

## **MODERN HISTORY: *WORLD WAR ONE***

**“Men played a more substantial role in WW1 than women.”**

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It is a sad fact that throughout history the majority of men and women have exhibited the universal belief that war should only be associated with men, and hence the preconception of men playing a more significant role than women in the war still exists at present in this modernised society. However, World War One, a momentous war that forever shaped the world and lasted for four years encapsulates the unprecedented magnitude of women’s role in the war. My arguments against the aforementioned topic will encompass why and how men did not play a more substantial role than women in WWI.

An important figure in World War One once declared, “if the women in the war factories stopped for twenty minutes, we should lose the war”, this quote by the famous French General Joffre encapsulates the very essence of the substantial role women played in the First World War. Joffre’s assumption of the war ending if women stopped working in war factories accentuates the concept of ‘total war’ as it takes complete dedication of a nation’s resources and people to sustain the war effort. Without every person doing their utmost to help and continue the war effort, the war would not succeed in meeting its goals. Therefore, women on the home front were vital in this sense as their role was no longer mediocre, taking a transition to a more substantial role that will in hindsight determine the outcome of the war. The replacement of men in a wide spectrum of jobs was met with enthusiasm despite being in a daunting environment. Obviously this is unparallel to the experiences of men on the Western Front, but nonetheless women still experienced hardships. Joining the workforce for the first time in 1914, women had to adjust to their new lifestyles as they had an obligation to fulfill these roles. From July 1914 to July 1819, over 700 000 jobs in the workforce needed to be filled immediately, but instead over 1.3 million women enlisted. Furthermore, the greatest concern on the home front at the time was food shortages and the possibility of dying of starvation. Such a predicament was never to be predicted prior to the war as Britain’s rich economy insured an endless supply of food. However the consequences of blockades by the Germans would surely be catastrophic to millions of civilians. So how would the government find a quick and viable solution before the whole nation starves to death? Through the employment of women in agriculture. By 1918, over 260 000 women proved themselves capable in agricultural work, annihilating any criticism from men who believed that physical labour was solely for men. Thus, women’s unrelenting pursuit to uphold the war effort on the home front was fundamental to the Allied victory.

Throughout the four years of WWI, there have been innumerable instances where military authorities’ feeble attempts in making a breakthrough highlighted their incompetency. Of course, there are countless acts of heroism by soldiers, but in the end the majority of soldiers unfortunately died in vain. Ultimately, abysmal failures by men in the war are visible in every facet of the war effort. For instance, the Schlieffen Plan, an overambitious strategy by Count Alfred von Schlieffen and General Moltke that involved Germany crossing the neutral Belgium and Holland, striking France and encircling France with the assumption that victory would be achieved in a mere six weeks. However, the reality was that Germany did not prevent herself from simultaneously fighting a war on two fronts, instead a race to the sea occurred, preceded by the unsolicited stalemate along the Western Front. What about General Haig? Supposedly a powerful man in the Great War who was the catalyst to over 400 000 casualties in the 1916 battle of the Somme. Millions of innocent men died in horrific circumstances in the war, and for what? They were simply pawns in a game, a game played by men who held authority that were incapable of fulfilling their patriotic duties. Perhaps the argument of ‘men played a more substantial role in WWI than women’ should be rephrased to the more accurate ‘men played a more substantial role in contributing to the abysmal failures of WWI than women’.

Therefore, the ineptitude showed by particular men in WWI overrides the valiant role shown by British soldiers whereas women’s role was substantial in the fact that their efforts did not go to waste unlike their unfortunate counterparts. Thus, men did not play a more substantial role in WWI.