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## History of Military Cartography

5th International Symposium of the ICA  
Commission on the History of Cartography,  
2014

 Springer

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## Preface

This volume comprises most of the research papers presented at the 5th International Symposium of the ICA Commission on the History of Cartography which took place at Ghent University in Ghent, Belgium, on 2–5 December, 2014. As such it is the third volume in a series which has been made possible through the partnership between the International Cartographic Association (ICA) and the international publishing house of Springer-Verlag.

The history of cartography covers a vast field of knowledge and includes all maps and map-like graphics made by humankind since prehistoric times. Map compilation and map-use today are, however, seldom dependent on maps which were produced before early modern times. With this in mind, the ICA Commission decided to concentrate on the history of cartography since the Enlightenment and, more specifically, on cartographic developments during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The 5th International Symposium of the ICA Commission on the History of Cartography had as its general theme “Cartography in Times of War and Peace”. The Symposium was jointly organised by the ICA Commission on the History of Cartography, the ICA Commission on Map Production and Geo-Business, and the Brussels Map Circle (BMC) in collaboration with the Department of Geography of Ghent University, and the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO). The various paper sessions were held at Ghent University’s conference centre “Het Pand”.

The main focus of the Symposium was on Military Cartography in commemoration of the First World War (1914–1918), also known as the ‘Great War’. The ICA Commission acknowledged the fact that the First World War was the world’s first truly global conflict as the battle raged not just in the trenches of the Western Front, but also in Africa, in the Middle East, and in Asia, and that military maps and mapping played a decisive role in all these areas. With 2014 being the centenary of the outbreak of the War, and the conference venue in Ghent situated so close to the actual war zone of 1914–1918, contributions on military cartography during World War I were encouraged. The Symposium was, however, also open to contributions on military mapping executed in various parts of the world before and after World War I.

# Image of Belgium in WWI Through Maps

Wouter Bracke

**Abstract** This contribution focuses on maps of Belgium produced in and outside the country during WWI and intended for the larger public. They have recently been digitized by the Royal library of Belgium and are readily accessible through the Europeana website.

During WWI, the press was very much censored by the occupying forces. Maps are mentioned nowhere in official publications related to censorship, and consequently little or nothing has been written on their production or diffusion in Belgium at the time. Nonetheless, they constituted important sources of information, together with newspapers and magazines. This contribution discusses some examples of these maps against the background of what is known about the Germans' censorship policy in occupied Belgium.

## 1 "Europeana Collections 1914–1918"

From 2011 to 2014 the Royal Library of Belgium participated in a European project, called Europeana Collections 1914–1918 (<http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en>). Directed by the State Library of Berlin, the project aimed at digitizing about 400,000 documents related to WWI present in national and university libraries as well as private collections in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Serbia and the United Kingdom, thus making them available to a large public through the Europeana website. The project has created an impressive virtual cross boundary collection of WWI realia, including books, newspapers, trench journals, music sheets, children's literature, photographs, posters, pamphlets, propaganda leaflets, original art, religious works, medals, coins, and maps. It permits new interpretations of history that go beyond traditional military history. In this paper we will illustrate the effect of censorship, established from the first months of the occupation of Belgium onwards, on the production and distribution of war related maps in the country. Although we will take the main episodes of the war in Belgium

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as a thread, our interest goes not so much towards the maps' representation of the different stages of the war, but to the maps as a whole as a historical document. The maps we will discuss here are not the ones used by the officers in charge of the war, but those which were actually made for or sold to the larger public.

In the framework of the Europeana project, the Royal Library of Belgium digitized more than 15,000 items, amongst which about 600 map items, from various origins and with different topics: English, German, French and Belgian maps; military maps, news maps, censored maps and propaganda maps. They represent more than 20% of the total amount of the about 2000 cartographic items integrated in the project, of which a little more than 400 concern the western front. It is obvious from these figures that a selection has been made by the partners: for instance, the Imperial War Museum in London alone has approximately 1750 maps related to the Western front, out of a total of 34,000 maps in its possession. The selection was based on the following criteria: uniqueness of the documents, fragile state, historical and cultural relevance, chronology (they had to be made during the war) and provenance (they had to be made in the provider's historic territory). Sometimes though, exceptions to these rules were allowed.

## 2 The First Years of the War

At the outbreak of the war, the German Army in the West consisted of seven field armies, comprising over 80% of the German armed forces. On the 4th of August 1914, the German army under the command of generals Alexander von Kluck and Karl von Bülow invaded Belgium. Luxemburg had rendered 2 days before. There was some unexpected resistance around Liège, but the city quickly fell to the Germans under the direction of Erich Ludendorff on the 7th of August. Its 12 forts would hold from the 12th till the 16th of the same month. Two days later, the Belgian army left for Antwerp, after waiting in vain for the French and the British behind the Gete river, on the border between the provinces of Brabant and Liège. Brussels fell on August 20th, Namur on August 24th. Speed was important for the Germans who wanted to arrive in Paris as soon as possible. Not so much Liège, as popular tradition has it, but Antwerp impeded the Germans to quickly move southwards. Although the German army bypassed Antwerp, the city remained a threat to their rear flank, so five or six divisions under the command of General Van Beseler had to be sent north to attack the city. Antwerp eventually fell on October 10th (De Schaepdrijver 2005, pp. 69–97)

At the time of the invasion, the *Institut cartographique militaire* had followed the army to Antwerp, abandoning the printing presses in the Abbaye de la Cambre in Brussels (Seligmann 1921, p. 3). They would be used by the occupying forces for their cartographic production of the country. After the withdrawal of the Belgian government, the Institute moved from Antwerp to England where it was hosted at the War Office and would supply the Belgian and Allied forces (Southampton and Calais) with the necessary maps. Therefore, no official war maps were produced in

Belgium during the war, except for those produced by the occupying forces. Besides the official production by the Germans, maps were made and sold by private editors or companies.

After the fall of Antwerp, the Belgian army withdrew behind the line Nieuwpoort-Diksmuide, where the German forces made their final breakthrough attempt during the First Battle of Ypres (October 19th—November 22nd). By the end of November the front line was as it would remain for the next 3 years thanks to the flooding of the Yser plain. The entire territory east of the dike of the rail way was inundated, a brilliant idea, not so much stemming from the army officials but thought up by local citizens.

On the map by von Paasche and Luz of Stuttgart from 1917 (see Fig. 1), the flooded area is clearly indicated (*überschwemmungsgebiet* in German). The map is a later print of the one published in 1916. The text box in the upper right corner states that, following the decree on the press issued by the commander in charge of the Eastern front, the map could be diffused in the area under his command. This refers to the decree signed by von Hindenburg of 5 December 1915/28 February 1916, which permitted the diffusion in Ober-Ost of maps published in Germany. The censorship clearly has nothing to do with Belgium as the map was destined for the Eastern rather than the Western front. How, then, did the map arrive in Belgium, and in the Royal library? Was it distributed in Belgium during WWI and, if so, to whom? The copy of the Royal library was registered only in 1922, but it must have entered the library years before, as the inventory states that it came from the provisional inventory made during the war. Other maps we will discuss came from this same provisional source. So, if the map entered the library during the war, this means it must have been distributed in Belgium at the time. However, we found no indication of the map having passed the Belgian censorship.

The case of the map printed in Belgium shown in Fig. 2, is quite different with respect to censorship. The map covers more or less the same area between Nieuwpoort and Ypres, but on a larger scale. It clearly shows the flat open country of the Yser, with its fragile hydraulic equilibrium, which was maintained thanks to an ingenious system of canals, waterworks, reservoirs and thousands of small branches and ditches. No area was easier to flood than this one. In 1600 its inundation had impeded Maurits of Nassau from continuing his siege of the city of Nieuwpoort. In 1914 Emeric Feys, a lawyer from Furnes, who was also a historian and local folklore specialist, informed the military headquarters of this possibility. On October 28 the locks at Furnes were opened with the assistance of lockkeeper Karel Cogge and the day after, Hendrik Geeraert opened those of the Canal du Nord. For three nights in a row, the same ritual would be repeated (de Schaepdrijver 2005, p. 100). Despite its detail, the map does not show anything of the flooding, nor does it give any other information on the war. This is quite strange as the title of the map states it is a war map, describing the entire western front in 8 maps (of which this sheet is the first). In the map's lower right corner, following the map's generic title, a mark of censorship was added. Censorship is probably the reason for the absence of any war related information on the map. The map was registered in the library's inventory on 5 February 1917, but once again, it must have entered the institute long before, as the



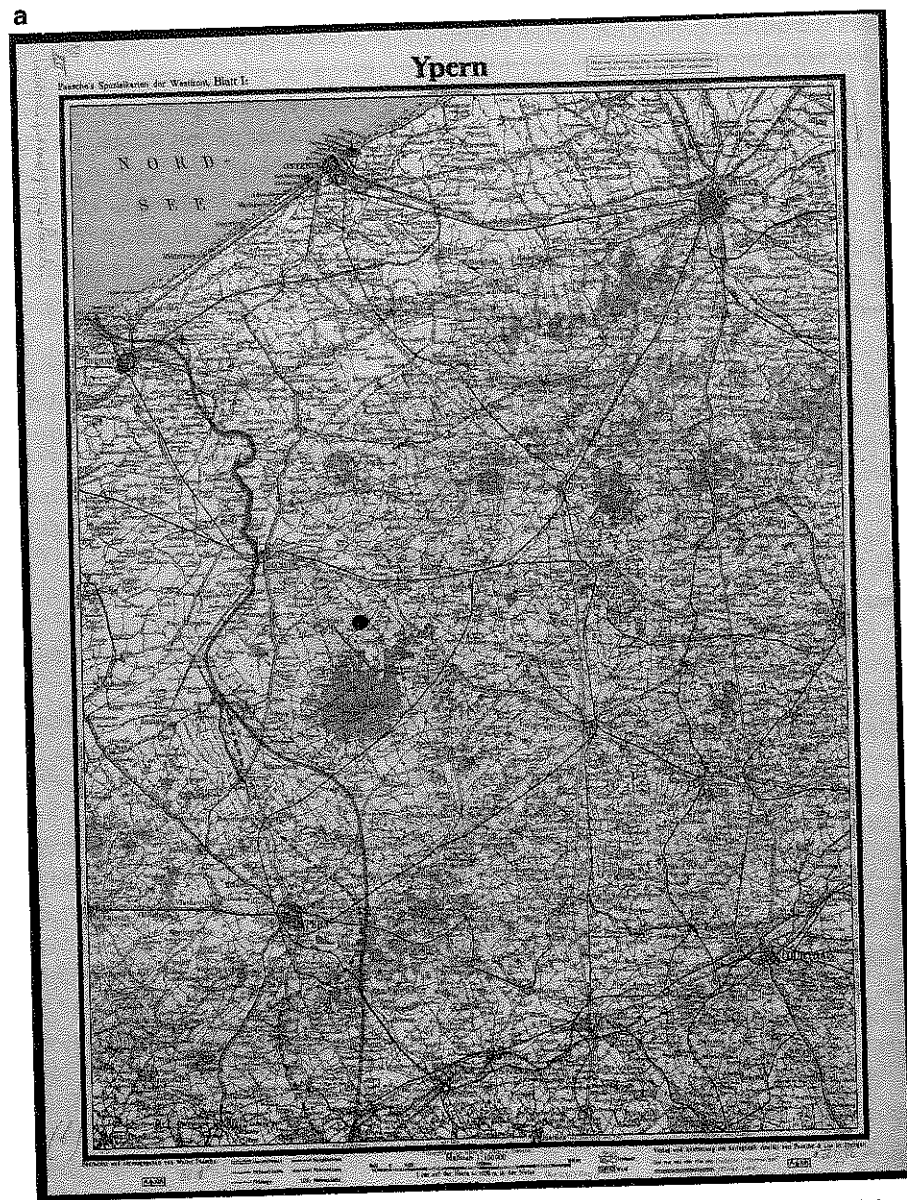


Fig. 1 Map of Ypres and surroundings, 1917. (IV 5.588, Courtesy of the Royal Library of Belgium)

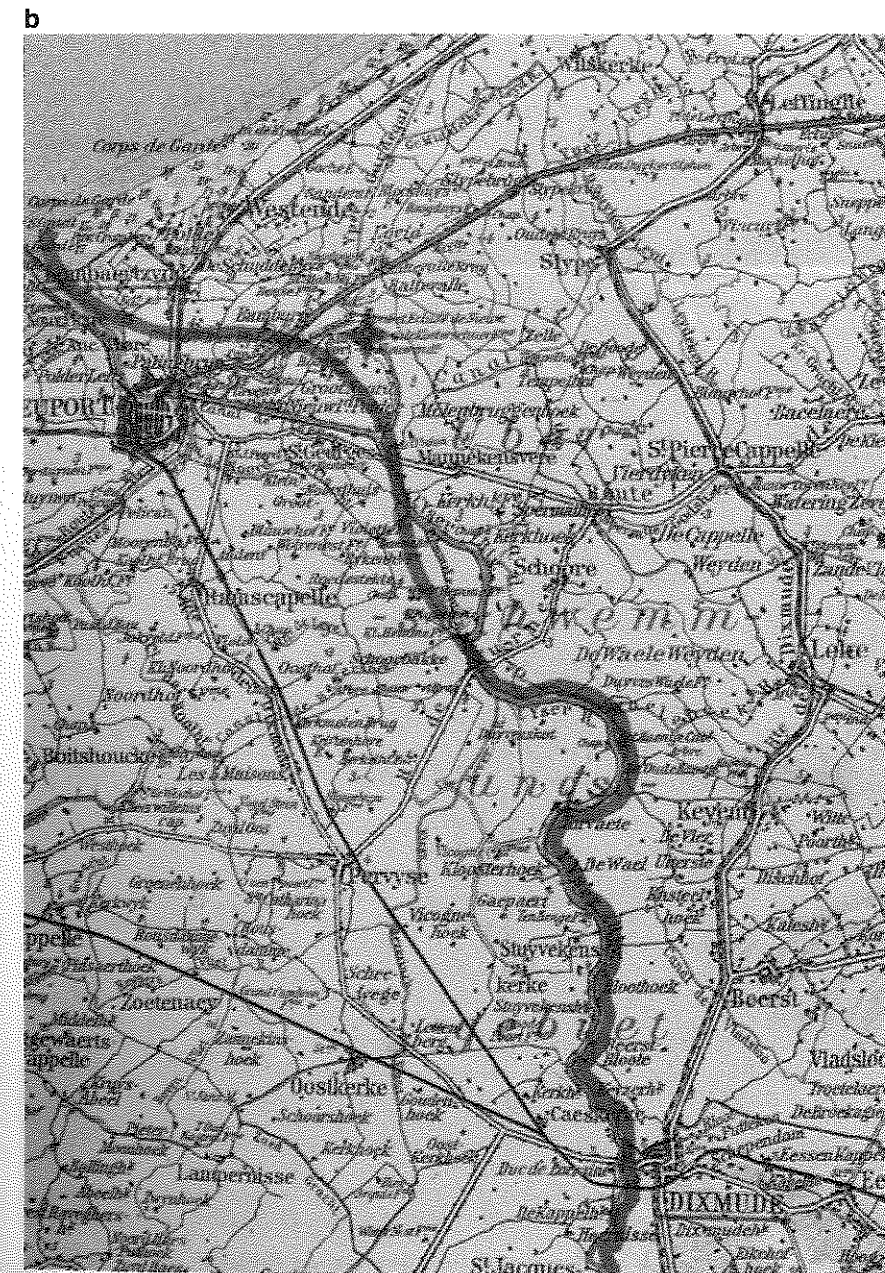


Fig. 1 (continued)





Fig. 2 *Le conflit mondial: le front occidental, l'Yser et la Bassée*, 1915. (IV 2.918, Courtesy of the Royal Library of Belgium)

inventory tells us it comes from the provisional inventory. In its description, a 1915 date has been added. We do not find the map in the *Bibliographie de Belgique* of that year, the national bibliography of publications on Belgium that had entered the library, probably because it was still provisionally inventoried. However, even if the map did not give any information on the ongoing war at the time, it does give us now, post factum, interesting details on map production in Belgium during WWI. The map was published in Brussels and Ghent, by Albert Sugg and Theo de Graeve respectively. Albert Sugg and Theo de Graeve are chiefly known as publishers and sellers of postcards. Postcards appeared at the end of the nineteenth century. As the *Histoire anecdotique de la guerre de 1914–1915* tells us, in the early twentieth century, they were sold in the streets, often together with maps (Nohain and Delay 1915, p. 68). Albert Sugg was of German origin. He moved from Ghent to Brussels, where he is listed as living in Schaarbeek (Rubensstraat, 23) on 4 June 1915. He would stay there until 1917 (Van Caeneghem-Schoone 2015a: s.v. A. Sugg). Theo De Graeve, from Ghent, had his print shop in the Burgstraat, 41, the address mentioned on the map. The place is said to have been occupied by the Germans, who would demolish the machinery at the end of the war. During the war the print shop also published cards of and for German soldiers (Van Caeneghem-Schoone 2015b: s.v. T. De Graeve). The map is thus a German controlled product as is confirmed by the mark of censorship.

Although in the first months of the war, during which the frontline at the Yser was stabilized, censorship was not yet generally established, in the autumn of 1914 most publishers of existing newspapers decided to stop their activities. An important number of new journals quickly arose, but only a few survived till the end of the year. With the decree of 13 October (regarding all kinds of prints, theatre and film), censorship was taken over from the military government by the civil administration. The work of this administration was however far from efficient and not guided by a uniform, centralized policy. All kinds of books, leaflets and maps could thus be published and distributed. The *Theâtre des opérations occidentales* by Henri Kumps-Robyn (see Fig. 3) bears no date, but in the Belgian bibliography of 1915 it is registered as a publication of 1914 (*Bibliographie de Belgique* 1915, p. 39). The map by Kumps is said to have been financed by the *Cercle philanthropique Les Sans-Souci* and sold for the benefit of the war victims. The map is an example of the various solidarity actions that spontaneously arose during these first months, amidst the general confusion that reigned in the country. The most important initiatives were without doubt, in Belgium, the creation by Emile Francqui of the *Société Générale* of what was to become the *Comité national de Secours et d'Alimentation* (the major problem being that of the resupplying), and on an international level, the installation of a Commission for Relief in Belgium under the direction of Herbert Hoover in London. These initiatives would be followed on a local level all over the world to collect money for Little Belgium.

The Belgian bibliography of 1915, the first edition with maps since the war, publishes two lists of maps, both containing 33 items. The first mainly contains maps of 1914 (29) of which 26 were published by Belgian editors; the second mainly contains maps of 1915 (29) of which only 10 were Belgian, the others being of German origin. Although the lists cannot be considered as being complete—we

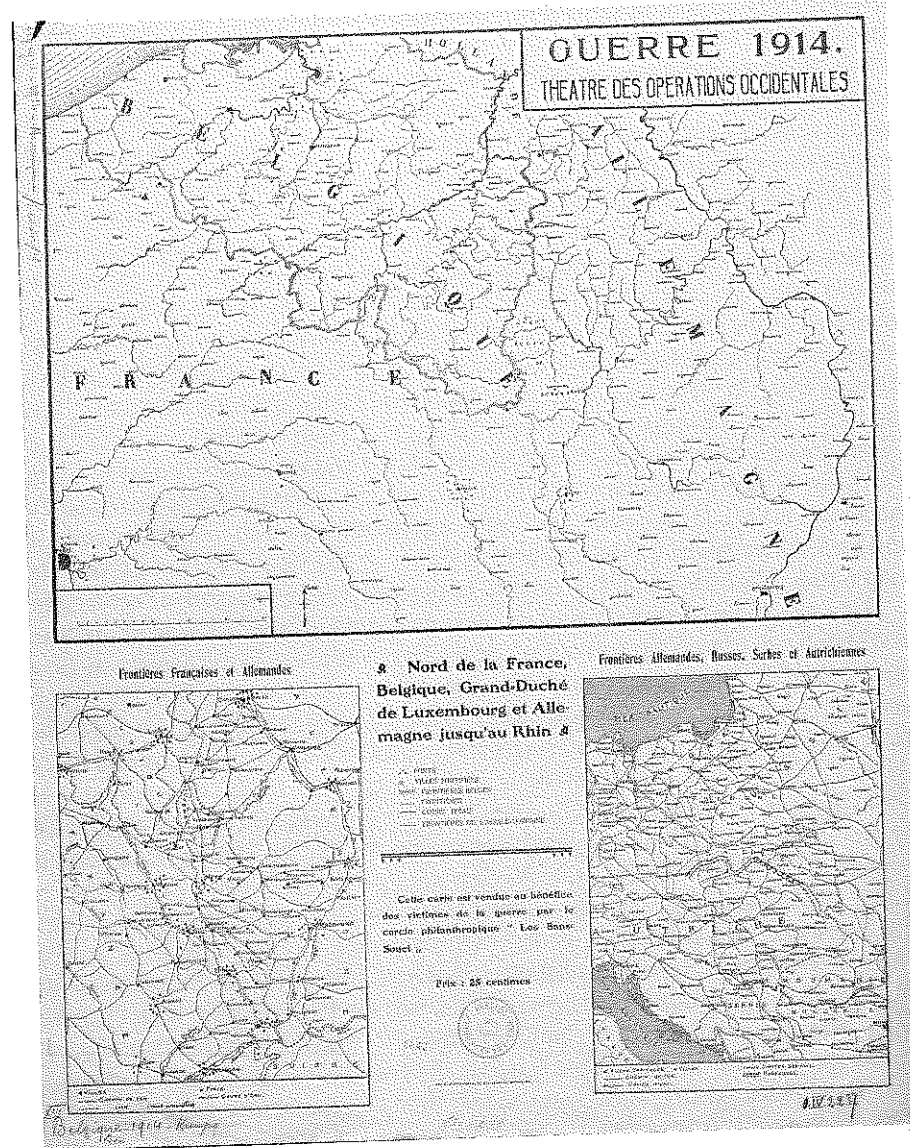


Fig. 3 *Guerre 1914. Théâtre des opérations occidentales*, 1914. (IV 2.237, Courtesy of the Royal Library of Belgium)

have seen that maps were entered in provisional inventories before being officially registered—they clearly indicate a shift from national to German publications. Censorship certainly constitutes one of the explanations for this evolution. If we then compare the books on the war which were published in the bibliographies of 1915 and 1917 (the latter lists no maps), we see an enormous decline in the number

of book publications: from 174 on a total of 808 items in 1915 to only 40 on a total of 920 items in 1917, most of which in German and clearly of propagandistic character. Again, censorship must have played a role in this evolution. In fact, during the first months of the war, numerous leaflets or booklets regarding the war were published, but their number diminished with the rise of circulation figures of the Belgian newspapers, as was already observed by the German administration in Belgium at the time (Amara and Roland 2004, p. 73).

In January 1915 a central control organ of the press (*Pressezentrale*) had been created and subsequently integrated in the political department of the General-Gouvernement in Belgium. The department was led by Oscar von der Lancken-Wakenitz and was responsible for more delicate political questions such as propaganda, censorship and religious and linguistic policies. The central control organ being divided in 5 sections, maps were treated by the last one, together with other images, post-cards and illustrated magazines (Amara and Roland 2004, p. 72). The principles of censorship were simple: information published in occupied Belgium could not contain military information to the disadvantage of Germany and its allies, could not give information concerning the actions of the Belgian government in exile and absolutely had to avoid publishing articles that would “maintain or strengthen the hatred of the population against Germany”. Finally, the Belgian population had to be convinced of the imminence of the German victory and had to be prepared for the solutions envisaged by the Germans for the future of Belgium (Amara and Roland 2004, p. 49; Boghaert-Vaché 1919, pp. 18–23). The application of these rules was entrusted to offices of censorship within the different editorial offices.

From 1915 onwards, maps for the Belgian market seem to suffer from censorship. A comparison between a newspaper map, a map published by a private company in Belgium and a foreign map can be illuminating in this respect. All three show the area around Gheluvelt, south east of Ypres, where in the First Battle of Ypres, the Germans had come closer than they ever would afterwards to breaking through Allied lines. The map published by *l’Echo de la presse internationale* in 1915 (see Fig. 4), a censored Belgian war paper (published in Brussels, rue du Canal) is said to have been explicitly made to offer its readers the possibility to follow the official news distributed by the occupying powers day by day, but it actually gives little detailed information. The same can be said of the map by René Dosseray, censored by the occupying forces in April 1916 as indicated on the lower left (see Fig. 5). The case of Nonnebossche near Gheluvelt can serve as an example. On 11 November 1914, the Allies (basically consisting of the British Expeditionary Forces) chased the Germans out of the woods here in a counter attack, thereby definitively repelling the German push. Notwithstanding its importance, Nonnebossche is missing on both maps. Dosseray’s map even offers an almost idyllic picture of the frontline.

The absence of Nonnebossche can be a mere accident, but the locality does appear on this Daily News map of 1915 (see Fig. 6, east of Ypres), a fairly idyllic picture as well (perhaps in order not to frighten people at home too much). It looks as if the name has been added, as are other names in the area about which there was so much to do



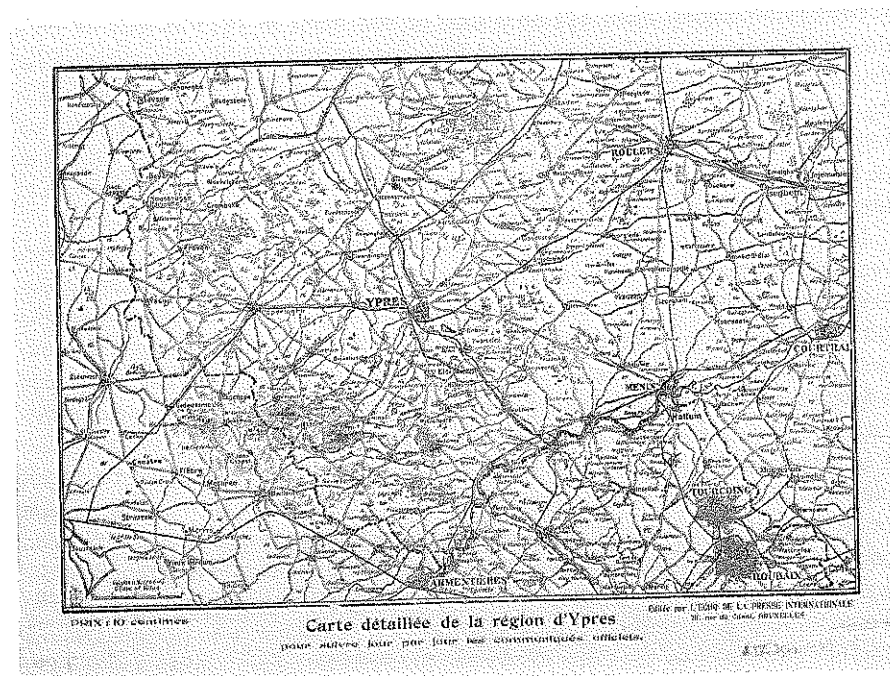


Fig. 4 *l'Echo de la presse internationale*, 1915. (IV 2.500, Courtesy of the Royal Library of Belgium)

at the time: Westhoek, Polygon Wood which played an important role in the Third Battle of Ypres (1917), Verlorenhoek, etc. For the English, Nonnebossche of course was an important event as they had won that battle. The map entered the Royal library only after the war. The inventory indicates it came from the war archives in London. It clearly was not on the Belgian market during WWI.

### 3 From 1916 Onwards

The second part of the war, from the end of 1916 onwards, was even more difficult for the Belgian people than the first part (de Schaepdrijver 2005, p. 213 ff.). Two different views on how Belgium should be governed divided the general government in Belgium under the direction of von Bissing (and after his death in April 1917 of von Falkenhausen) and the military party, i.e. Ludendorff and von Hindenburg. The first aimed at a long term strategy, using the *Flamenpolitik*, the special—preferential—treatment of the Flemish population in Belgium, to convince or rather to mentally prepare or condition the country to become part of Germany. The second group

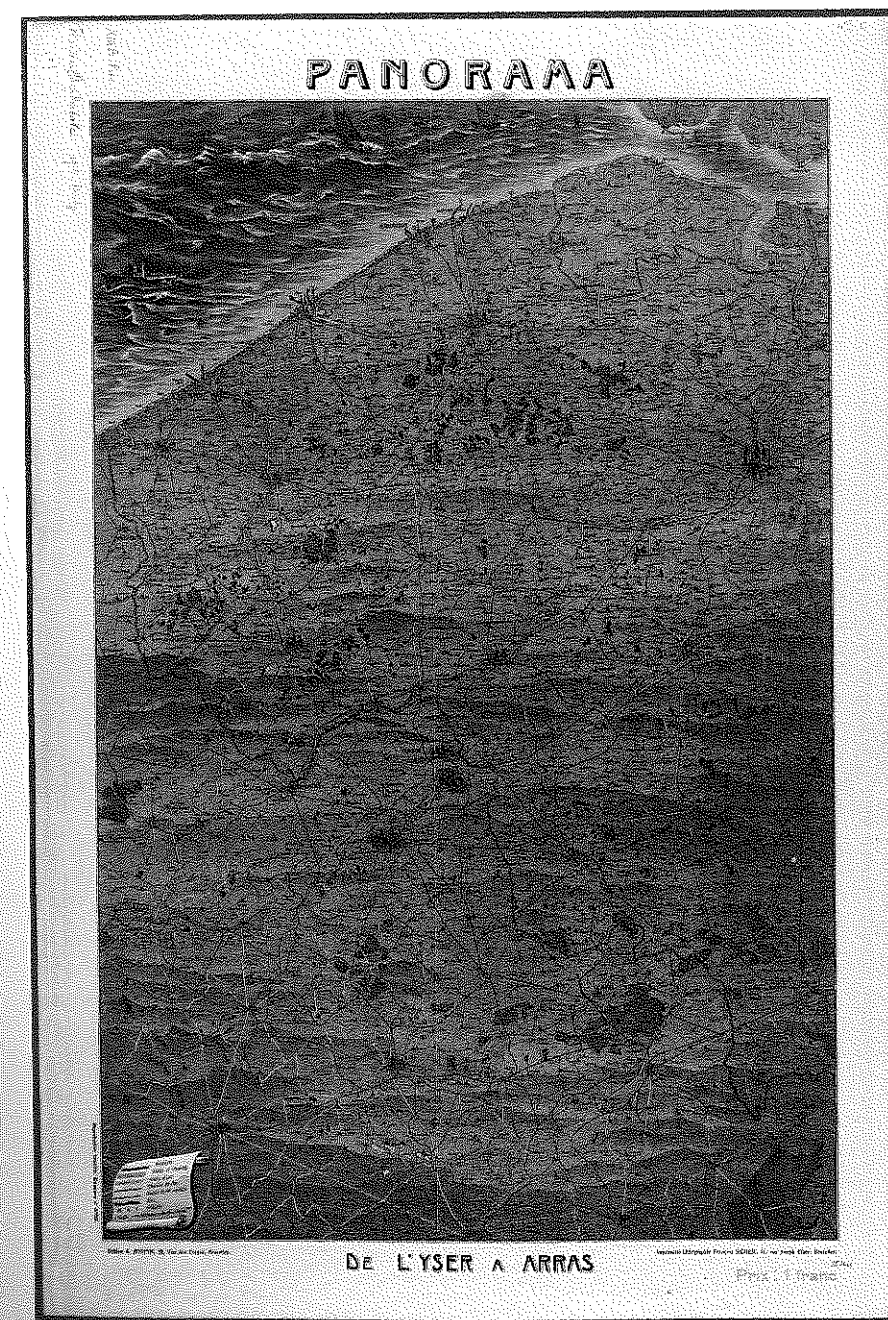


Fig. 5 *Panorama de l'Yser à Arras*, 1916. (IV 2.499, Courtesy of the Royal Library of Belgium)