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# The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs: A Digital History

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# The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs: A Digital History

## **Abstract**

This poster provides a high-level overview of [The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs: A Digital History project](#), giving information on its creation, the collection of letters, how it has used digital mapping, and its use in the classroom.

## **Keywords**

World War I, Digital Humanities, War and Memory Studies, Gettysburg College, Jack Peirs

## **Disciplines**

European History | History | Military History

## **Comments**

This poster was presented at The First World War Network: Past, Present, and Future Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland on June 27-28, 2019.

# The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs

## A Digital History

jackpeirs.org

### From Archival to Digital

The Peirs papers, previously held in a private collection, include nearly 300 letters plus photographs, trench maps, telegrams, military documents, newspapers, three-dimensional artifacts, and ephemera. The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs has transcribed, digitized, contextualized, and made available to the public letters written by Lieutenant Colonel H.J.C. "Jack" Peirs who served with the British Army on the Western Front from 1915-1919.

The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs is grounded in a pedagogical theory that joining First World War primary sources with contextualization is valuable for multiple audiences, whether academic researchers, students, educators, or casual visitors to the site. At its core, the project is both public and educational. Only five months after the site went live, Gettysburg College students were accessing Peirs' letters digitally for class assignments. Through the story of H.J.C. Peirs, students gain a more personal understanding of the way the First World War progressed, how conduct of the war evolved over time, and how soldiers adapted to their environment in the trenches.



Jack Peirs was a British officer in the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment. For three years, Peirs served on the western front, fighting in every major campaign waged by the British Army from 1915 to 1918. During the war, Peirs rose in rank from Lieutenant to Lieutenant-Colonel and he was decorated with Distinguished Service Order (two bars) and named a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George at the King's Birthday Honours in 1919.

### The Staff

Current	Past Research Assistants
Dr. Ian Isherwood, Assistant Professor	Abigail Winston (2018-2019)
Amy Lucadamo, College Archivist	Jesse Campana (2018)
R.C. Miessler, Systems Librarian	Meghan O'Donnell (2016-2018)
Jenna Fleming, Content Consultant	Melanie Fernandes (2016-2017)
Benjamin Roy, Digital Scholarship Fellow	Jenna Fleming (2014-2016)
Elizabeth Hobbs, Research Assistant	Kevin Lavery (2014-2016)
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Special thanks to: Nic Dracopoli, Diane Zorich, Marco Dracopoli, Jack Ryan, Carolyn Sautter, Robin Wagner, Jim Taub



### Mapping Innovations

Using historic trench maps and photographs, the battalion diary, and data gleaned from the site visit, we created an interactive map that tracks the opening of the German Spring Offensive and the action encountered by Peirs and the 8<sup>th</sup> Queens on March 21-22, 1918.



### Battlefield to Battlefield: Field Research in France and Live Outreach to the U.S.

Our trip was planned to coincide with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the defense of the small French town of Le Verguier by Peirs' Battalion in March 1918. The town was in the direct line of advance of the 1918 German Spring Offensive. Although ultimately a defeat for the British, the defense of the town was a defining event for the men of The Queen's, so much so that it was selected for a monument to the entire 24<sup>th</sup> Division. For our team days in Le Verguier combined active, on the ground historical research with digital outreach in an entirely new way. We did a real-time, digital battlefield walk broadcast to our followers to coincide with an important event Peirs lived through during the war.

Using Facebook Live and Skype sessions, the team in France gave presentations to two classes of Gettysburg College students. The students were provided archival material from the Peirs collection to interact with before and after the sessions. In Gettysburg, a team member guided students through the online maps and made connections to the physical letters and photographs. In France, students exhibited the terrain, positions of companies around the town, and the flow of the battle.

