people going about their day-to-day business are based on real places and events that formed part of the Home Front story. The illustrations can be joined together to create a wall display for your classroom.

Story Cards:

Each of the five Home Front illustrations has a story connected to it. The story card tells the particular story of an event or activity. The story cards will help your pupils or group members to research a Home Front story in more depth. Read the story cards and use them to inspire further research into subjects such as the roles of women on the Home Front, the Zeppelin raids, and the stories of Belgian refugees.

The story cards can be downloaded from the [Home Front Legacy](#) section of the YAC website.



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Morse Code worksheet (below)

This worksheet explains the different combinations of short and long beats (dots and dashes) that were used to represent letters and numerals when sending messages via a telegraph machine.

British Field Service Postcard (below)

This worksheet shows an example of a British Field Service Postcard, which was a quick and easy way for soldiers on the front lines to send short messages to their families on the Home Front to reassure them that they were alive.

Propaganda posters (below)

These examples of propaganda posters from the collection of the Imperial War Museum can be used to inspire your pupils and group members to create their own.

Session plan

Time to talk... start this session by asking your pupils or group members how they think that people communicated with each other on the Home Front during the First World War. How do they think that news was shared between the Home Front and the soldiers fighting on the front line?

Point out that there were no mobile phones, text messages, emails, internet or social media. People had to rely on writing letters and postcards and sending telegrams to communicate with each other. There were a few telephones available, but this was a fairly new technology, and at the start of the First World War only around 2% of people in Britain had a telephone in their home.

Home Front letters... Encourage your pupils or group members to look at the Home Front Legacy illustrations and to choose a character that they can see pictured. This could be a soldier in a training camp, an injured soldier in a hospital, a munitionette, Red Cross nurse, German POW, Belgian Refugee, Women's Land Army worker, or even someone whose house has been bombed during a Zeppelin raid.

Once they have chosen a character, challenge your pupils or group members to write a letter about their experiences on the Home Front. They can write about the work they are doing, whether they are happy or not, and what is happening around them.



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Your group may be able to find examples of First World War letters in a local library or archives.

Your pupils or group members could choose to write to a loved one on the front lines about their experiences on the Home Front. During the War, millions of items of post were delivered to the front lines from the Home Front every week via the Post Office's Army Postal Service (APS). The APS had a Home Depot in London's Regent Park which employed around 2,500 staff, mainly women. The APS also had depots in continental Europe at Le Havre, Boulogne and Calais; these depots handled over 19,000 mailbags of letters a day in 1917! Impressively, it only took two days for a letter from the Home Front to reach a soldier on the front lines.

Once they have finished their letters, encourage your pupils or group members to explain which character they chose and why. They can then read out their letter to the rest of the group.

Front line letters... letters from soldiers on the front lines back to their friends and family on the Home Front were subject to strict censorship. Information about where they were, negative comments about general health and well-being, their battalion's movements and action plans, and intelligence about the suspected movements of the enemy were all forbidden – and would have been removed from letters by the censors. Comments about the death or serious wounding of fellow soldiers were also forbidden, as it was believed that bad news from the front lines and stories of the true horror of the fighting would damage morale on the Home Front and erode support for the War.

Censorship was done by junior officers, and they would have simply scribbled out sentences that broke the rules or even torn off sections of letters. Censorship of communication between the front lines and the Home Front became an increasingly big job; at the start of the War, only one person was employed as a censor, but by November 1918, 5,000 personnel were involved in the censorship of letters.

Time to talk... What do your pupils or group members think about censorship? Do they think that it was necessary? How would they feel if their personal letters and communications were read by someone else? Do they think that censorship worked?

How would they feel on the Home Front if they received a censored letter? Would they actually have wondered what was removed and why? Many soldiers' self-censored'; they wanted to spare their families the true horror of the War, so naturally left out the more horrific details.

Challenge your pupils or group members to write a letter from a soldier on the front lines to a loved one on the Home Front. How would they ensure that their letter got past the censors? You could suggest that your pupils or group members write two letters; one which tells the true story of life on the front lines (and which would have been subject to heavy censorship if it was sent), and one which has been 'self-censored' to be more palatable for a loved one on the Home Front.

Many soldiers on the front lines communicated with their families on the Home Front using a British Field Service Postcard. Show your pupils or group members the worksheet with the example of the British Field Service Postcard pictured. What do your group members and pupils think of this as a method of communication between the front lines and the Home Front? Can they design their own postcard that would enable them to communicate with their parents about a day at school, for example, by just crossing off the irrelevant details on a multiple choice 'postcard'?

Home Front Telegrams... telegrams were sent and received by electric telegraph machines. They were the quickest way of sending messages on the Home Front in the First World War and would have been used for sending urgent news. During 1915 alone, 91 million telegrams were sent and received in the UK. (Although this sounds like a lot, compare that with the estimated 102 billion text messages that the communications regulator Ofcom records as having been sent in the UK between September 2014 and September 2015!)

Telegrams worked by sending messages as a series of electric impulses along a wire between two telegraph machines. An operator was necessary at both ends of the telegraph wire: one to send the message and one to receive/decode the message. Messages were sent using Morse Code. There were telegraph operators based at Post Offices right across the UK. Once a telegram had been received, the message would be written out and put into an envelope to be delivered to the recipient –

usually by a uniformed boy or girl on a bicycle. It cost 6d (around 2p) to send a telegram of up to nine words; every extra word cost a penny more! Telegrams were, therefore, very short and left out unimportant words. Each sentence in a telegram ended with the word 'STOP'.

During the First World War, thousands of women were employed as telegraph operators because many of the men who had worked in these roles before the War were off fighting in the trenches on the Western Front and elsewhere. There were so many Post Office employees that signed up to fight that the Post Office had its own battalion made up entirely of postal staff. They were called the Post Office Rifles (POR), and they fought on the Western Front at the deadly battles of Ypres and the Somme.

Telegram time... using the Morse Code worksheet and working in pairs, can your pupils or group members compose, send and decode messages as if they were telegraph operators? The short and long beats used in Morse Code could be mimicked using a drum or other musical instrument; you could use flashes of light; or they could simply say 'dot' and 'dash' to represent the different beats. Encourage your members to send the kinds of messages that might have been sent during the First World War. Remember to omit unnecessary words, end each sentence with 'STOP', and keep it short – ideally no more than nine words long!

Telegraph dash... you could play a game with your pupils or group members based on the sending and receiving of telegrams. Split your class or group into teams of six people. The aim of the game is to be the first group to send a message successfully and to receive the answer – all via Morse Code. The first person in each group should write down a simple question that will have a single word answer, e.g. "What is your favourite colour?" or "What is two add two?". They should give this to a second person, who will need to take it to the 'telegraph office' (this could be by running a set distance, for example). At the 'telegraph office', the third person must send the message by Morse Code to the fourth person in the team, who should be sitting alongside them (but without talking at all!). The fourth group member needs to write down the question as they receive it and pass the message on to the fifth member of the group. This group member is the delivery girl/boy. They need to take the message to the final group member – again by running a set distance (or even by

bike!) – and pass the message on. The recipient should write down their single word answer to the question and pass this back to the delivery person. Reverse the process to get the one-word answer back to the first group member! The winning team is the first team to get a ‘correct’ answer to the telegram back to the person that sent the initial message.

Propaganda posters... during the First World War, the government produced a range of propaganda posters designed to support and promote certain behaviours and campaigns on the Home Front. These included saving food (especially bread) and reducing kitchen waste, enlisting in the armed services, joining the women's land army, and buying War Bonds (which helped the government to finance war spending).

Show your pupils or group members the examples of First World War propaganda posters that were displayed on the Home Front and challenge them to create their own. Can they compose their own slogan to include on their poster?

Final questions

At the end of this session, your pupils or group members should be able to answer the following questions: ***How did people on the Home Front communicate with other people during the First World War? Why were letters sent to the Home Front by soldiers on the front line censored? Why did the government make and distribute propaganda posters? What types of messages did the government share using propaganda posters?***



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Home Front Legacy – Morse Code

Morse Code can be sent using sound or light. Morse Code messages sent by telegram used clicks of sound. In Morse Code each different letter or numeral is represented by a unique sequence of 'dots' and 'dashes'. A dot is a short beat (or a short flash of light) and a dash is a longer beat or longer flash of light. The length of a 'dash' should be the same length as three 'dots'.

Each dot or dash within the sequence for a single letter or numeral is followed by a short dot-long silence. The letters of a word are separated by a silence equal to one dash, and a complete word is followed by a silence equal to seven dots.

Use this worksheet to help you send and receive your own messages in Morse Code.

Morse Code letters and numerals

A ● –
B – ● ● ●
C – ● – ●
D – ● ●
E ●
F ● ● – ●
G – – ●
H ● ● ● ●
I ⚡ ●

J ⚡ – – –
K – ● –
L ● – ● ●
M – –
N – ●
O – – –
P ● – – ●
Q – – ● –
R ● – ●

S ● ● ●
T –
U ● ● –
V ● ● ● –
W ● – – –
X – ● ● –
Y – ● – – –
Z – – ● ●

1	● – – – –	6	– ● ● ● ●
2	● ● – – –	7	– – ● ● ●
3	● ● ● – –	8	– – – ● ●
4	● ● ● ● ● –	9	– – – – ●
5	● ● ● ● ● ●	0	– – – – – –



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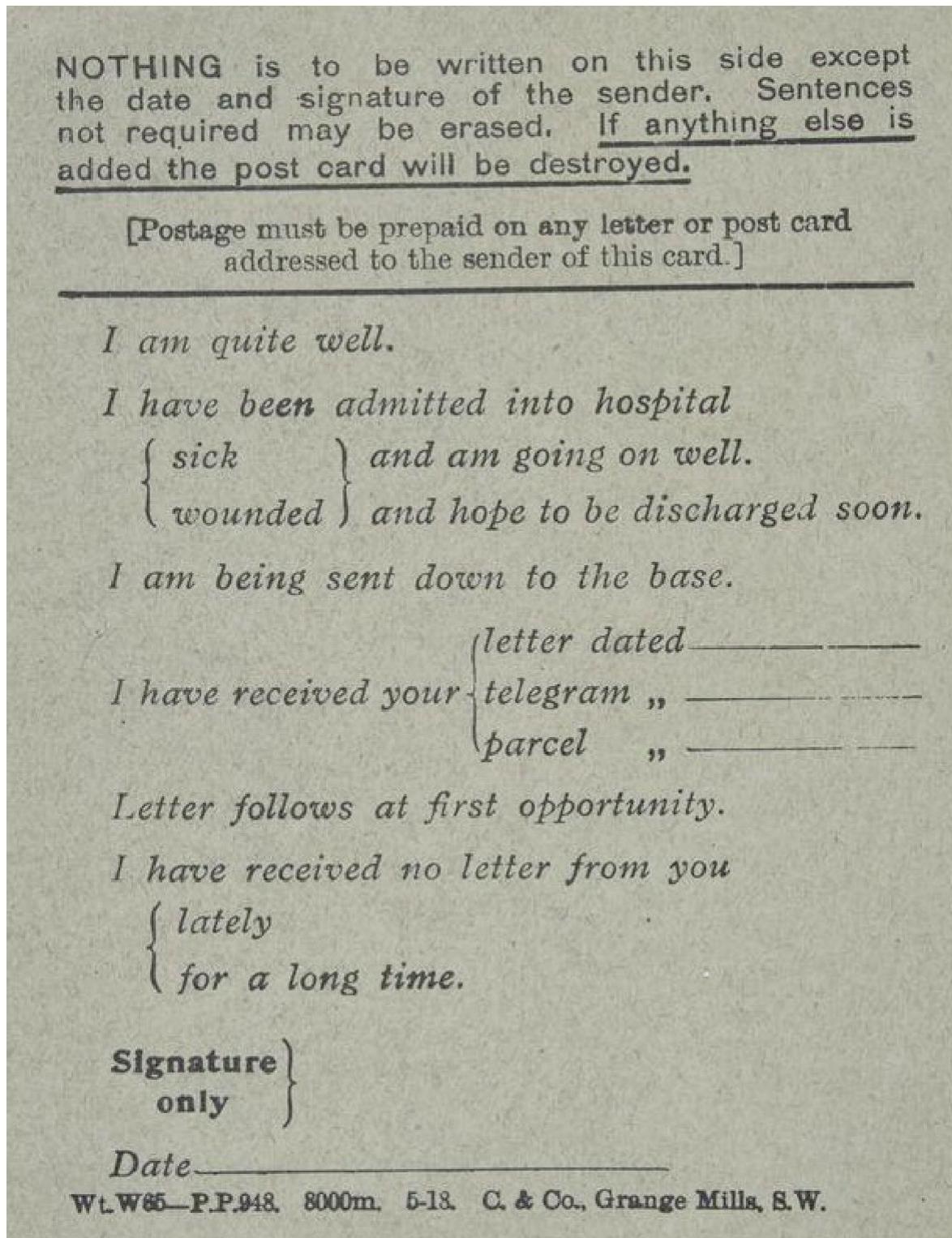


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Home Front Legacy – British Field Service Postcard

A British Field Service Postcard was a quick and easy way for soldiers on the front line to send short messages to their families on the Home Front to reassure them that they were alive.

The example below is from the collections of the Imperial War Museum, and shows how the postcards worked as a series of multiple choice options.



HOME FRONT LEGACY
1914-18

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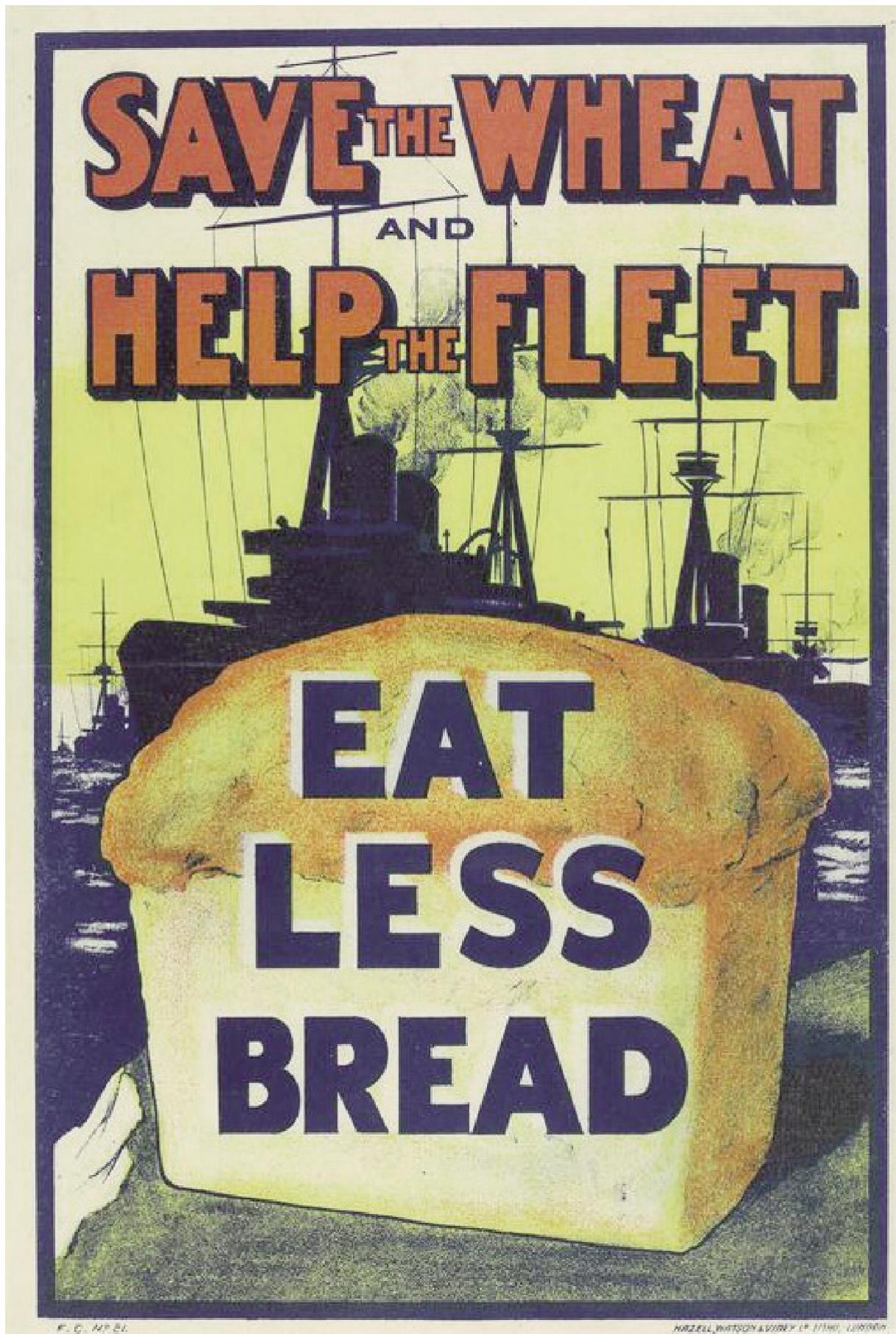


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***Home Front Legacy* – Propaganda posters**



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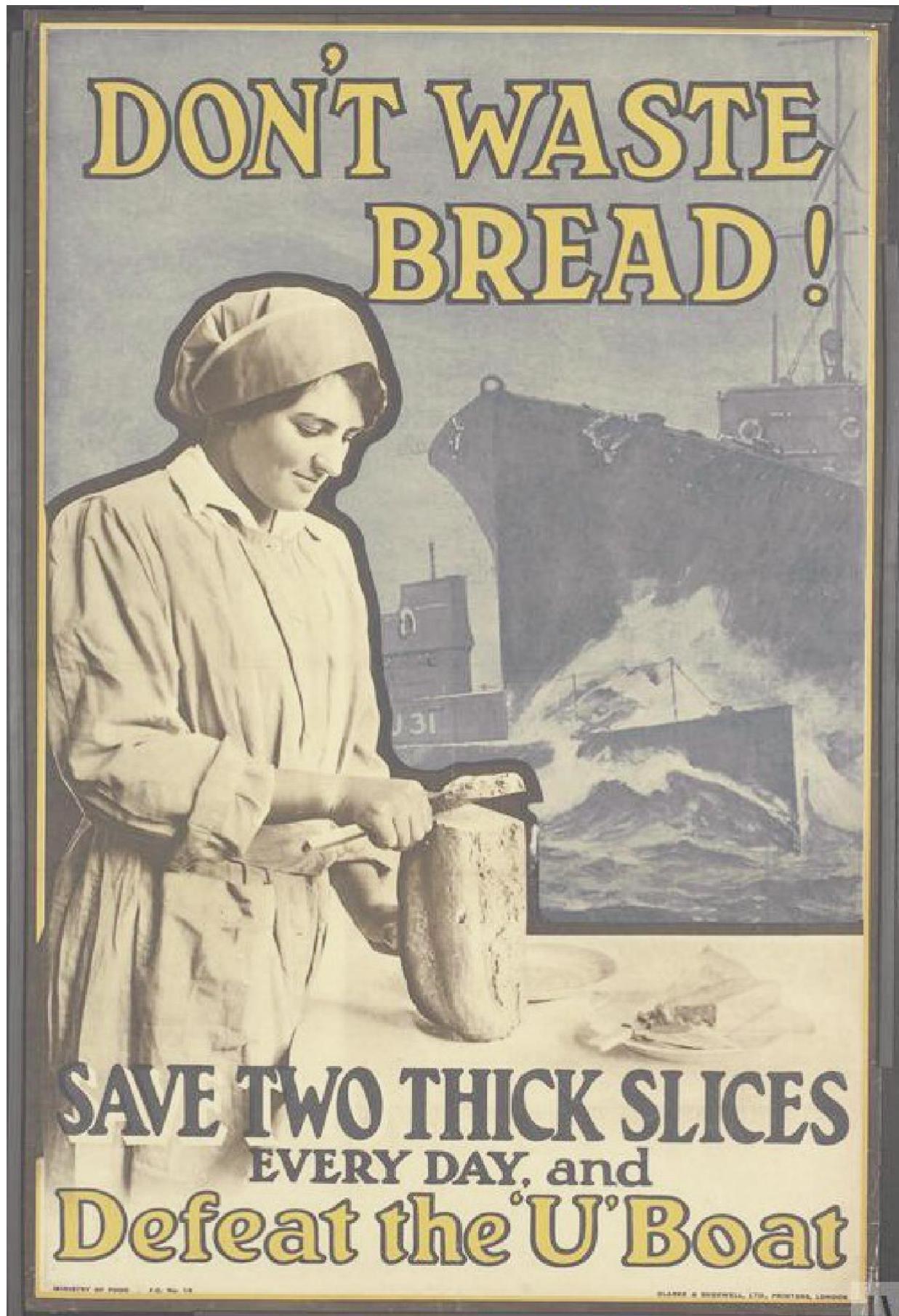
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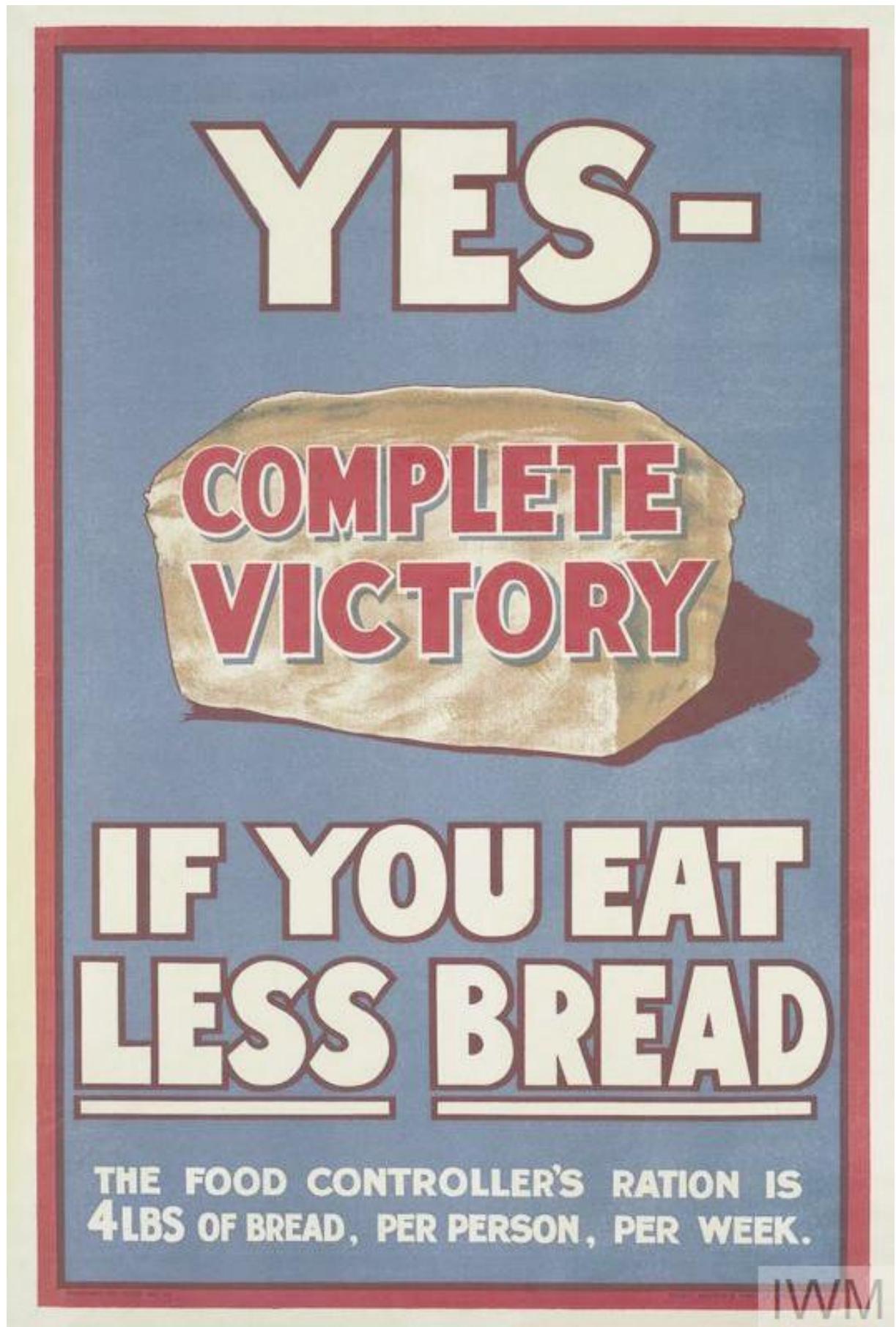
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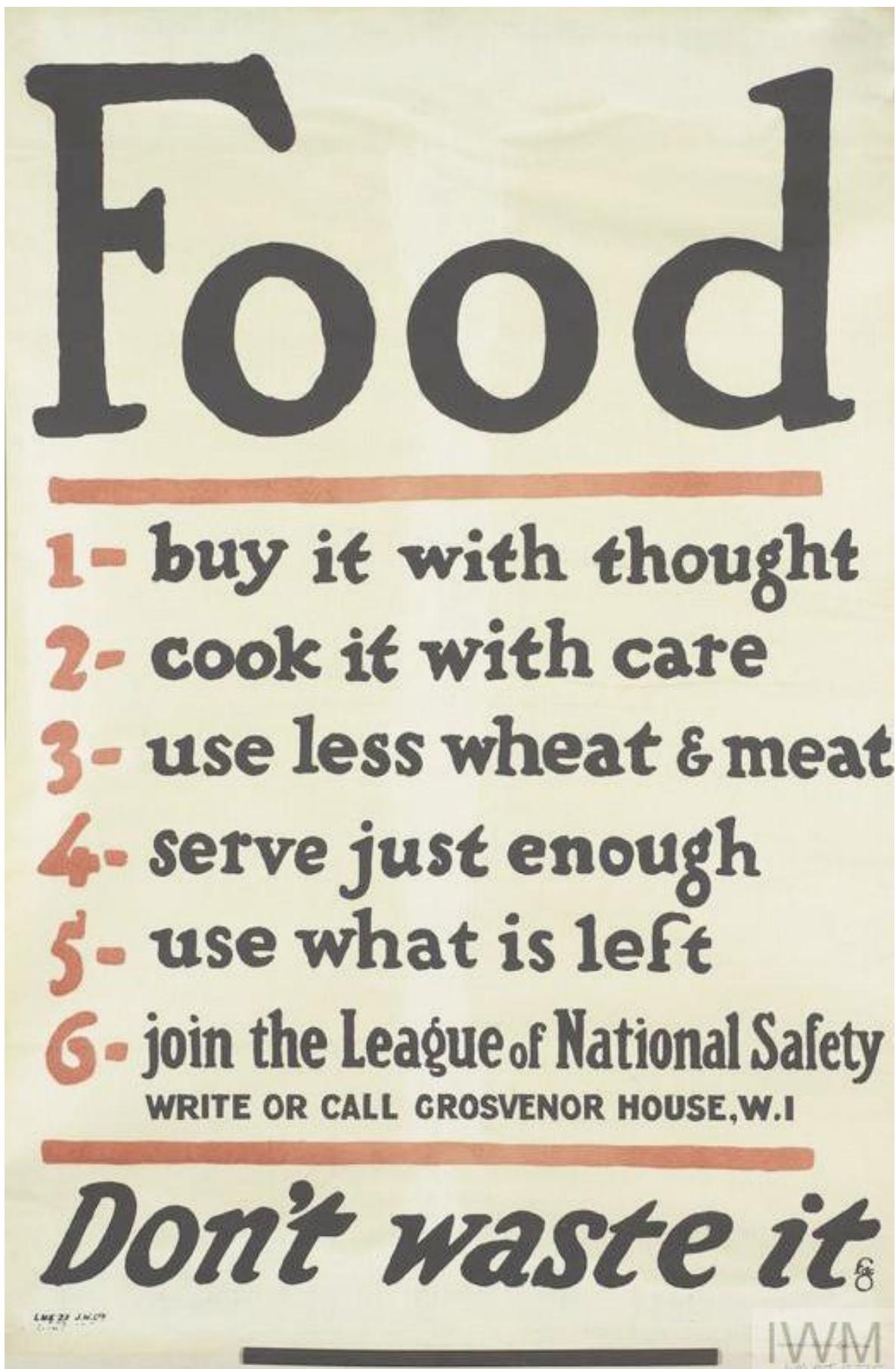
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Home Front Legacy – Propaganda posters



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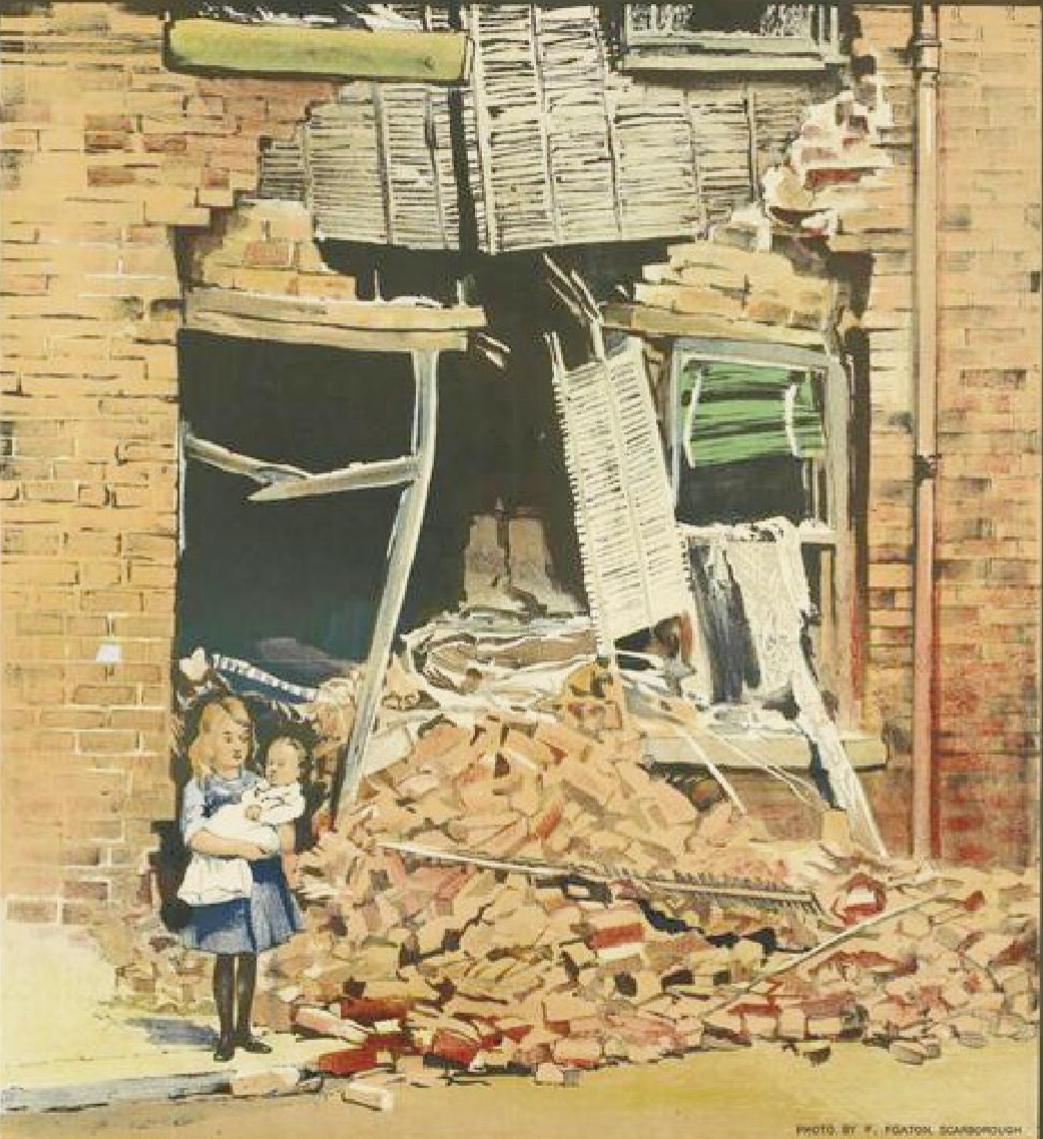


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**MEN OF BRITAIN !
WILL YOU STAND THIS ?**



No 2 Wykeham Street, SCARBOROUGH, after the German bombardment on Decr 16th. It was the Home of a Working Man. Four People were killed in this House including the Wife aged 58, and Two Children, the youngest aged 5.

78 Women & Children were killed and 228 Women & Children were wounded by the German Raiders

ENLIST NOW

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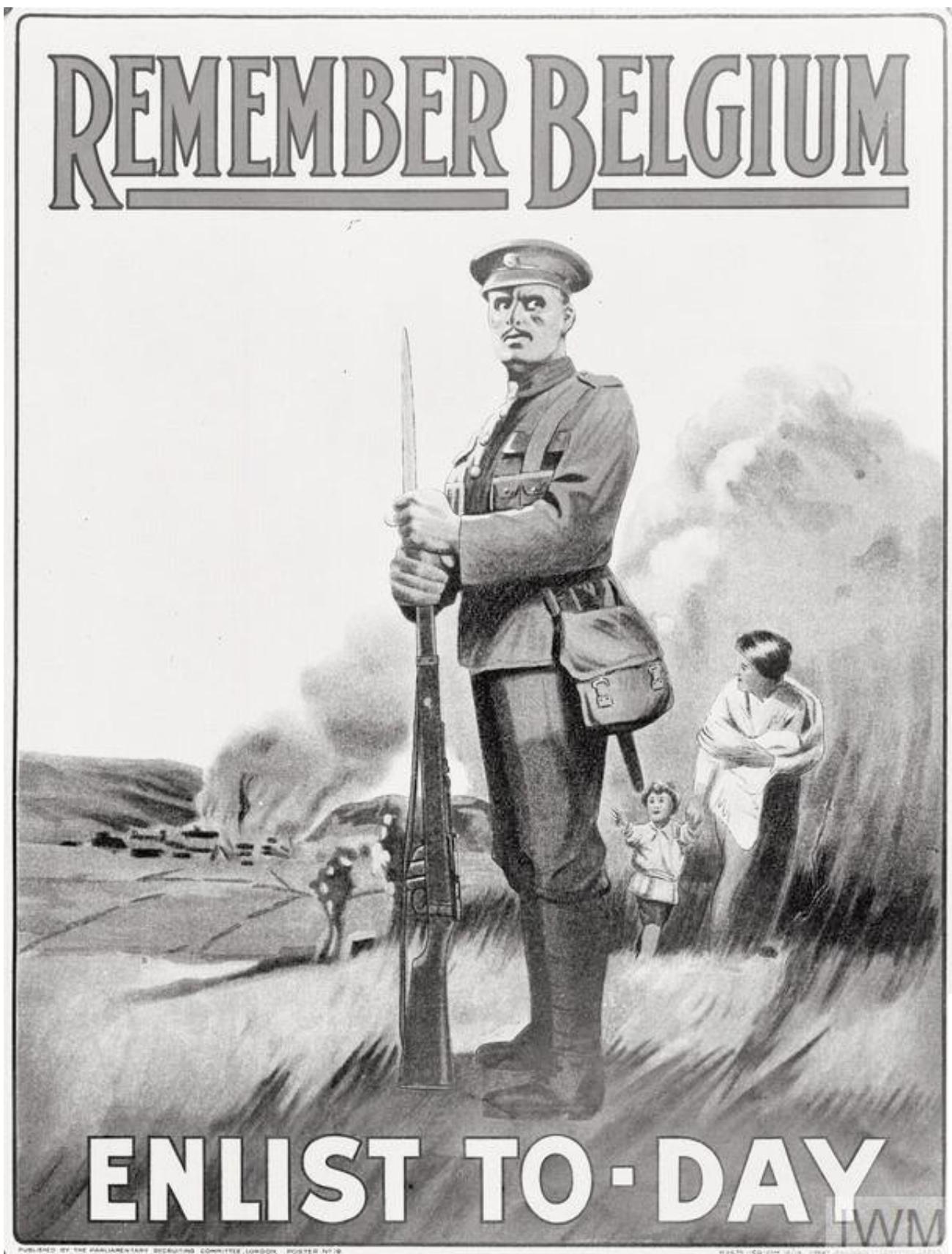
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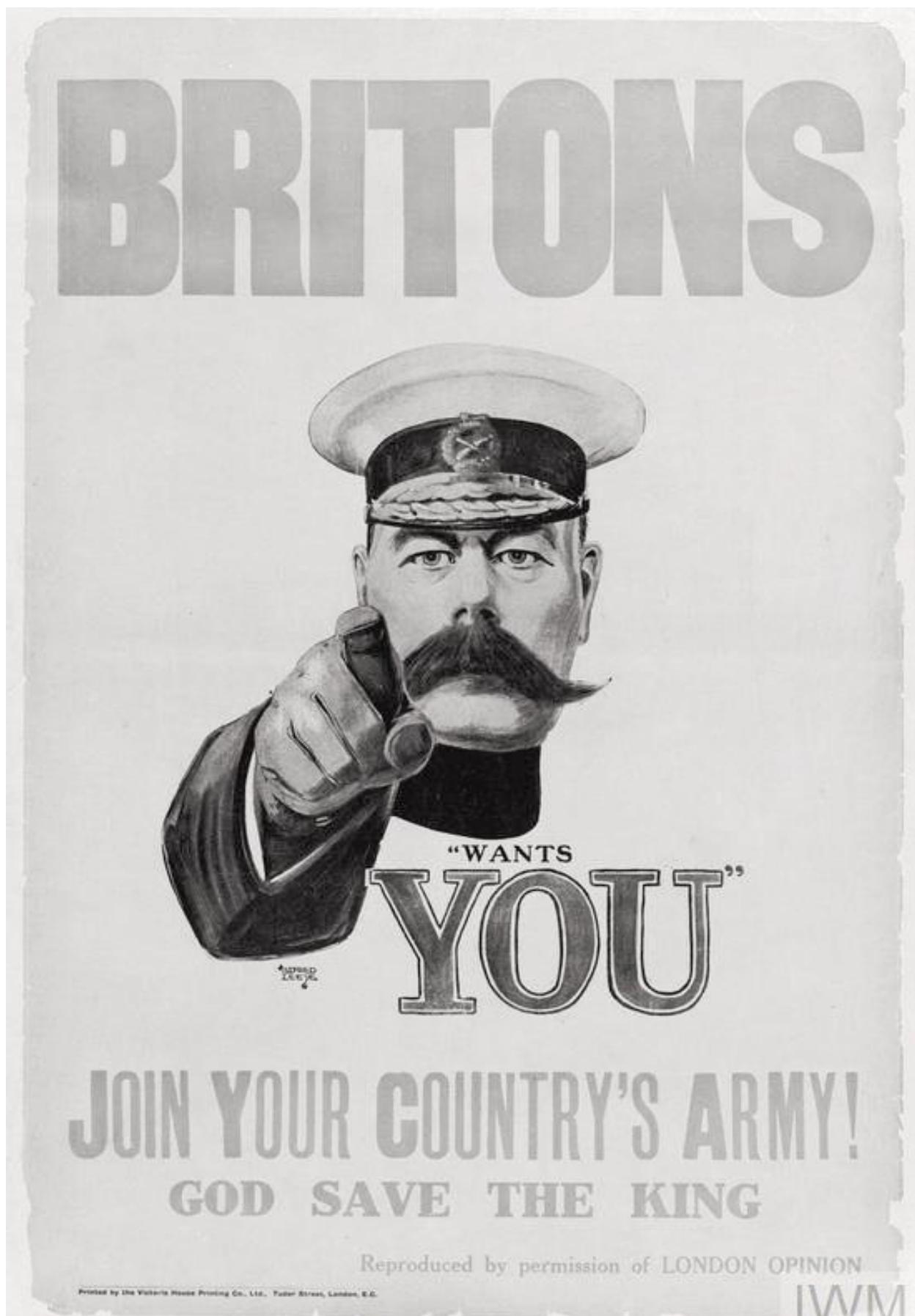


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Home Front Legacy – Propaganda posters



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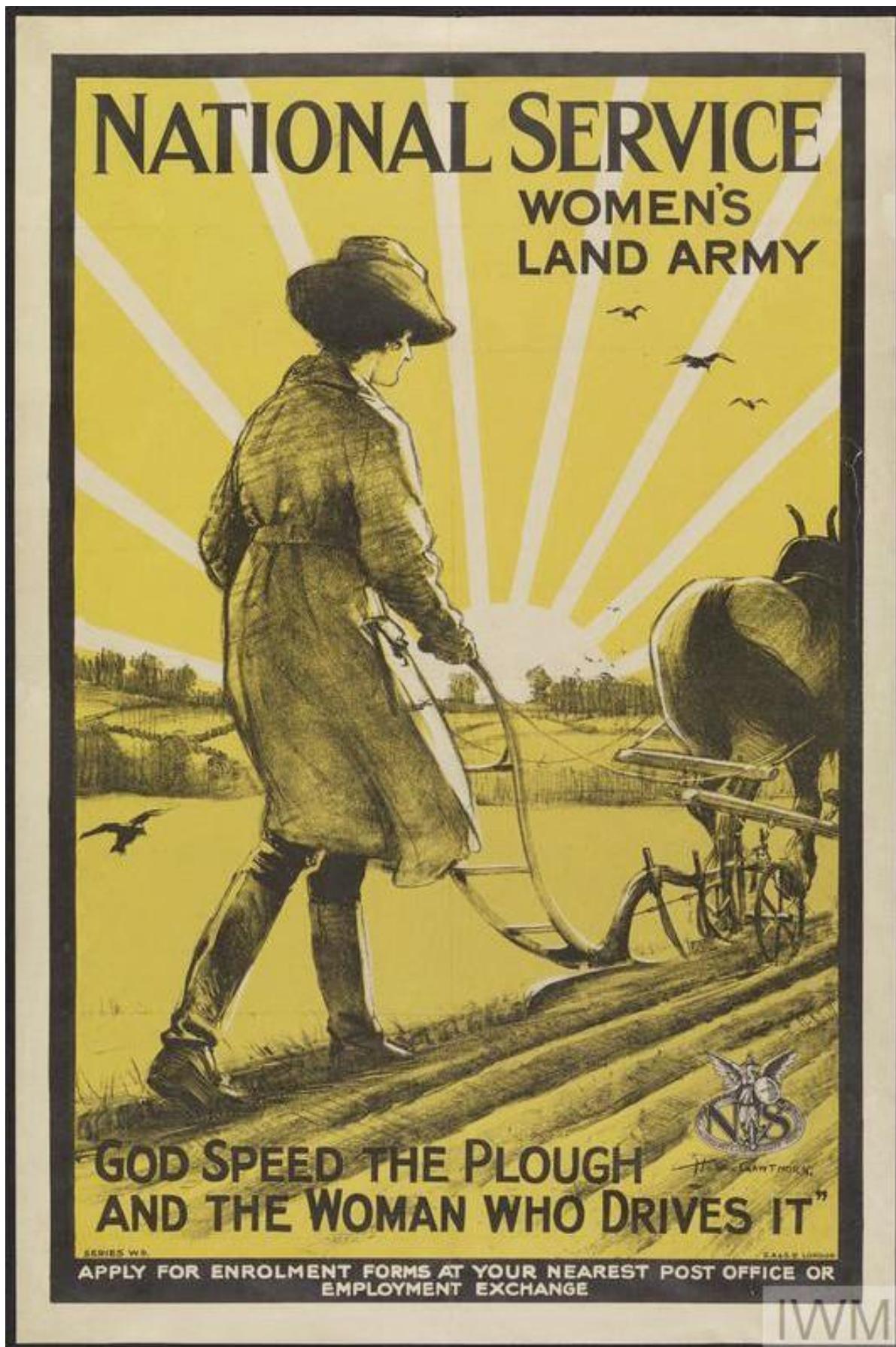


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Home Front Legacy – Propaganda posters



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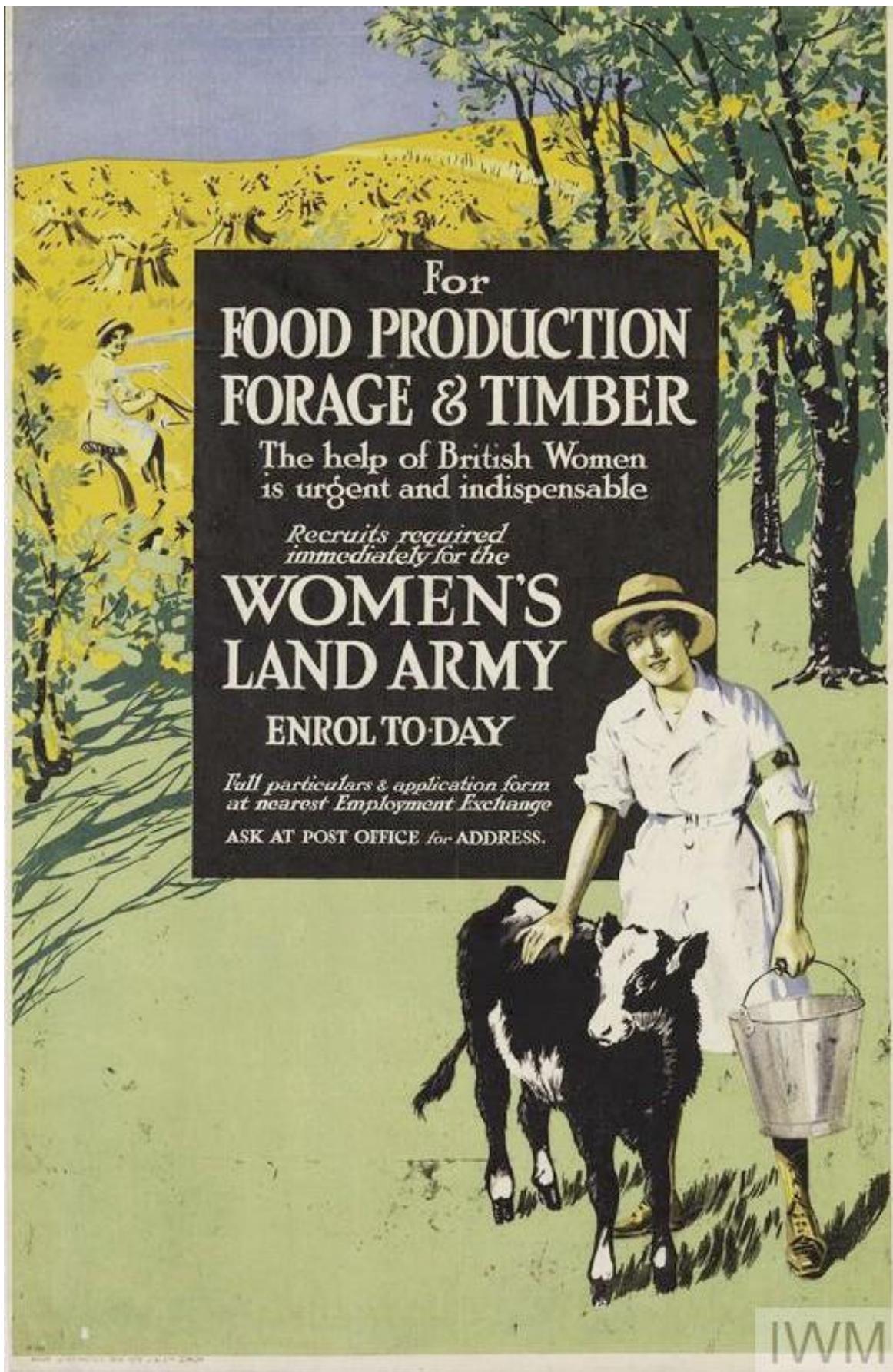


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Home Front Legacy – Propaganda posters



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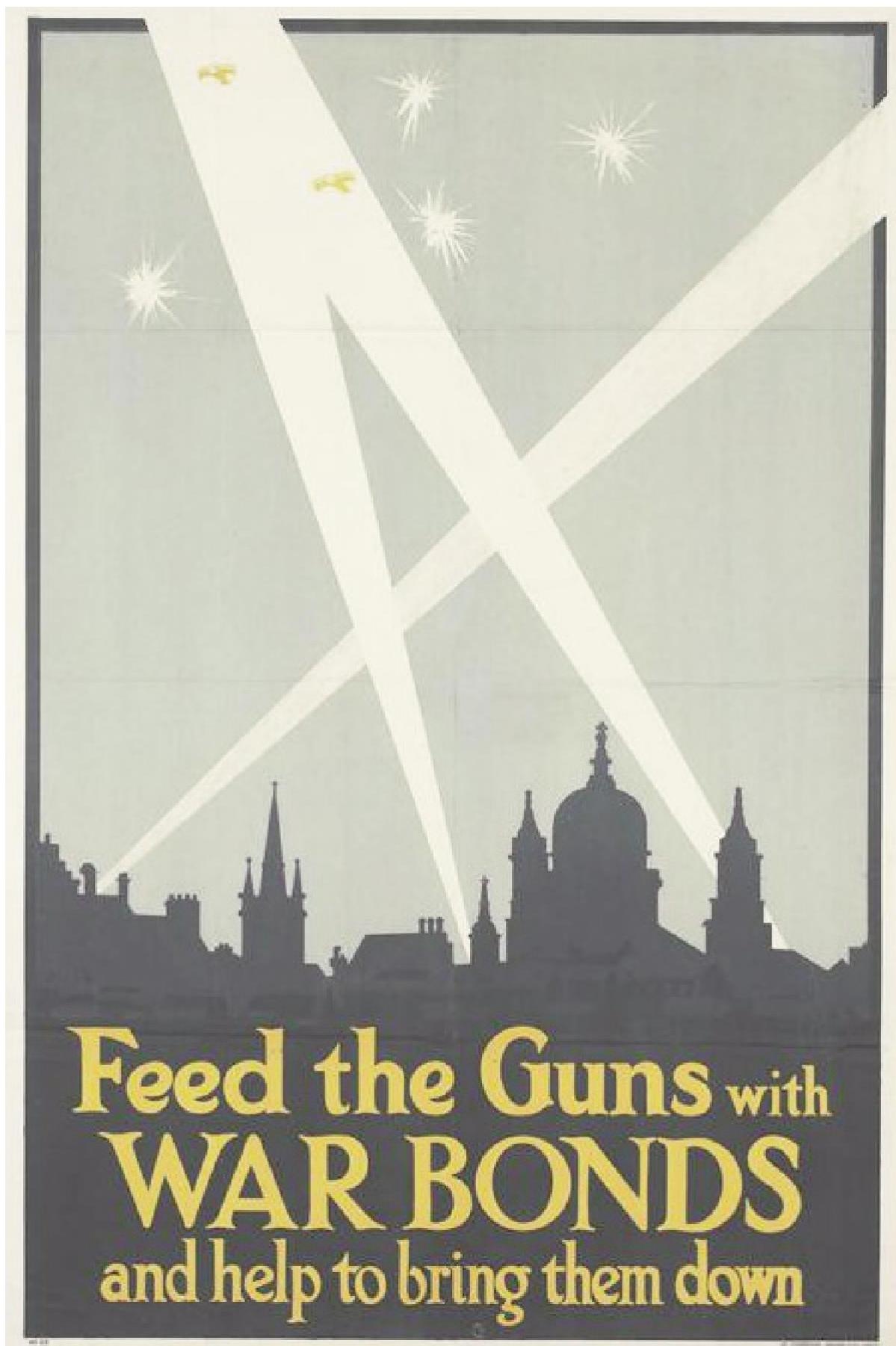


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Home Front Legacy – Propaganda posters



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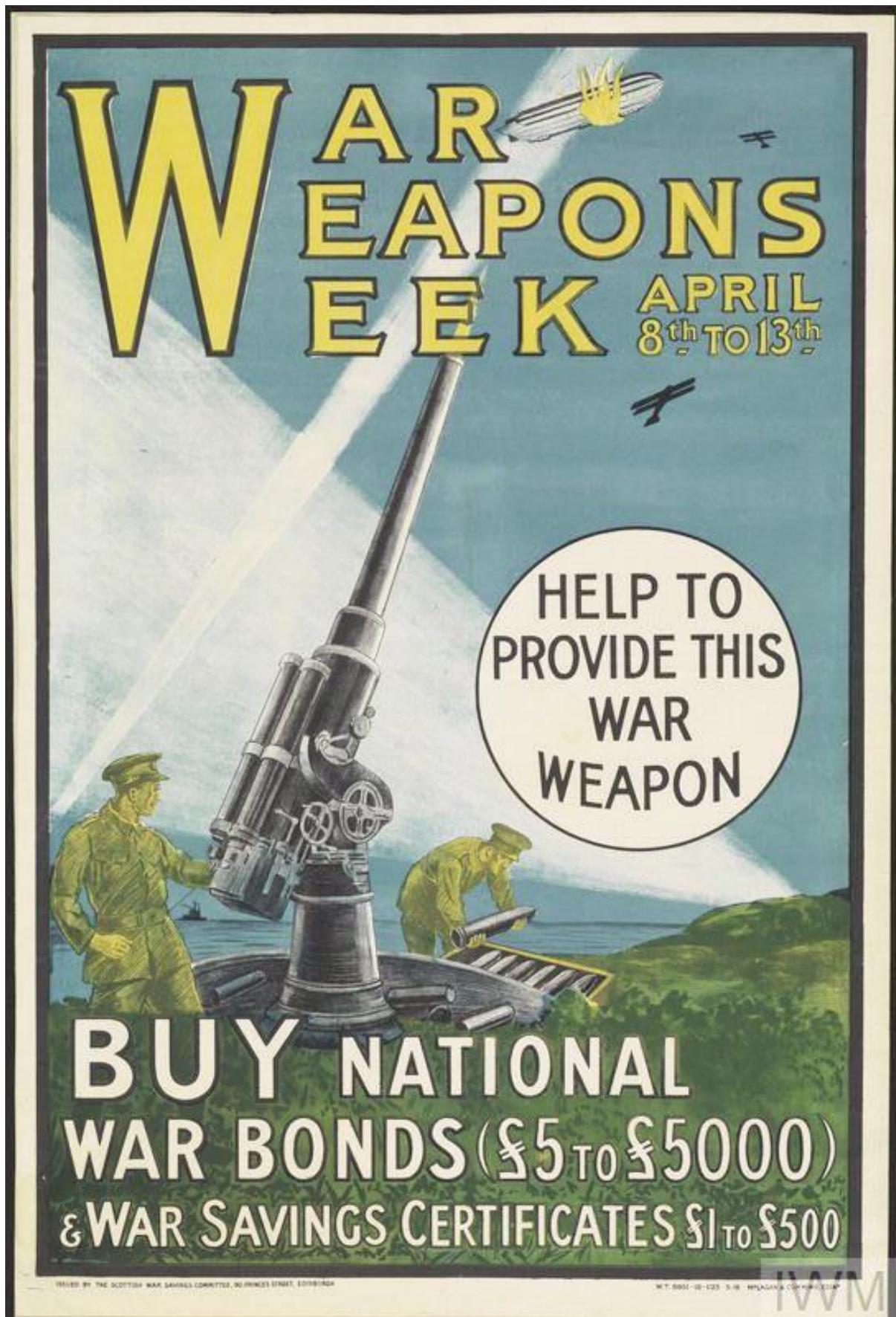
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