

# 1915 Keystone's Phony War

by Ralph Reiley

In August 1914, the European powers rushed into war with bands playing and soldiers singing as they marched to battle. It was the first time that millions of men were mobilized and sent to war. By the time it ended in 1918, it was difficult to tell the difference between victory and defeat. When the war started in August, each nation was convinced that God was on their side, victory would be swift, and the troops would be home before Christmas. Christmas came and went, as did New Year's Day 1915. While the war showed no sign of ending, it was still believed that just one more big push would break the enemy's resolve, and victory would then be complete, if not as swift as anticipated. Until that time, there was money to be made selling photos of the largest war in history. In the USA, Keystone and Underwood & Underwood began work on putting out war views for sale.

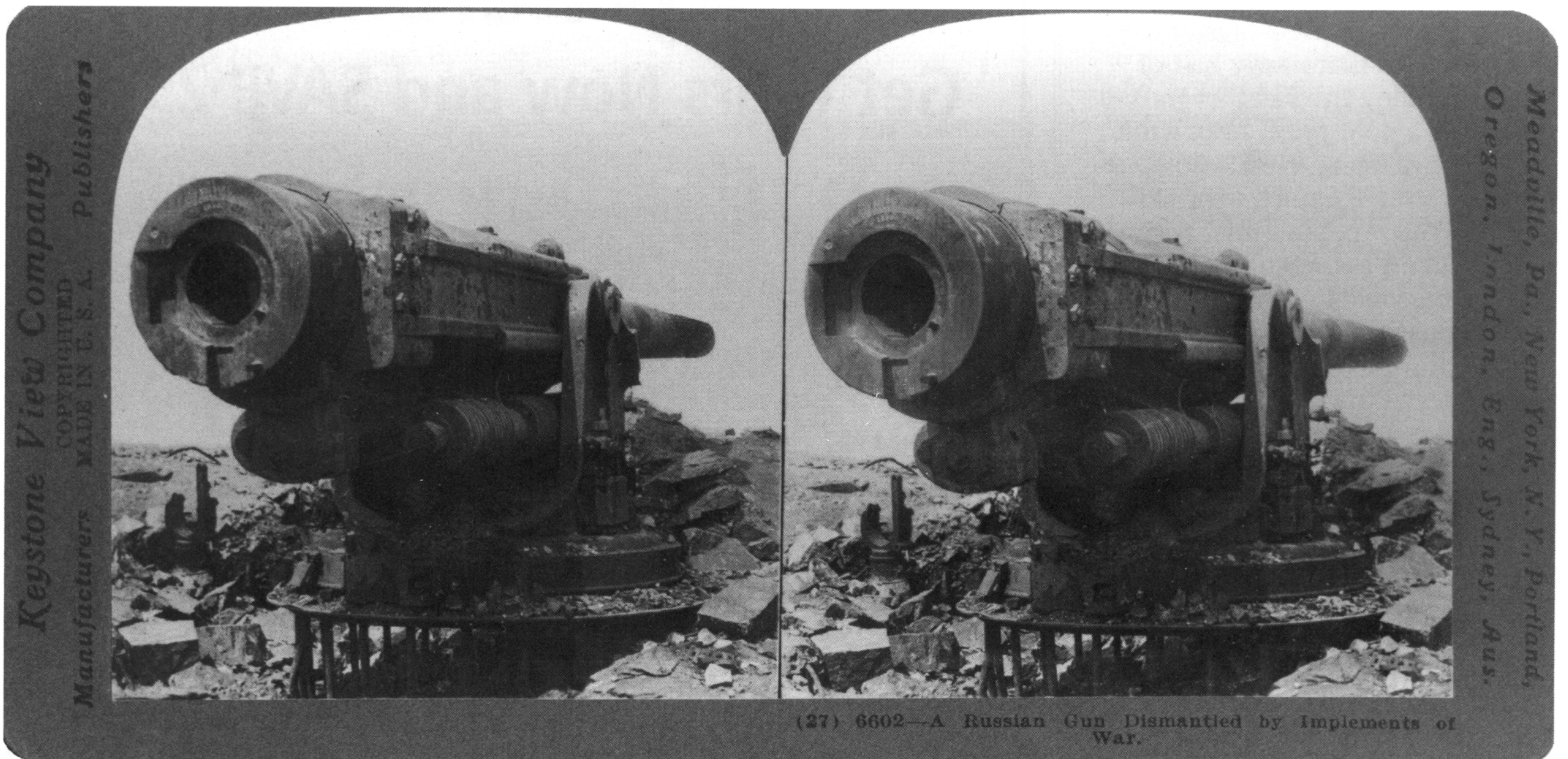
Every war from the American Civil War to the Balkan War in 1913 had been documented with stereoviews. Photos sold very well while the war was in progress. Interest in buying photos ended as soon as the war was over. It is understandable why Underwood, as well as Keystone, would rush to get sets of war views published as soon as possible, as the war was expected to end at any time. Underwood had an advantage over Keystone. They had offices in England, close to the war, and they had a photographer, Albert K. Hibbard, on the European mainland when the war broke out.

The first Underwood set had one hundred views of Belgian and British soldiers in Belgium, before the country was overrun by the Germans. There were views of the French army

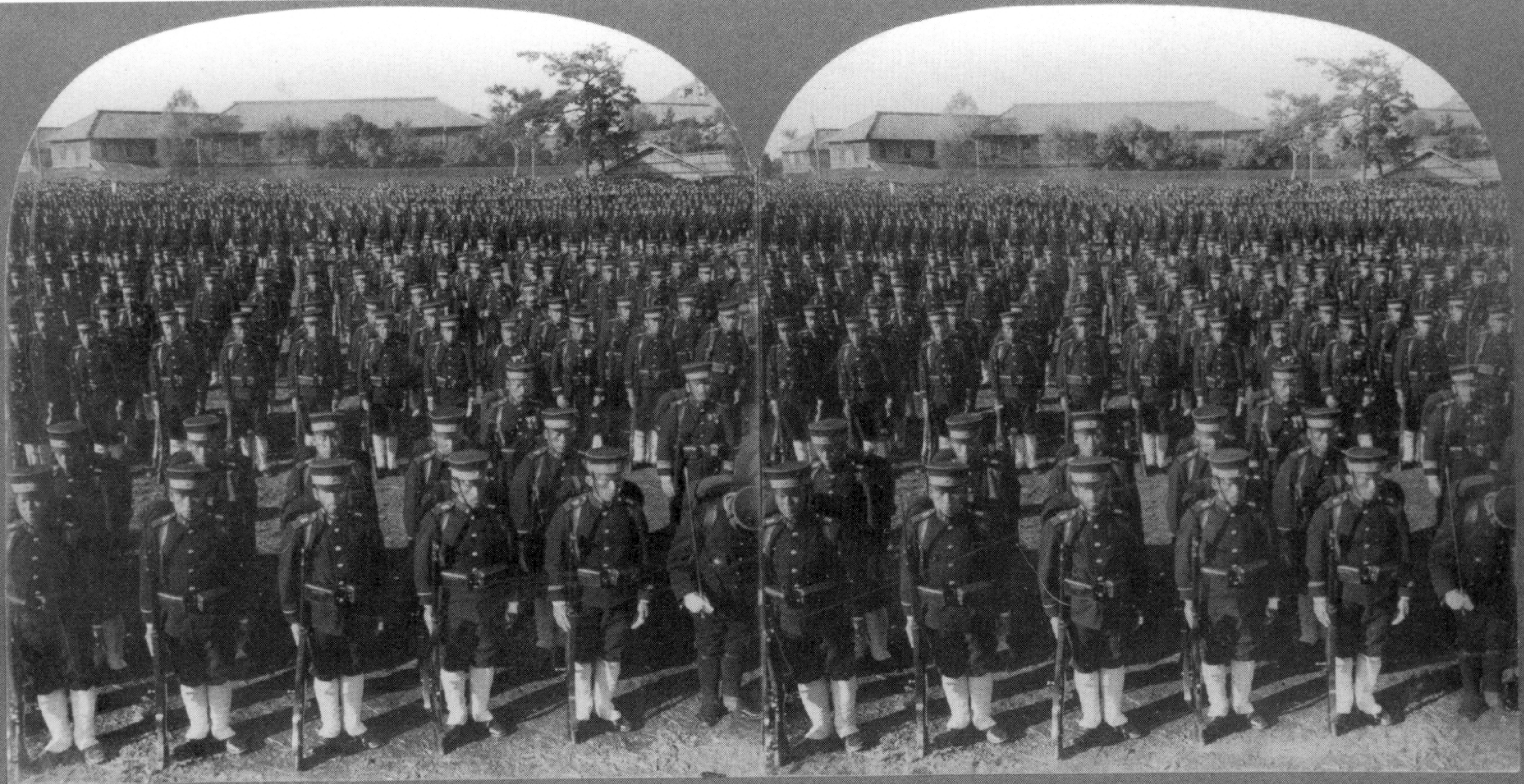
just before the Battle of the Marne. There were also a few photos of the German and Austrian army on the Eastern Front acquired from German sources. Underwood published its first set of war views in early 1915. The set was very tame, compared to what was really going on at the front line. In the photos the troops are well fed, clean, and very cheerful. All of the photos were taken well behind the front lines. No front line views, or views of dead soldiers were allowed.

Keystone, not to be outdone, or pass up a quick buck, quickly followed Underwood with a set of war views. The first set had thirty views in it, and it is a very unique set of war views. There are photos of soldiers, battle ships, wrecked artillery, fortresses, and places where the

No. 6602, "A Russian gun dismantled by implements of war." This Russian gun was part of the Port Arthur harbor defense, destroyed during the Japanese bombardment in 1905. (No. 27 in the set.)



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(14) 14797—Germany's Dreaded Foe in the East.

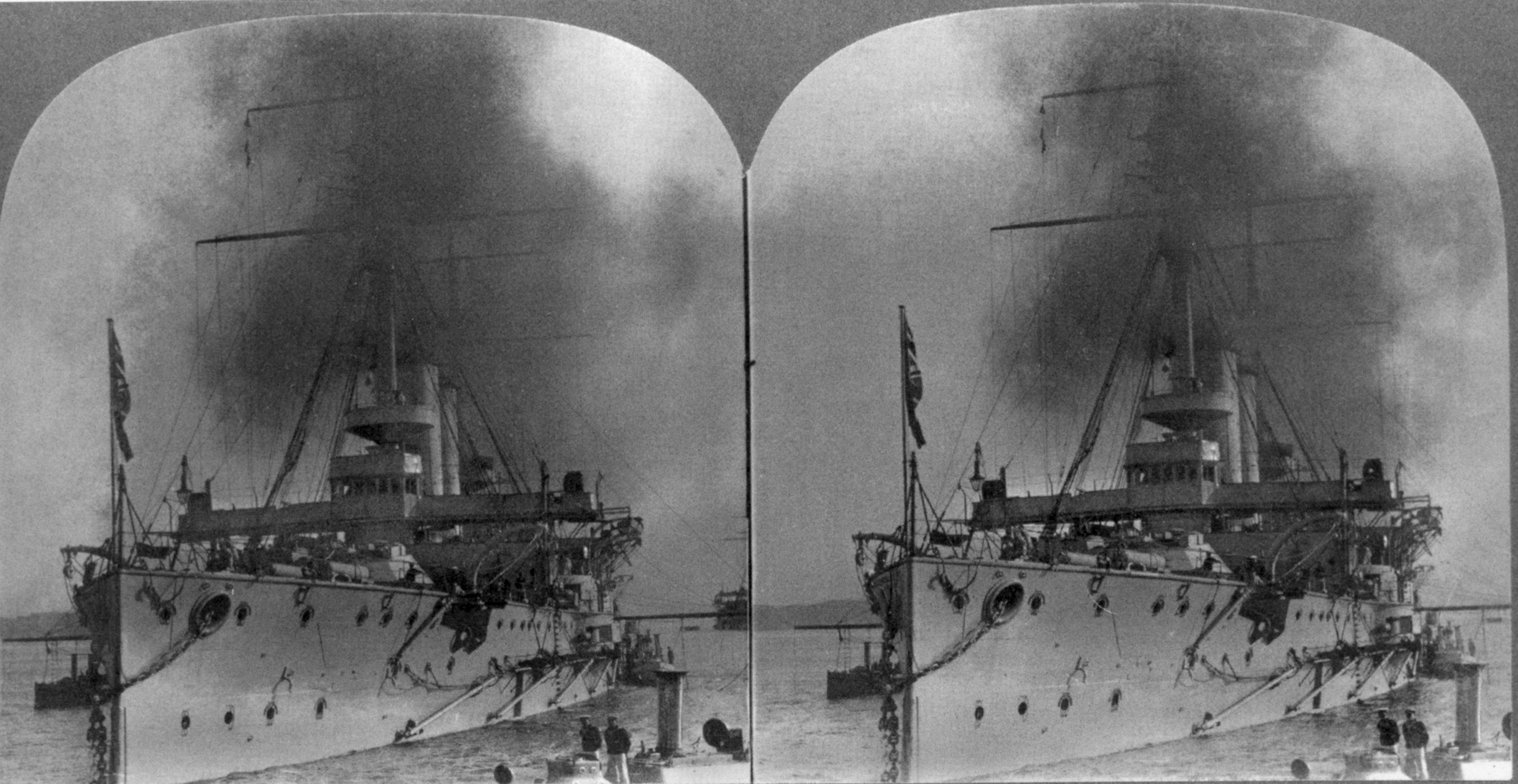
newspapers reported huge battles were taking place. There were photos of medieval churches just prior to their destruction. There are photos of cities, just about to be invaded by the Germans. There is even a photo of where a German spy was executed. The only problem with the photos is that all of them were taken before

No. 14797, "Germany's dreaded foe in the east." Shortly after war in Europe started, the Japanese laid siege to the German colony in China, in the Kiautschou Bay region, called Deutsch-Kiautschou. The Germans put up a strong defense, but surrendered before the end of 1915 after food and ammunition ran out. The main city was Tsingtau, and the brewery there is still in operation where a good German lager is made. This was taken in Tokyo in 1905, during a birthday celebration for the Japanese Emperor. It was originally an H.C. White photo, one of their Russo-Japanese war views. In 1915, H.C. White went out of business and Keystone bought their negatives. The photo was used through 1920. (No. 14 in the set.)

No. 16259, "The 'Indomitable', an English battleship which has left its mark of destruction on German ships." The Indomitable did leave a mark of destruction on German ships, but this is actually the HMS Russel, photographed in 1908 at the Quebec Tercentenary Celebration. This image was used in all of the Keystone war view sets, as the Indomitable. The Indomitable was also in Canada in 1908, and there is a stereo of it in SW Vol. 34 No. 2. The HMS Indomitable was a modern battlecruiser built in 1907. The HMS Russel was a pre-dreadnaught battleship, obsolete after 1906. It served until April 27, 1916, when it struck a mine off Malta and sank with 27 officers and 98 sailors lost out of the 720 man crew. (No. 19 in the set.)

1910. Some were taken before 1900! It is one of the best, or worst, examples of re-using stock photos with new captions I have ever seen. P. T. Barnum would have been proud of the effort of squeezing another nickel out of old stock photos. Each view has text on the back with a detailed story about the photo. While some

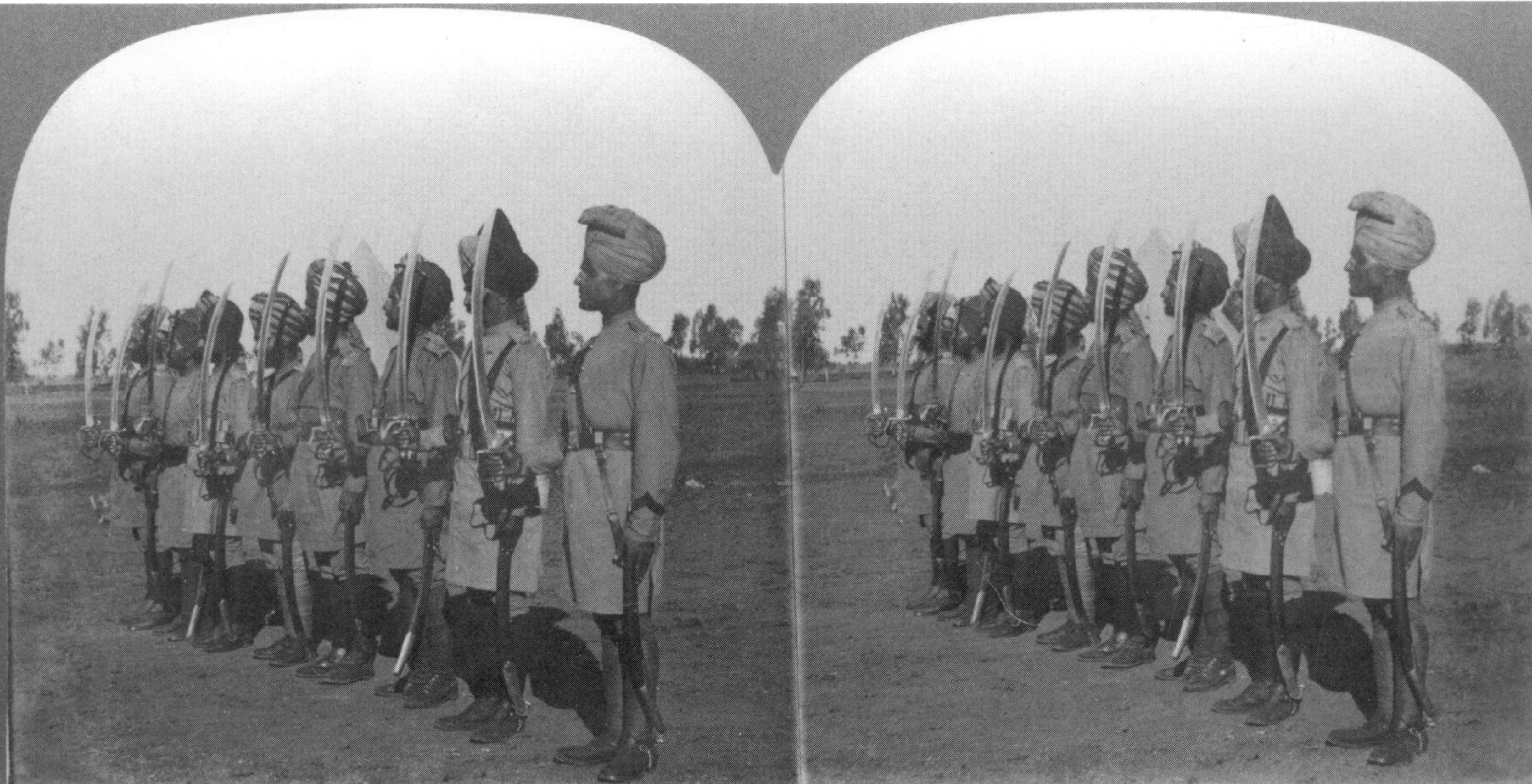
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(19) 16259—The "Indomitable"—An English Battleship Which Has Left Its Mark of Destruction on German Ships.

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(13) 11833—Indian Soldiers With Drawn Swords—30,000 of These Were on the English Battle Line in France.

of the text is factual, most of it is an exercise in creative writing.

The photos of soldiers were taken during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 or the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, not in France as implied. There are photos of some battleships, which in 1915 were still on active service, except for the ones that had been lost in action. The photos of ships were taken at Port Arthur, China, in 1904, or in Canada, in 1908, during the Tercentenary of Quebec, Canada's first national military pageant

No. 11833, "Indian soldiers with drawn swords - 30,000 of these were on the English battle line in France." There was a force of 30,000 Indian colonial troops in France, but these men were in China, near Round House, Tien-Tsin during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. (No. 13 in the set.)

(see SW Vol. 34 No. 2). All the views have been given exciting new captions, making them seem relevant to the current event in progress in 1915. The most blatant are the travel views given captions and text on the back making them appear to be taken just before some major war action was to take place. One recycled view is the

Tower of London, indicating that a German spy had just been executed there. At least they didn't write that you could see the spy awaiting his fate in the window of his prison cell, in the third tower from the left.

The set of views came in a simple unmarked black box, as did all Keystone war views until 1917. When the USA entered the war the boxes became more ornate. The 1915 set I have was not complete when I got it, and without its box. I have replaced

No. 1128, "German Sailors sending their last good-bye's to their sweethearts." That is probably what they are doing, but these are German See-Batallione troops (German Marines), and they are bound for China in 1900, for the Boxer Rebellion. There are some sailors, in white, in background. (No. 7 in the set.)

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(7) 11268—German Sailors Sending Their Last Good-bye's to Their Sweethearts.



(26) 10137—"Oudeburg"—Castle of the Duke of Flanders—  
A Stronghold Founded in 868, Again Facing War Scenes  
Many Centuries Later, Ghent, Belgium.

No. 10137, "Oudeburg, Castle of the Duke of Flanders, a stronghold founded in 868, again facing war scenes many centuries later, Ghent, Belgium." I am pretty sure that the medieval fortress played no part in slowing the German advance through Belgium. (No. 26 in the set.)

the correct photos that were missing, and all but one are from the 1915-1916 period, although some are not numbered. The views are numbered from (1) to (30) on the front. I did not pay a lot of money for this incomplete set. I did not pay a lot of money for the replacement views, although it did take some time to acquire the proper 1915-1916 versions, and I still have one to go. I doubt that there are many collectors who would have any interest in this

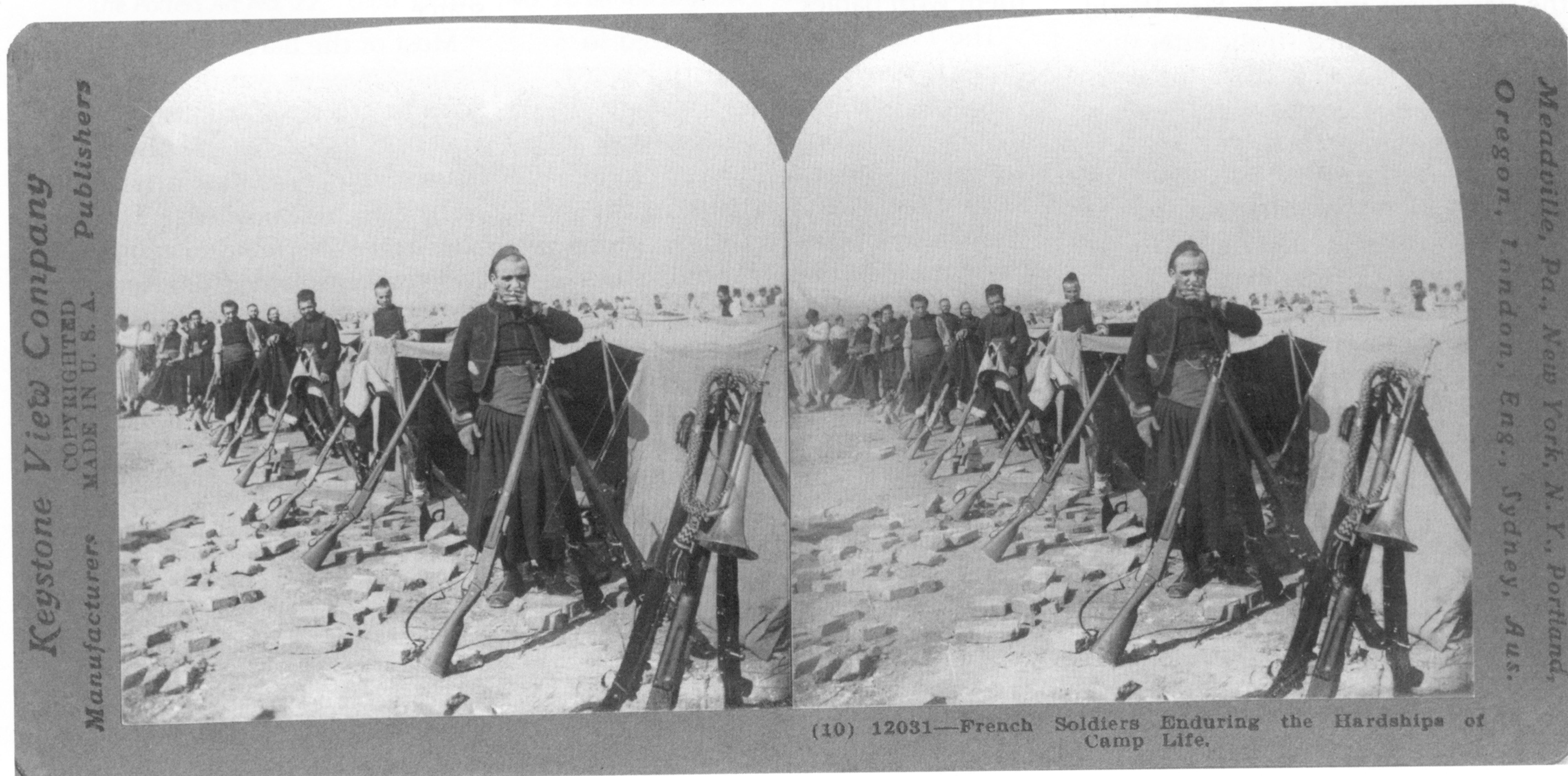
set of fabricated war views, but it remains one of my favorites, because it is a total fabrication. I also enjoy *Plan 9 From Outer Space* and *Robot Monster*, arguably two of the worst movies ever made, so go figure.

In 1916 Keystone put out a revised set of war views, with actual views of the war. Since the war kept going, with no end in sight, Keystone

invested in a number of stereoviews from French, British and German sources, possibly as many as 100 negatives. The 1916 set was a great improvement over the 1915 set, although some pre-war stock views remained in the set. I believe that Keystone also sold custom sets of war views at this time, as a number of views exist from this period that were never a part of a standard set of war views.

After the USA entered the war in 1917, the war view set focused on

No. 12031, "French soldiers enduring the hardships of camp life." In 1901 this same view carried the caption, "French soldiers in camp near Round House, Tien-Tsin, China 1900." The troops are Zouaves, French colonial troops from North Africa. (No. 10 in the set.)



(10) 12031—French Soldiers Enduring the Hardships of Camp Life.

Sequence	Image Number	Title	Source
1	15625	Sarajevo from Porch of New Town Hall, Bosnia, Austria-Hungary—Scene of Murder of Crown Prince Which Started the Flame that Engulfed all Europe	Travel view
2	10354	The Ruling Monarchs in Times of Peace	1909 Berlin
3	6131	The Reichstags-Gebäude, Berlin, Where Germany Appropriates Her Millions for War	Travel view
4	10370	German Soldiers Listening to an Address by the Kaiser	1900 Boxer Rebellion
5	10369	A Group of German Officers	1900 Boxer Rebellion
6	10332	The Cuirassier Guards Parading the Streets of Berlin, A Sight Which Calls Forth the Patriotism of Every German Heart	1901 Berlin
7	11268	German Sailors Sending Their Last Good-bye's to Their Sweethearts	1900 Boxer Rebellion
8	14506	Part of the Czar's Millions	1904 Russo-Japanese War
9	14520	Russian Naval Infantry Ready to Embark	1904 Russo-Japanese War
10	12031	French Soldiers Enduring the Hardships of Camp Life	1900 Boxer Rebellion
11	11374	English Cavalry Horses Ready for the Front	1902 London
12	11307	Third Scots Guards	1908 Canada
13	11833	Indian Soldiers with Drawn Swords—30,000 of These Were on the English Battle Line in France	1900 Boxer Rebellion
14	14797	Germany's Dreaded Foe in the East	1905 Russo-Japanese War
15	14504	Russian Pacific Fleet	1904 Russo-Japanese War
16	11774	French Fleet in Their Mediterranean Stronghold, Villefranche, France	Unkown
17	16049	French Battleship at Close Range	1908 Canada
18	16090	One of the Battleships With Which the English Hope to Bottle up Germany	1908 Canada
19	16259	The "Indomitable"—An English Battleship Which Has Left Its Mark of Destruction on German Ships	1908 Canada
20	6653	Scene of First Mobilization Which Precipitated the European War	Travel view
21	10110	An Impregnable Belgium Fortress—Fortress and Bridge at Dinant, Belgium	Travel view
22	10124	The Palace of the Court of Justice, Now Occupied by German Forces, Liege, Belgium	Travel view
23	10120	Cathedral of St. Rombold, Showing Huge Clock on Tower, Now Completely Destroyed, Malines, Belgium	Travel view
24	10122	Church of Notre Dame, Interior, Before It Was Destroyed by Shells, Malines, Belgium	Travel view
25	10119	The Town Hall—the Only Building of Note left Standing in Louvain, Belgium	Travel view
26	10137	"Oudeburg"—Castle of the Duke of Flanders—A Stronghold Founded in 868, Again Facing War Scenes Many Centuries Later, Ghent, Belgium	Travel view
27	6602	A Russian Gun Dismantled by Implements of War	1905 Russo-Japanese War
28	15619	Old Venetian Fort Commanding the Sea, Ragusa, Dalmatia, Austria Hungary	Travel view
29	2111	Tower of London—After 200 Years Again the Scene of Capital Punishment in the Execution of a German Spy	Travel view
30	3104	Notre Dame—The World Renowned Cathedral of Paris, France, Whose Tower was Wrecked by a Bomb From a German Dirigible	Travel view

*A list of views in the original 1915 Keystone World War One set, compiled by Robert Boyd.*

the American war effort, and the photo captions and back text were re-written with a patriotic/Jingoistic tone, and some anti-German propaganda was added. Each year the Keystone sets were updated with new images, and the sets got larger. Unlike most wars during the age of the stereoview, interest in First World War views remained strong after the Armistice on Nov. 11, 1918. Interest continued to be strong after the Versailles Treaty in 1921. Interest remained strong until 1929, when the world economy collapsed and there were few who had money to spare on non-essential items.

In 1921, after acquiring all of Underwood's negatives, the set was expanded to 300 views and most, but not all, pre-war views were retired. The pre-war views that remained generally had a superior 3-D effect. In 1923 the war view set took on a more educational or documentary style in keeping with Keystone's marketing to schools and libraries. From 1919 to 1923, there was a loose "story" implied in the war views about the American involvement. The story begins with

Americans troops saying goodbye to wives and girlfriends as they left for France. The last view of the set ended the story when the troops got back home and were reunited with their wives and girlfriends, some of them with babies.

The 1923 set was reorganized so that the views were more or less in chronological order, and it came with a guide book with a massive amount of reference material in it. Some effort went into putting the views into a historic context, something none of the other publishers ever did. The 1923 set sold very well up to 1929, when the Great Depression set in. In 1932, a 400 view set was produced that is probably the single best set of war views ever published. It is a comprehensive set of views, all the major war fronts are covered, and most of the wartime propaganda against Germany had been edited out. By 1930, photos were no longer under military censorship, most of the publishers had gone out of business, and had sold Keystone their negatives. Most of the

views are fairly tame, but there are some that show the grim reality of modern war. Due to the high cost of this set during the Depression and a loss of interest in the war, sales were slow, making the 1932 set of views scarce.

Most of the hard research on Keystone war views was done by Robert Boyd for his book, published in 2002. The 1915 list of views is also by Robert Boyd, who has been very generous with his knowledge. His book, *The Great War Through Keystone Stereographs*, is available from Amazon, Trafford Publishing, and through his website. The book is an excellent reference for anyone collecting Keystone war views. His website can be found at: <http://greatwarin3d.org/Home.htm> where one can find a wealth of information on Keystone and the major publishers of World War One stereoviews. 📷📷