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Stereography in the Great War (Pt III):
Amateur Stereographers

by Genevieve Ference

Author's Note: This is the third in a three–part series on stereography in the Great War. Familiarity with Parts I and II from 'Stand To!' *(Numbers 122 and 123) is assumed. In order to provide the greatest level of image detail to readers, non–image areas of glass slides presented have been cropped.*

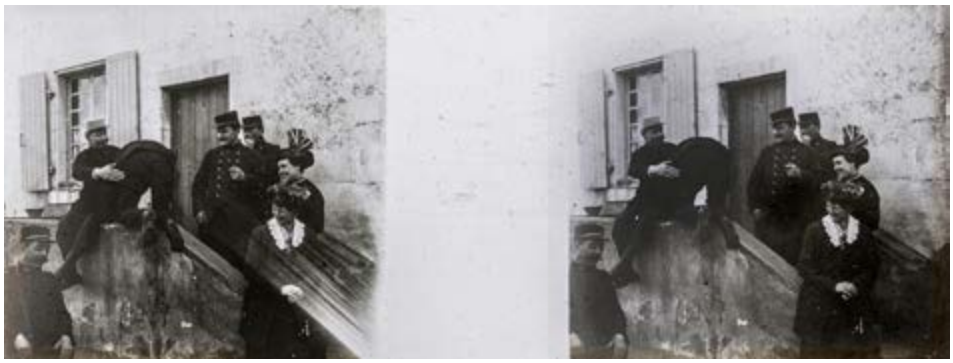
Introduction

All of Great War stereography is divided into three parts. Having taken a brief look at the first two, comprising commercial paper card and glass stereoviews, here we examine the final, most intriguing component. Fewer than 1 per cent of all stereoscopic images taken during and just after the war ever saw commercial publication. Those that didn't are generally referred to as 'amateur' views.[1]

There are a number of reasons for non–publication. Most were taken with no intention of publishing. Many soldiers from all combatant nations took their own personal shots with traditional cameras, and those from the Continent often used inexpensive 45x107 (small format) stereo cameras.[2] Many of the views would not have widespread commercial appeal. While delightful, the header image for this article makes this case fairly succinctly.

Stereography entered a dark age during the 1930s, and most of these artefacts were relegated to attics, basements and other places where photosensitive materials really shouldn't be stored. Techniques for printing from negatives were lost, and for the past century they've been mere curiosities. Whatever the reason, this author would argue that they are a crucial part of Great War material culture. They are certainly more important than the largely falsified images taken by the papercard manufacturers, and in terms of narrative power, are more unified than the haphazardly assembled sets of the French glass manufacturers.

This article borrows from the work of Nicholas J Saunders,[3] substituting 'Amateur Stereography' for 'Trench Art'. Amateur stereography must be explored in terms not only of *what it is,* but also *what it means*. Here, this interpretive element is largely concerned with two things: photographic context (from camera technique to choice of subjects) and personal narrative (in collections of four or more stereoviews with shared authorship, termed 'cohesive collections').



One of 25 stereoviews taken by a member of the 16th Territorial Infantry Regiment (soldiers deemed too old for combat) during their 1915 billeting in Liré while on assignment to improve the 64th Infantry Barracks in Ancenis (Jordan/Ference Collection).

Scottish soldiers, taken from a set which the author has termed the 'French Photojournalist 1914' collection, mostly taken at and around the Marne. Many of these very high–quality stereoviews were clearly intended for publication, but only one is known to have been published (Jordan/Ference Collection).

'Verdun – Forest of St Airy – My shelter in the 36th Artillery Regiment (January 1918)' an interpretation of one of four similar negatives obtained by the Jordan/Ference Collection in 2019. From the proximal adjacency of the other numbers obtained (this is slide 196), it can safely be assumed that the stereographer created at least 200 images by January 1918, and that the collection has been separated in the century since. This is a shame, as very little information is available regarding this second–line regiment comprised of men aged 40–45 at the outbreak of the war (Jordan/Ference Collection).

The significance of amateur Great War stereography

Combing through an amateur collection is akin to reading a trench diary, due to the notion of single authorship. Subjects from the exciting to the mundane are often covered, and a complete cohesive collection provides a window into the perspective and experiences of a single stereographer, and therefore tells a unified story. While proving completeness is problematic, even fragmentary cohesive collections can provide insight, in the same way than an excerpt from a trench diary might give some insight into a particular event, mood or contemplation.

Incompleteness makes little difference as regards the importance of these artefacts as a means by which to study the conflict. As Volker Jacob writes about two Great War amateur collections: 'The illusion of spatiality and depth appears to negate the passage of time between us and the events as they unfolded, a phenomenon that traditionally "flat" photography cannot lay aside. It would seem – apparently – that stereoscopy turns us into protagonists, accessories'.[4] While this is certainly true to an extent with commercial images and with one–off amateur views, it is nowhere truer than with amateur *sets*, even those numbering as few as four.

Original negatives have particular interest for two reasons. In the modern age, photography is available to anybody with a mobile phone. This has removed the entry barrier of technical

This interpretation of a negative portrays a lone 'poilu' looking stolidly at the camera, on a narrow dirt road heading to (or from) an anonymous town in the distance. Despite lacking any sort of context, the image is powerful, not least because the sky was recovered using the digital equivalent of traditional darkroom techniques. This would not have been possible with a positive print of the same image (Jordan/Ference Collection).

Taken from one copy of the 'German Dandy' collection, which contains numerous depictions of this particular soldier, always portrayed humorously. Taken as a cohesive collection, much can be inferred about the relationship between the photographer and his favourite subject. Even on its own, this single page from this particular trench diary speaks volumes about the same (Jordan/Ference Collection).

skill and digital photographs leave no physical counterpart behind. But just over a century ago, every photograph had to count, as glass plates were heavy and expensive. The photographer had to consider, properly frame and properly expose each shot, and the result was a negative. These were used to create positives. The positives allowed the viewer a magical window into another time and place, with all of the coincident wonder, despair and horror.

The second reason is entirely practical. The high–silver emulsions on negatives provide far more latitude from which to draw detail. Negatives present their own challenges but given a choice between a pristine negative and a pristine diapositive, the negative is always preferable. Unfortunately, many more negatives than positives have been discarded over the last century.

This is not to downplay the value of amateur diapositives and paper card stereoviews.[5] Most amateur images now exist exclusively in these forms; since they are less likely to be binned and stand up to time better, they are more widely available and of course they are orders of magnitude easier to digitise and preserve. If the goal is to simply enjoy the artefact in its present form, negatives are almost entirely useless.[6]

The significance of amateur stereography is that it provides a single authorship window through which to study the war. In *cohesive collections*, where four or more artefacts of like authorship are available to study, two perspectives emerge: the personal and the photographic. Because of the three–dimensionality of the medium, these visual 'trench diaries' give insight not only into *what* the stereographer saw but *how* he saw it.[7] Following Jacob, the viewer of these images is effectively putting themselves into the shoes of the original stereographer and seeing the war through their perspective, in much the same way as the reader of a trench diary is able to verbally experience the subjective aspects of war. The meaning of these collections is just this: each is one man's unique visual perspective, both on the war and on himself.

Without context, this image of a young girl contemplating a morbid roadside shrine would not be readily identifiable as a Great War stereoview at all. Given its placement within a large set of views from the Salonika Front, primarily concerned with the Allied Army of the Orient and life behind the line, it is possible not only to contextualise the image, but to contextualise other works by the author, giving some insight into what he found interesting outside military life (Jordan/Ference Collection).

Earlier in this series, the argument has been there were some benefits over traditional flat photography, but these were not overwhelming. Putting an ordered series of Realistic Travels cards in a stereoscope and scrolling through them presents *no distinct narrative.* Some images were staged by Girdwood, others were taken by other stereographers and misleading captions further muddle whatever narrative exists. French glass manufacturers were little better. Viewing the best of their images in sequential order would have the viewer jumping from camera to camera, from battlefield to battlefield, a dizzying cornucopia of action, daily life and differing perspectives.

A cohesive collection, in presenting images from a single point of view, provides a fractured narrative of one man's journey through the Great War. Many contain humorous depictions of the officer's mates, studies of subjects of interest to the photographer besides war or the drudgery of daily life. Insight into the attitude of the author at the time of taking can be gleaned from subject choice, angle and scope of image, posed or unposed nature and arrangement of elements within the scene.

The challenges of amateur stereoscopic collections

There are a number of challenges to cataloguing a new amateur collection, primarily *cohesiveness* and *completeness,* of which the causal factors are *attrition, dispersion* and *combination.* Briefly, let us define terms:

Cohesiveness refers to the degree of certitude that every element within an amateur collection has some relevance to that collection; in amateur stereography, this usually means common authorship, although sometimes common camera (passed around in a unit) or some other unifying factor. A collection is cohesive if all elements seem relevant; if it appears to be formed from disparate sources, such as the wartime images of a particular soldier combined with some travel stereoviews taken a decade later, it is termed an 'artificial collection'. Cohesiveness is affected by combination and dispersion, but not attrition.

Completeness is a rarity; almost no amateur collections not accompanied by a separate title list can be judged entirely complete, but familiarity with the subject matter can often provide a reasonable estimate on completeness of a collection. Completeness is affected by attrition and dispersion, but not combination.

'Preparing the meat ration, 1915'. Interpretation from a set of 14 amateur negatives of superlative quality obtained from an auction site. Interstitial markings indicate that there were at least 40 negatives in the original collection, meaning significant incompleteness was apparent. To the author's chagrin, upon contacting the seller, it was determined that nearly 100 slides from this collection were originally in his possession, that he had sold them off in lots of 20 over an extended period and that these 14, being considered least desirable, were the final lot. This is an all–too–common example of one means of dispersion, discussed below (Jordan/Ference Collection).

Attrition refers to the overall loss of individual elements from a collection over time, whether from improper storage, reckless handling, negligent disposal or intentional destruction.

Dispersion refers to the practice of breaking up an amateur collection either for sale as individual artefacts, or of dividing an amateur collection in two.

Combination refers to ordering collections by any factor other than creatorship and is responsible for the vast majority of artificial collections.

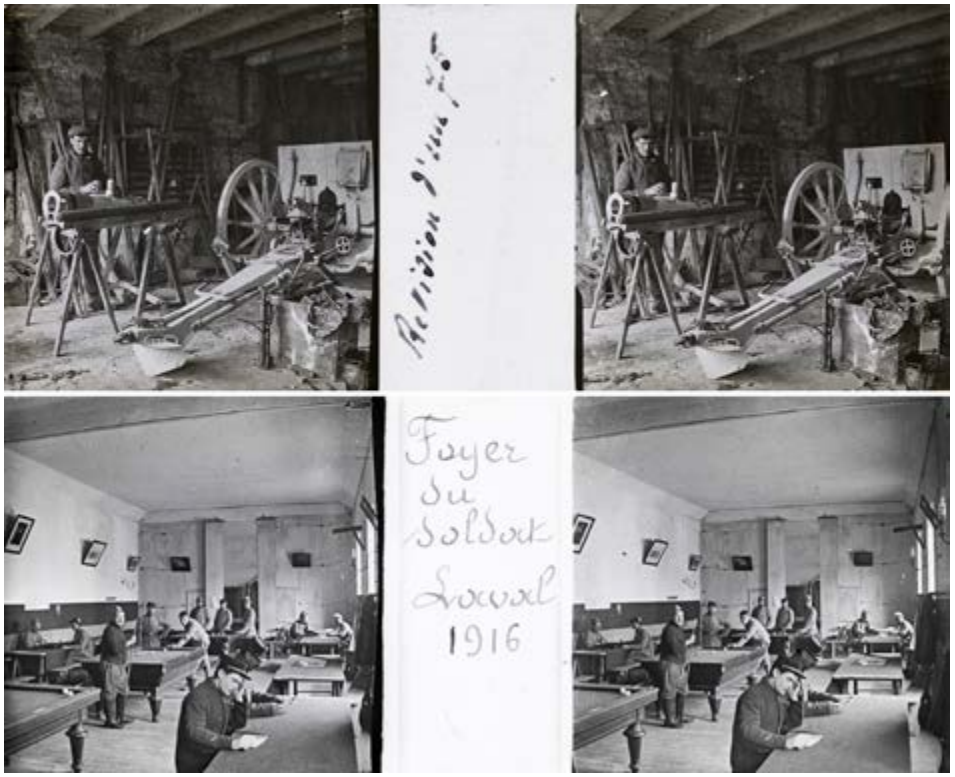
Case study: The Alexander Otto Fasser Collection

Sometime in 2011, a collection of nearly 500 medium–format (6x13cm) glass slides was obtained by what is now the Jordan/Ference Collection. They arrived damaged. As nobody then affiliated with the Collection had background or training in the conservation of glass photographic materials, they were shelved, largely unexamined.

The author received these slides on 26 October 2018; the following day a clue in the form of a doctor's prescription note reading 'DR A O FASSER' led to a possible identification of the primary stereographer:[8] Doctor Alexander Otto Fasser, born in Germany to a father who'd received the Iron Cross during the Franco–Prussian War. Having emigrated to America as a toddler, Fasser went on to distinguish himself at Yale Medical School, before moving west, to Belle Fourche, South Dakota. Excitingly, contemporary news articles described a six–month trip, from Autumn 1915 to Spring 1916, to work at a hospital in France. Even more excitingly, it mentioned the medical stereoviews.

This collection consists of 427 glass stereoviews and 5 relevant paper materials. Of the stereoviews, 183 are negatives. There were additional artefacts included in the purchase, including blank slides, fragments of slides and other junk items, which were unlikely to have belonged to Fasser or were so badly damaged that they were removed. The bulk of the negatives were taken with the same camera, and roughly half of them correspond with the largest set of positives. Additionally, there are 17 aerial reconnaissance negatives taken with a second camera and 19 trench scenes taken by a third.

Of the positives, more than half were made from the first set of negatives or were clearly taken in the same time period with the same camera; of the remainder, the majority were post–war images featuring scenes from Paris, Zeebrugge, the Belgian countryside and so on. 27 were commercial slides manufactured by La Stéréoscopie Universelle (LSU), which clearly indicated that either Fasser, or some later collector,[9] had purchased them and added them to the collection and 12 were ambiguous, neither taken with Fasser's standard camera, nor post–war and presenting some anomalies beyond the scope of this article. Clearly, what had been obtained was an artificial collection, with heavy signs of combination and attrition. At the heart of this collection was an incomplete cohesive collection: the presumed works of a German American surgeon/stereographer in France during the years 1915–1916.



(Above) *'Overhaul of a 75'* ***(Below)*** *'Foyer du Soldat, Laval 1916'. Although these were portrayed by the seller as part of a cohesive collection of 75 Great War stereoviews, and a similar (quite common) camera was used to take both of them, they come from two completely difference sources, merged at some point through combination. 'Overhaul of a 75' is part of a 56–slide collection taken at various locations in France in 1915; 'Foyer du Soldat, Laval 1916' is part of a 19–slide collection taken by someone affiliated with the eponymous temperance institution in winter 1916. In addition to quite different subjects, photographic techniques and handwriting, analysis of the actual glass, printing technique and emulsions confirms separate sources.*

A conservation / preservation analysis of the Fasser Collection

The extant slides from the Fasser Collection arrived in Texas packaged in barely cushioned boxes, which led to quite a lot of attrition by shattering in transit **(Figure 1 on page 32)**. It is unclear how they had been stored previously, although it is clear that storage was improper. About two–fifths of the diapositive slides were backed and taped[10] by someone after the collection had left Fasser's possession;[11] this person clearly did a hurried job, as moisture was trapped between layers (as seen in **Figure 2**) and some slides were taped backwards, meaning that tape existed on the emulsion side, irrevocably destroying parts of the image area.

Alas, the untaped slides were of an even worse disposition, as demonstrated in **Figure 3.** The letters in this illustration provide us with clues as to the improper storage and abhorrent handling of the slides after they left Fasser's possession, with each letter conforming to a different sort of post–production damage. A typical Fasser negative (**Figure 4**, the only example to be shown actual size) demonstrates some of the above, as well as several additional problems which, while possible in positives, are more typical in the thick, high–silver emulsions used to create glass plate negatives.

A research archival analysis of the Fasser Collection

With several sets of slides, and a tentative identification of one Alexander Otto Fasser **(Figure 5)** as the author of at least one set of positives and one set of corresponding negatives, the only starting point for further research was precisely what arrived in the post: quite a number of slides and a prescription slip with a name. For brevity's sake, only the large set of negatives that were taken with the same camera, the positives which can be associated with those negatives and the large collection of post–war images taken with at least two disparate cameras will be considered.[12]

Early research into this collection centred on what was most certainly the most remarkable portion of it: Fasser's portraits of patients **(Figure 6)**, studies of medical practice underway **(Figure 7)**, and occasionally, candid shots on the wards **(Figure 8, interpretation of a negative[13])**. While it quickly became apparent that Fasser took no self–portraits, there is plenty of information to be explored in these images. The tonality of Figure 6 indicates that either Fasser or the professional lab which printed his positives had the ability to tint images. The fact that the camera was capable of taking panoramas, as shown in Figure 7, indicates a high probability that the photographer was using either the Stéréospido or, even more likely, the folding Contessa–Nettel.[14] While Figure 8 might *appear* to be a truly spontaneous candid, it is most likely a recreation of a candid moment; the absence of motion blur indicates that his subjects were told to remain still.

A rough chronology can be established by detailed analysis of the artefacts themselves. Fasser's earliest works were all taken outdoors, with aviation the most common theme. Presumably, Fasser obtained his camera towards the end of winter. This can be ascertained by the fact that the worst of his work features a heavy blanket of snow on the ground; generally, these make poor use of depth, suffer from camera shake and are poorly exposed. By the time the snow has thinned out, objects are generally sharp, some concept of use of depth has been established and compositions become more competent. When the ground is clear of snow, and for all interior images (presumably taken with faster emulsions), one gets the sense of near expertise, as these later works are all of superlative quality.

Chronology, however, brings about something of a problem when looking at the second–largest collection of positives, all taken after the war and divided by subject. We know from records that Fasser left Europe in early April 1916. Yet these other views, of a high photographic quality, but shot with at least two much–less–versatile cameras on much lower–quality glass and corresponding to no known negatives, became interspersed with Fasser's untaped positives. Consider a slide found intermingled with other military subjects **(Figure 9)** and a slide bound in a twine bundle with like images and including a note in Fasser's handwriting reading 'Belgium' **(Figure 10)**. Through extensive research, a possible answer became clear: after touring the Dakota region lecturing with his slides, America entered the war and Fasser enlisted as a medical officer with the AEF. He did not return to America until 1919, meaning that he was in the region when the post–war views were taken!

It's possible that Fasser authored at least *some* of the second–largest set of positives in the Collection. These were taken with far less sophisticated cameras; no negatives exist, perhaps discarded by a Parisian lab. Perhaps Fasser was not the author. US military regulation barred him from bringing the expensive camera he'd purchased on his first trip. It's possible that he bought a less expensive model to document his post–war travels. This doesn't explain the fact that at least two cameras and printing methods exist within the post–war views. He might also have borrowed or rented cameras for excursions. It is known from the primary set that he enjoyed travelling as close to the action as allowed; 1916 images of the *Eglise Sainte–Genevieve* in Barcy (Marne department), Reims Cathedral and a handful of second–line trenches and field hospitals give evidence of his adventurous nature.

It cannot be known that any artefact within this second set of stereoviews was authored by Fasser but the preponderance of evidence suggests that this is the case at least as far as the Zeebrugge series is concerned. The Jordan/Ference Collection presents these images as having been 'presumed authored' by Fasser on the following grounds:

1) That no other versions of any of these images has been seen elsewhere, indicating that in all likelihood they were authored by Fasser or were a unique collection Fasser obtained while 'over there', which Occam's Razor suggests as less likely.[15]
2) A photographic perspective similar to the later works from Fasser's first trip.
3) The fact that Fasser was on the Continent during the capture of the stereoviews, for those which can be definitively dated.
4) The fact that the views were accompanied by examples of Fasser's own handwriting, noting the location of various subsets of this collection.

While it cannot be inferred with a high enough degree of certitude that these images were absolutely taken by Fasser; it can justifiably be *believed* that they were. Things are a bit murkier with the series taken at the *Place de la Concorde*; Figure 9 in particular has been observed in one other instance.[16] Of the factors considered when assigning presumed authorship to the image in Figure 10, factor 1 is completely contradicted and factor 4 does not exist. At best, agnosticism as to authorship should be considered, if not presumption of non–authorship.

Definitive evidence that the primary set was authored by Fasser was not discovered until nearly a year of research had been conducted. Jordan noticed that several of the negatives were taken aboard a ship (Figure 11, interpretation of a negative) identified as the *SS Noordam*. Concurrently, records of Fasser's first return trip to America, embarking on 15 April 1916 were discovered in a new database obtained for query by the author. He was aboard the *Noordam*. At this point, an overwhelming abundance of evidence pointed towards Fasser and placed these artefacts in the highest category of certitude within the Fasser Collection.

The meaning of the Fasser Collection

It is now time to bring back the nebulous notion of 'meaning' discussed earlier. We have described an extensive artificial collection, the bulk of which can be known or strongly believed to be authored by a German American living a pastoral life as a surgeon/postman in rural Midwest America, who abruptly took it upon himself to travel to France to work against his ancestral land by aiding the Allied Forces before formal American involvement. This is, in and of itself, a fascinating story. Through the physical artefacts he left behind, he's given us two distinct windows through which his experiences in 1915–1916 and 1918–1919 can be contextualised.

The first window gives us a glimpse at the various subject towards which Fasser tended to aim his camera (Figure 12). Much of his output, particularly as pertains to hospital life, has no equal in commercial stereography, nor in any other cohesive amateur collection that the author is aware of. Outside the hospital, Fasser's particular interests give us the ability to 'look through his spectacles' (that is to say, our stereoscope) and insert ourselves into the sorts of scenes that Fasser fancied.

The second window looks backwards, into the intentionality of Fasser himself. While some of his medical studies are of a gruesome nature or include sleeping patients with open wounds, clearly intended as medical studies, his portraiture of living casualties is unparalleled. His self–aware subjects display courage, contemplation, questioning and humour; his particular interpretations of them omit the impressions that these are men deserving of being disregarded, disdained or least of all, pitied. His portraits provide an interesting counterpoint to Wilfred Owen's *Disabled*[17] in this sense. His early work on other subjects shows an enthusiasm for aircraft, by way of example, that overrides technical considerations by focusing the cameras directly at a plane in flight; his later work shows him similarly fascinated by his subjects but are actually good stereoviews. Even from what little remains of the Fasser Collection,[18] one can walk away with an impression of the man, as well as an impression of the subjects of interest to him. Through these two windows, it is hoped that the meaning of the 'meaning' of the collection might be glimpsed by the reader.

By way of conclusion

One aspect of First World War material culture studies frequently overlooked is the contribution of amateur stereography. Commercial stereography is found and studied often enough that there has been a significant move to formalise and catalogue it over the past 25 years or so. However, commercial stereography has narrow intentionality, generally being produced to bolster a particular perspective on the war, to present its most sensational aspects and to describe particular battles or events. The analysis of the nature of a set of commercial stereoviews points towards editorship, while similar analysis of cohesive amateur sets points towards single voice authorship.

Single voice authorship provides a cohesive story, wherefore these collections of artefacts attain categorical distinction from the commercial works. Having already

Case Study: The Alexander Otto Fasser Collection (illustrations)

Figure 1 - Condition of Slides upon arrival

Figure 2 - Left pane of taped positive stereoview

Figure 3 - Detail from a typical untaped slide, displaying many problems common with poor care and storage

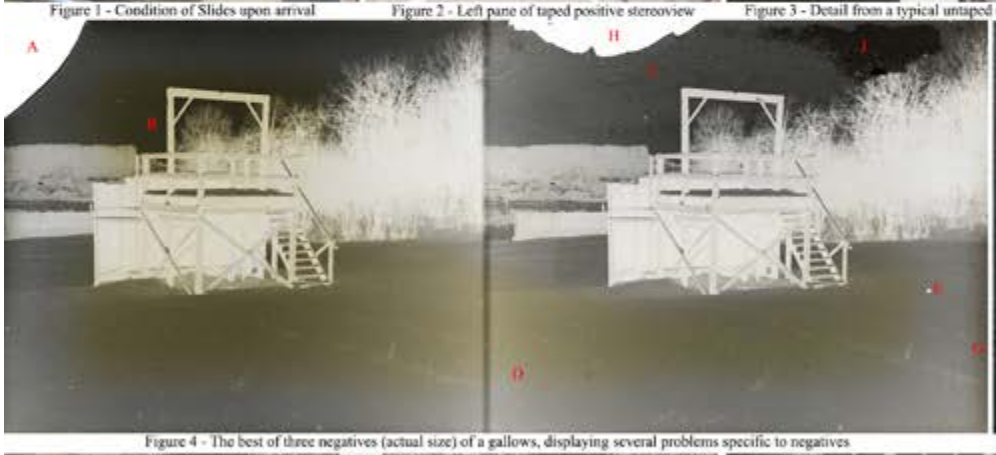


Figure 4 - The best of three negatives (actual size) of a gallows, displaying several problems specific to negatives

Figure 5 - Fasser in his final year at Yale School of Medicine

Figure 6 - A typical Fasser portrait of an injured *poilu*

Figure 7 - A typical Fasser subject (study of his colleagues at work), atypical for being a panoramic flat photo

Figure 8 - A candid stereoview of life on the wards, atypical of the bulk of Fasser's hospital slides

Figure 9 - A7V tank 'Elfriede' on display at the *Place de la Concorde*, winter 1918-1919 - a work of Fasser?

Figure 10 - The Port of Zeebrugge after Allied recapture, and prior to Summer 1919 - a work of Fasser?

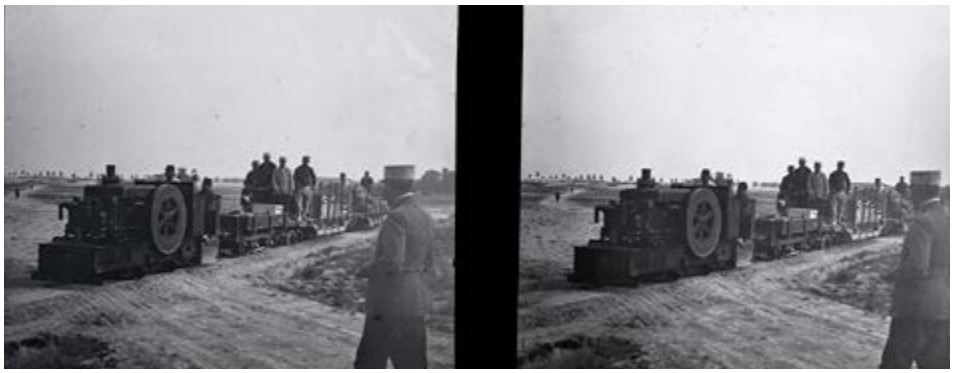
Figure 11 - Lifeboats aboard *SS Noordam*, the final piece of evidence to prove Fasser's authorship

(Below) Figure 12 - Various single panes from the A. O. Fasser Collection

All illustrations from the Jordan/Ference Collection excepting Figure 5, courtesy of Yale University, Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library.

drawn the parallel between the study of cohesive amateur collections and the study of trench diaries, we can draw a similar parallel between study of commercial views and study of contemporary news reports and newsreels and the multitude of monographs on the war published immediately after its conclusion. These have almost no connection to the individual experience of the war.

The visual perspective of the average soldier, then, is best presented by amateur single–voice authorship collections of photographs or stereoviews; preference ought to be given to the latter, particularly when a chronology can be established, as they allow the viewer to insert themselves into the narrative, effectively donning the spectacles of the author in each scene portrayed. This is the point at which one important distinction between trench diaries and amateur collections must be understood: the former are necessarily verbally descriptions of events post facto, with every author's bias and subjective hindsight–laden analysis attached, while the latter are necessarily visual depictions of the precise moment.



'Decauville Engine (Col Cigna looks on)' from a collection of 20 superlative–quality slides primarily focused on official ceremonies and balloon launches. An expert in the use of light rail during the Great War suggests that not only is this the only known stereoscopic image of use of a German Oberursel locomotive by French forces during the war, it is the only such image full–stop[19] *(Jordan/Ference Collection).*

(Top) *The intact statue of Madame Boursin in the ruins of the Château de Soupir in Soissons* ***(Centre)*** *French Minister for Artillery and Munitions Albert Thomas, General Joffre and Lord Kitchener in a casual moment during the Franco–British Conference in Calais.* ***(Bottom)*** *Suppertime for some French officers, date and location unknown. Viewed individually, there would be no reason to suspect that these were in any way connected. Significant research, however, has shown that these were very probably all works of one C Gueidan, a photographer whose primary works were attained by the Section Photographique de l'Armée (SPA). Since these do not conform with his published works, these are likely his outtakes or, in the last case, private views taken for his own memory/enjoyment (Jordan/Ference Collection).*

Why, then, are amateur stereoviews not currently considered a vital part of the story of the Great War? The answers to this question could, themselves, form the foundation of a paper–length treatment; for brevity's sake, three such answers will receive cursory examination here:

Misconceptions about the nature of stereoscopy are commonplace. Therefore, stereography might be perceived as a novelty, or as a uniform entity; the categorical difference between amateur and commercial stereography may not be readily apparent.

Lack of knowledge is an enemy of appreciation. The vast majority of the artefacts under consideration were produced by Continental photographers; most people in Anglophone nations are unaware of the fact that stereoscopic cameras were widely available. The Stereoscopic Dark Age then erased stereoscopic knowledge from the public consciousness. While some strides have been made in France, the Netherlands and Germany in recent years, on the whole, the study of these artefacts is lagging behind studies of other aspects of the material culture of the Great War.

The third, and most problematic, answer to the question explains this lag. Study of stereography is not without inherent problems. Vision difficulties in either eye makes the viewing of stereographic images problematic or impossible. Those with perfect eyesight, but lacking a stereoscope, must train their eyes to free–view a positive image in its latent form; negatives are borderline unviewable. While the digital age has provided tools to make stereography more accessible, actual production of these forms is time consuming and, often, problematic.[20]

In addition to these three answers, many more are readily apparent, ranging from general apathy to the (often correctly) perceived elitism of many in the field of stereoscopy. The actual reason for the lack of consideration of amateur stereography is probably some combination of all of these answers; this informs the further, overriding question of 'where do we go from here?'

At this point, the author can only offer conjectures and hopes. Saunders opens the preface to the second edition of *Trench Art* by acknowledging that, in the decade since publication of the first edition, his subject 'has been transformed. No longer is it the sole preserve of enthusiastic and knowledgeable collectors. It is now recognised by historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and museum and heritage professionals, as a significant resource…'.[21]

Hopefully, before those old comrades attrition and dispersion destroy or scatter too many more amateur collections, a work akin to *Trench*

Art will arrive that brings to these collections of artefacts, as well as to their embedded meanings, the attention that they richly deserve. Perhaps, within a decade, amateur stereography would then reach the level of academic merit that Trench Art has enjoyed. Perhaps such an endeavour is already underway.

It can be hoped that more private collectors will offer to share digital representations of their physical collections with the community on the whole. Many pieces of many different puzzles would likely fall into place, and while it is still likely that many of the collections could still not be judged as 'complete', the breadth and depth of the available 'visual trench diaries' would be an invaluable asset to the Great War community on the whole. While the author is deeply sceptical of any such entity coming to fruition, based on collectors who guard their private collections as if they were their own personal Elgin Marbles, he posits that it hurts nobody to take Candide's approach; that is, to hope for the best of all possible worlds as relates to the future of amateur Great War stereography.

The author would like to acknowledge some people without whom this article would have been impossible (or at least, much more difficult). First and foremost, his mentor and dear friend Doug Jordan (1961–2020). Additionally, Paul Bond, Steve Cornock, Pascal Martiné, Ralph Reilly, Gillian Rothchild, André Ruiter, David Starkman, Alexandra Shiels and Stacey Doyle Ference, who lent their knowledge or their eyes on early drafts.

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References

1 Within the field of stereography, in a different linguistic usage than that used within the field of photography. The difference is quite simple; within photography, a body of work is considered to be 'amateur' if not produced by a professional photographer. Within stereography, the term is used at the artefact level, instead of at the creator level, to designate that the particular *stereoview* was never published. Therefore, there are extant examples of amateur stereoviews created by professional photographers – the key distinction being that they were never published commercially.

2 Examples of amateur groups created *for* particular units are extant as well. An excellent example of this is the 'German Dandy' collection, not yet digitised due to the abysmal condition of many of the slides. Two variants, with much overlap, have been obtained by the Jordan/Ference Collection, and a third is known to exist. While there are therefore multiple copies in existence, it is still considered an amateur collection as its publication went no further than distribution to some members of the unit in which the stereographer served (all known examples have similar German provenance).

3 Nicholas J Saunders, *Trench Art (Second Edition),* (Pen & Sword Books Ltd: 2011), p13.

4 Volker Jacob and Stephan Segura, *Front 14/18: Der Erste Weltkrieg in 3D,* (Teklenborg Verlag: 2014), p17. The author considers this book to be the finest collection of, and reflection on, amateur stereoviews taken during the First World War.

5 In general, far fewer paper card stereoviews exist than glass diapositives, and of those that do exist, the majority of them are of smaller sizes consistent with using Richard and similar cameras and formats; the notion of an amateur stereographer carrying a large–format camera to the front is all but laughable, excepting in the cases of high–ranking officers such as Sir Charles Snodgrass Ryan.

6 The qualifier 'almost' is used here only because it is possible to place the negative against a black background and cross–view the faux–ambrotype to create stereopsis. The author knows of nobody who, in fact, does this, though the theoretical possibility is acknowledged.

7 Anybody objecting to the use of the male pronoun here will be tasked with finding a single account of a female Great War stereographer, an exercise in futility based on the author's long–since–abandoned years–long attempts.

8 Courtesy of The Internet Archive

9 The LSU numbers, and lack of captions, indicate that they were very probably published during the war, admitting the possibility that Fasser purchased them himself.

10 Backing and taping a slide involves placing a clear piece of glass against the emulsion slide of the stereoview and using tape to join them; this is generally done to avoid scratching or damaging the emulsion, but it does preclude the viewing the artefact in a tray–based mechanical stereoscope such as the *Métascope* or the *Magnétique* (see Part II, p 43).

11 One can, with some degree of certitude, assert that if Fasser had been responsible for the taping, he would not only have done a proper job of it, but he would also have been made sure to tape all of his own slides, as opposed to a portion of his own works and all of the commercial slides inserted into the collection, which are of obvious lesser significance.

12 On the issue of the LSU slides found with the Fasser collection, their numbering, as well as the fact that they seem like early versions of the images (most lack standardised captioning), allow that they *may* have been purchased by Fasser during his second stint in France. It is impossible to state with any certitude that they *were* obtained in such a way, or that they ever belonged to Fasser; some future owner might have merged them into the artificial collection, though certainly they were obtained prior to taping, as the taping methodology on the LSU slides is consistent with the taping of known Fasser slides.

13 Unlike printed positives (such as the reproductions seen in this journal), negatives are not directly printed or scanned in stereography. Rather, for use in the modern age, they must be scanned, manipulated, and transposed for display as proper stereoviews (see: https://stereosite.com/collecting/stereoviews/negative–notions–proper–digitization–of–stereoscopic–negatives–for–parallel–viewing/). It should be noted that every interpretation of a negative is just that; it should further be noted that the best interpretations of negatives are those which convey the original photographers' intent as best understood by the interpreter.

14 Following the same argumentation on commonality as John Dennis, '6x13 Treasures on Glass', in *Stereo World,* Vol 26, Nr. 2 and 3, May–August 1999, p35.

15 Pers. Comm. 4 November 2018; Jordan suggested that most people who made the effort to record their experiences stereoscopically during the Great War did not immediately divest themselves of these artefacts; rather, most amateur collections separated from their author prior to the Second World War were done so as a result of the author's death or financial hardship. The likelihood of someone selling their collection to Fasser in the immediate aftermath of the war would be quite low.

16 Pers. Comm. Ralph Reilly, 5 September 2021. It is incontrovertible that the other example came from the same negative, although it is worthy of note that it is a later–generation print; that is to say, the version from the Fasser collection was hand–printed from the original negative, and the other example appears to have been professionally printed from a copy negative.

17 Wilfred Owen, *ed.* Jon Stallworthy, *Wilfred Owen: The complete poems and fragments* (Chatto and Windu: 2013), Volume I, pp175–177.

18 Pers. Comm. 10 January 2019. Jordan noted that, as roughly one–third of the negatives had corresponding positives, and one–quarter of the positives had corresponding negatives, the original collection brought back on the *Noordam* likely numbered between 600 and 900 unique images, meaning that more than half can be considered lost.

19 Pers. Comm. Martin Haywood, 6 June 2021.

20 These problems are compounded by the fact that institutions perceived to be authoritative oftentimes present stereoscopic images incorrectly. By way of example, while the scans of negatives provided by the Imperial War Museums are tonally excellent, they are not flipped and transposed in such a way as to be parallel–viewed or viewed properly with a stereoscope. Anybody attempting to view these scans (eg, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205244149) risks eye strain and possible headache without any reasonable expectation of experiencing the depth that is the principal reason for the stereoview's existence. Infuriatingly, another institution responded to the author's enquiries about improperly processed negatives by stating that 'We strive to present an accurate representation of the physical artifact'. While this is a valid position to hold if it were true, it is completely invalidated by the same institution's portrayal of the image as a positive (rather than as the extant negative), as well as the complete lack of information as to the characteristics of the glass, the emulsion, and other factors used to describe a physical negative rather than the positive it was created to produce.

21 Saunders (2011), p7.