

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Peace in every shot: How Kodak changed the way we see war

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Abstract

Our family album is often the first medium through which we encounter war: nestled in the heart of home life and revisited throughout childhood, its pages intertwine peacetime photos of vacations and gatherings with wartime images featuring smiling soldiers and pastoral landscapes from missions abroad, blending these contrasting realities into one familiar story. This article introduces, for the first time, this overlooked heritage, tracing its roots to WWI – the first conflict photographed by the public. With the outbreak of war, the amateur photography industry, focused on leisure and holidays, came to a halt. Kodak found an unexpected solution: rebranding the camera as a tool to transform harsh realities into peaceful moments by capturing images that portrayed war as joyfully as a summer vacation. It marketed the zoom as a way to avoid violence by keeping it out of the frame while promoting one-click shooting as a means to preserve fleeting moments of beauty amid chaos. The flash was positioned as a source of optimism in dark times, and the family album was framed as a nostalgic object creating a view of the ongoing war as if it had already ended. Capitalizing on witnesses' longing for peace, this campaign achieved unprecedented success, establishing norms for amateur war photography. This article defines this model that shapes how we see, capture, and share the experience of war, acquiring renewed significance as amateur war photography expands from family albums to the global reach of social media.

Keywords: amateur photography; Kodak; visual memory; leisure imagery in war; war photography

Introduction

Smiling soldiers locked in gentle embrace, sun-drenched outposts rendered as postcard idylls, fleeting moments of play amid the battleground – amateur wartime photographs have often resembled vacation snapshots far more than the brutal imagery of war found in headlines or history books. What explains this choice by war witnesses – figures typically associated with the moral duty to convey the horrors of war for future generations – to depict it instead as a peaceful, even pleasurable, experience? This article traces the origins of this visual grammar to Kodak's aggressive WWI campaign, which marketed the camera as an extension of the witness's eye – transforming war into an experience of peace by framing out violence in favour of smiling, vacation-like scenes. Widely successful, Kodak made WWI the first mass-photographed war and laid the foundation for similar Kodak campaigns

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throughout the twentieth century, shaping visual norms that persist today in conflict zones such as Ukraine and Gaza, where such imagery now circulates from family albums to social media feeds. Yet this vast corpus – preserved across private and institutional archives – remains largely undefined and unclassified. Through a comparative analysis of Kodak's pre-war and WWI campaigns, situated at the intersection of media witnessing, the cultural history of peace and war, and leisure studies, this article will address these questions, tracing the emergence of a marginal witnessing subject, entitled here the *snap-witness*.

While the desire to capture everyday moments may seem spontaneous, when Kodak introduced the first amateur camera in 1888, the public saw little reason to document daily existence. This is because since the invention of studio photography in 1841, the bourgeoisie had embraced photography as a means to democratise the aristocratic portrait – used as a testimony to significant life events such as weddings and births. In this context, there seemed little justification for purchasing a Kodak: priced at \$25 compared to around \$3 for a studio portrait, it cost more than all the portraits one might commission over a lifetime, while offering a less professional result. (Munir and Phillips, 2005, 1668).

Kodak tackled this challenge on two intertwined fronts. To overcome public reluctance, Kodak introduced the \$1 snapshot camera in 1900 – about a third the cost of a studio portrait – while significantly raising the cost per image: a 100-exposure roll once priced at \$2.50 was replaced by a 12-exposure roll at the same price (Eckman, 2021). This change marked a transition from a one-time profit model based on camera sales to a model of unlimited profit potential from film sales, which would grow as more moments were seen as worth photographing. This logic was reinforced by Kodak's invention of the modern family album: unlike the ornate, long-term 19 century albums kept out of reach, Kodak's album was affordable, accessible, and meant to be filled continuously – placed at the centre of the home and integrated into daily life (West, 2000).

Second, to overcome public indifference, Kodak launched an unprecedentedly aggressive international campaign, placing daily ads in the leading national, women's, and family magazines across the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Argentina, India, Japan, Australia, and beyond – all promoting the same concept while adapting stylistically to local audiences through familiar clothing and settings (Aquino, 2016, 262). Each ad resembled a page from a Kodak family album, depicting a *Kodak moment*: everyday scene – home dinner, picnic, beach vacation – that could not be captured in a studio. The photo captions framed these fleeting moments as worthy of preservation through the assembly of two discourses. The first was that of testimony: snapshotting *Kodak Moments* was defined as acts of 'testifying' (*Proof Positive*, 1912), 'commemorating' and 'proving' (*Prove It – with a Kodak*, 1913) – terms previously reserved for major life events photographed in the studio. The second discourse was that of peace: 'In war as in peace the Kodak is at the front', declared a 1904 ad, promoting amateur vacation photography by redefining the vacation site as a 'front of peace' to be documented like a historic event (*The Kodak is at the Front*, 1904). Gifting a camera was presented as a gesture of 'freedom' given to a child or a wife (*The Kodak Story*, 1913), thereby encouraging the purchase of multiple cameras per household. Developing and arranging these images in a Kodak album was framed as an act of taking 'liberty' and making 'harmony' (*The Kodak Story*, 1904), while repeated domestic viewing turned them into a 'lasting peace' and 'unity' (*The Kodak Story*, 1913). Inverting the hierarchy between moments considered worthy of testimony and those deemed trivial – presenting visual testimony about the latter as key to preserving peace, unity, and social cohesion – Kodak came to monopolise 75% to 80% of the photo trade and, by 1913, reported net profits of \$14,162,435 (*The Kodak as a News Getter*, 1915, 18).

With the outbreak of WWI, swathes of society were recruited into the army, bombed, and filled with anxiety, reducing opportunities and desire to create 'Kodak moments'. A new challenge emerged: How could a medium promoting the idea of peace be adapted to

the realities of war? Public intuitive adaptation to amateur wartime photography could not be assumed: in earlier conflicts following the invention of the Kodak camera – such as the Sudanese War (1898) and the Second Boer War (1899–1902) – most soldiers saw little reason to bring cameras to the front. Those who did typically photographed rare, especially violent moments – often inspired by professional war testimonies (Allan, 2012, 57) – which were later included in private family albums (Foliard, 2020). Photographic content focusing on regimes of violence indeed characterized the testimonial photography genre of the First World War, which was mostly produced by professional photographers characterized by a raw, explicit, and profoundly shocking style, presenting the public for the first time with daily visual testimonies of the conflict's brutal realities (Möller, 2016, 270). However, had Kodak chosen to expand this narrow model of testimonial photography focused on extreme violence, its camera and film sales might have suffered – not only because such atrocities were visible to only a limited segment of the population and rarely part of their daily lives, but also because, with the outbreak of WWI, military authorities in various armies imposed strict bans on photographing violence, reinforced by rigorous censorship (Struk, 2011).

However, Kodak identified in the war a different dual economic opportunity. First, the company recognised the potential of its technological developments and chemical factories for the arms trade, and developed the automatic camera, the aerial camera K-1, and the gun camera, and produced in its factories 1.5 million pounds of explosive daily (Black and Naylor, 1943, 15), allocating 38 per cent of its business to war contracts (Allbeson and Oldfield, 2016, 98). While the destructive power of Kodak's technologies was so immense that WWI would not have reached such catastrophic proportions without them (Nelson, 2016, 114), the company simultaneously launched a sweeping international campaign promoting amateur wartime photography in the name of peace and solidarity. In the same visual composition used in Kodak's prewar advertisements, the wartime campaign displayed cheerful snapshots of smiling soldiers – hugging, laughing, or playing at the front – as if enjoying a holiday rather than fighting a war (Figure 1). On the one hand, comparable to the pre-war campaign, Kodak framed these photographs as testimony – 'Photography has given the world new eyes for truth – eyes that see, observe, record and testify' (Duke, *They Doubted Columbus – But We Believed Scott's Photographs*, 1918). Yet rather than deepening the witness's experience of war, as conventional testimony would, the campaign promised the potential client that this type of snapshotting would allow them to experience peace at the heart of war. As Kodak ads modelled this new wartime photography, *Kodakery* magazine – distributed monthly for a year to every one of the millions of Kodak buyers – offered detailed guidance on how to produce such images. This was supported by a broader system that enabled their creation: from promoting the pocket-sized VPK camera to establishing thousands of developing labs within and near military bases (Covoksey, 2017). With over two million Kodak Pocket cameras sold and millions of amateur photographs sent home according to military statistics (Covoksey, 2017), a new mechanism emerged: soldiers and civilians from across the globe began sharing photographic representations of their war experiences – no matter how harrowing – as if they were joyful vacations, preserving these 'memories' for future generations in the family album.

Building on the commercial success of its WWI strategy, Kodak expanded this model across 20th-century conflicts. In colonial settings, it operated as Kodak Pathé in French territories and Kodak Limited in British ones, marketing to settlers and soldiers while supplying colonial armies – controlling 85% of the camera market and up to 95% of film sales across global colonies (Gaudreault, 2016). During WWII, Kodak revived its cheerful war photography campaign with a gendered focus on female soldiers – and, in a striking pursuit of profit, supplied military materials to both the Allied and Nazi regimes (Figure 2). Vast in scope yet elusive, the corpus of Kodak-influenced amateur war photographs is dispersed



Figure 1. Kodak campaign before the war (right) versus during the war (left): maintaining a consistent linguistic and visual structure while transforming vacation landscapes into battlefield scenes.



Figure 2. Kodak's WWII campaign advertisements.

across countless family albums and remains largely unindexed in major archives – including the Imperial War Museums, the George Eastman Museum, the Australian War Memorial, the Bundesarchiv, ECPAD, the U.S. National Archives, Library and Archives Canada, and French overseas repositories – often detached from the marketing history that shaped them. Though Kodak ceased these campaigns by the late 20th century, their cheerful visual norms persist in social media and in contemporary archives like the Syrian Archive, the Ukrainian Wartime Photography Project, and the Afghanistan Digital Archive.

Despite its broad international and cross-generational reach, Kodak's WWI campaign has never been the subject of a dedicated study and was only mentioned by very few studies – approached through two contrasting perspectives. Military historians have emphasized Kodak's role in enabling visual testimony and circumventing censorship during WWI (Covoksey, 2017; Struk, 2011), yet have largely overlooked the campaign's explicit and consistent emphasis on framing out suffering and atrocities. Conversely, scholars of leisure culture, such as Nancy Martha West, have highlighted escapism as the campaign's core, focusing on its imagery of family life and play (West, 2000), while neglecting the fact that the accompanying texts rather framed these cheerful images as wartime testimony.

The hypothesis of this article suggests that Kodak transcended the role of merely providing a tool for documenting the grim realities of war or escaping from it altogether. Instead, it identified a financial opportunity in the act of witnessing WWI. By leveraging techniques of framing, flash, and image development, it allowed individuals facing fear, isolation, and distress to momentarily recast their wartime experiences as scenes of beauty, pleasure, and illumination – easily shared and justified to future generations. Aware that this fleeting illusion would vanish once the moment passed, Kodak ingeniously designed wartime snap-witnessing to compel users to photograph incessantly, sustaining the illusion of war as a pleasurable experience and, in turn, boosting film and merchandise sales. Though the term *addictive technology* is typically associated with contemporary platforms – Instagram, TikTok, or journaling apps that reward endless personal sharing (Alter, 2017) – Kodak's WWI campaign already embodied, through this merger, the five core features now widely recognized in media and technology studies as defining such systems: an illusory promise of instant rewards – the suggestion of immediate peace with every shot taken at the heart of warfare; hyper-personalization – replacing collective war memory with the intimate 'Kodak story of war'; repetitive visual loops – a call to endlessly snap mundane scenes to enhance the well-being of the self, the loved ones, and the nation; a logic of gamified participation – through the framing of a 'playful' side of war revealed via photography; and the collapse of spatial and temporal boundaries – merging wartime and peacetime, the front and the home front.

From this merge, emerges the figure of the *snap-witness*: an amateur – soldier or civilian – shaped by consumer culture and leisure ideology, who was encouraged to document the experience of war through peaceful, recreational imagery, thereby embodying the ideological entanglement of testimony, denial, and domesticity.

The snap-witness subverts the conventional structure of witnessing, and particularly of media witnessing – defined as the act of witnessing that takes place in, by, and through the media, involving witnesses, the media itself, and audiences positioned as witnesses to events (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009). On one level, the snap-witness aligns with John Durham Peters's (2001) classical definition of witnessing as 'the passive one of seeing and the active one of saying,' which presupposes a communicative structure comprising a person present at the event (the wartime photographer), an utterance or speech-act (the photograph), and an audience (the family receiving the snapshot and future generations) (709). Furthermore, if the photographer operates under the influence of Kodak's campaign – which explicitly framed the sharing of cheerful wartime images as a historical, familial,

and social duty – he may be seen as fulfilling, at least partially, the dimension of witnessing outlined by John Ellis (2000), which entails a sense of responsibility toward the event and its transmission. However, this responsibility – and accordingly, the type of image the snap-witness produces – is fundamentally detached from the conventional moral imperative of the witness: to tell the truth about war for the sake of future generations (Felman and Laub, 1991; Laub, 1992). Instead, the snap-witness offers an idealized, appealing image of war within the format of the family album – a medium explicitly designed for inter-generational remembrance. This distortion of the witness’s responsibility renders external regimes of visibility – such as those developed during WWI and in colonial contexts to censor or obstruct testimony (Folliard, 2023) – largely unnecessary. In their place, it introduces a regime of visibility already internalized by the witness, producing not merely self-regulation but a desire, even an impulse, to share only those images that conform to the logic of pleasure (Figure 3).

To retrace this unique positioning and the marketing mechanisms that shaped it, this article adopts a comparative close-reading methodology of Kodak’s pre-war and World War I advertising campaigns, alongside its instructional magazine *Kodakery*, bridging discourses typically studied apart – war testimony, peace studies, and leisure consumer culture. Each chapter will explore one of four conventions challenged by Kodak’s campaign regarding the experience of peace and war: the first chapter will examine the redefinition of conventions related to the geographical perception of war; the second will focus on the creation of a collapsed Peacetime-Wartime Temporality; the third will analyze the reconstruction of the connection between the war witness’s eyes and the evidentiary tool; and the fourth will delve into the replacement of the linear visual chronology of the war with a fragmented demonstration of the conflict. Each chapter will commence with an exploration of one of these four conventions in WWI-era Western



Figure 3. Contrasting images from WWI: scenes of extreme violence and death in photojournalism (above) versus leisure and smiles in amateur photography, reflecting the legacy of vacations and tourist sites on the front (below).

society. Subsequently, through a comparative analysis of Kodak's pre-war versus WWI campaigns, it will examine how Kodak challenged this norm by integrating its pre-war representational universe with the wartime reality. It will then scrutinize how Kodak's WWI ads introduced a new form of photographed testimony corresponding to the analyzed concept of peace and war, as well as how the Kodakery magazine practically guided the public in creating such testimonies.

Questioning the geographical borders of war

The first strategy that the Kodak campaign employed involved challenging the idea of war as a phenomenon with determined geographical borders. Since the 19th century, modern perceptions of war have revolved around a dialectical division between two realms: the battlefield, typically understood as the delimited time and space where combat unfolds, and the home front, where those not directly engaged in frontline activities reside. (Favret, 2009, 9) Since WWI, the testimonial field has developed a hierarchy based on this spatial perception, where testimonies from the battlefield are considered the most reliable. (Dulong, 2009) This hierarchy is particularly dominant when it comes to the photographic testimony of war, generally referring to the documentation of frontlines or civilian targets, while banning spaces less visibly affected by war. (Brennen and Hardt, 1999, 129).

This spatial hierarchy of testimony was directly at odds with Kodak's financial objectives, as it threatened to render the entire representational universe of Kodak – comprising that of the home sphere, parks, and beaches – inappropriate for documentation, potentially leading homefront clients to cease documenting their lives. To counter this economic threat, Kodak devised an unexpected marketing strategy: promoting snapshotting as an exclusive means to dissolve the geographical boundaries of war, offering soldiers the chance to enjoy an instantaneous experience of peace at the heart of the battlefield, while simultaneously providing families back home with a tangible connection to the reality of their loved ones at the front lines.

The initial method employed by Kodak's campaign in pursuit of its goal was the assembly of the Homefront and the battlefield through the fabrication of 'meta photos': photographic compositions that incorporate images within images, generating a visual layering effect that blurs the lines between reality and representation, ultimately creating a profound sense of identification with the person depicted looking at the photo. The characteristic use of meta photos by Kodak has been evident since the early 20th century. As depicted in Figure 4 (on the left), which showcases a mother and daughter sitting at home and viewing images from their family album in a pre-war ad from 1912, Prior to WWI, Kodak's meta-photos typically depicted two images from the same homesphere: a family sitting in the living room looking at photos from their own home's past, fostering a sense of familial unity and continuation. During WWI, the campaign revisited this photographic composition: as seen in Figure 4 on the right, a series of Kodak posters distributed daily in the main newspaper featured meta-photos of two opposite spheres: a battlefield, seen in the photo, and the home front, represented in the photo on which soldiers are looking, effectively blurring the lines between the war reality and the home. These posters depicted soldiers standing against obscured backgrounds, their expressions – smiles, pleasure, camaraderie – juxtaposed with the somber backdrop of military camps.

The texts accompanying these photos vividly described scenes from everyday life, remarkably familiar from the pre-war Kodak campaign, from the point of view of the soldiers seen in the photos: a father mowing the grass, the neighbour's beautiful daughter, and Christmas dinner. The campaign explicitly added a new militaristic and nationalistic value to snapshotting the home front. For instance, in Figure 4 (second image from the left),

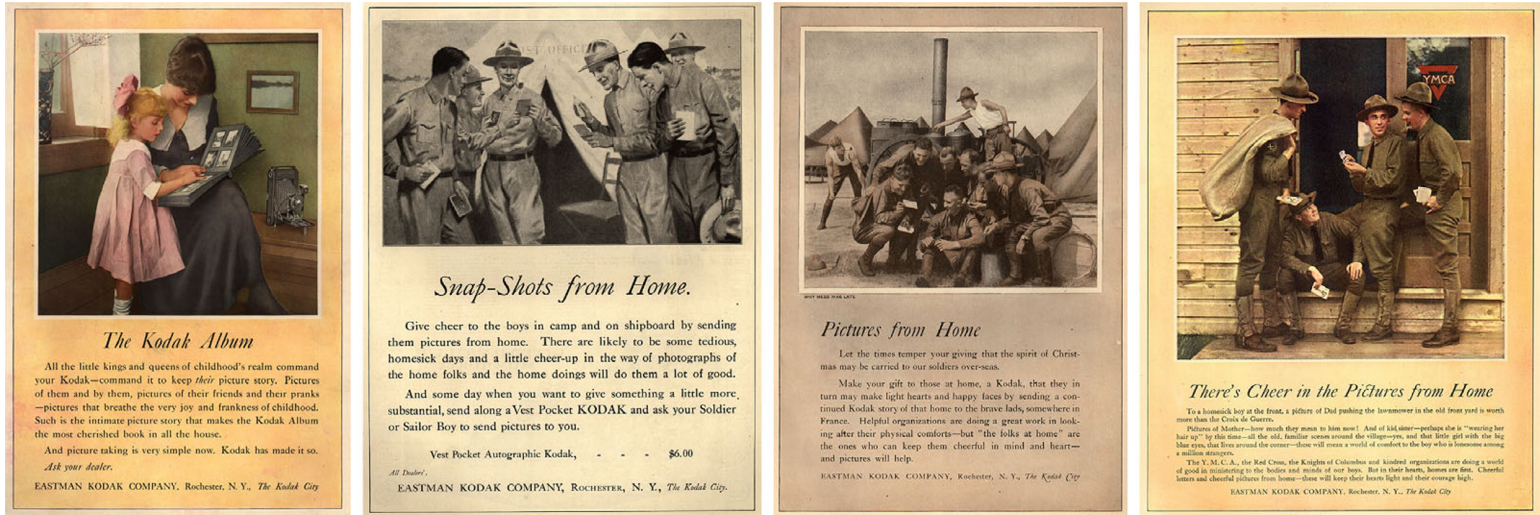


Figure 4. Meta images: family members at home viewing family photos in Kodak's pre-war campaign (left) versus soldiers creating a sense of home by looking at family photos on the battlefield during WWI (right).

a Kodak advertisement depicts soldiers gathered cheerfully around a campfire, reminiscent of a vacation in the woods, joyfully exchanging snapshots from home:

Our Boys, smiling and fighting – fighting with bullets, against a dogged foe; with smiles, fighting homesickness and dread monotony. It's a part of the nation's job today to keep this boys cheerful, to hold fast the bond between camp and home (...) and these things pictures can do – pictures of the home folks and the home doing, pictures of the neighbours, pictures that will enliven their memories of the days before the war – simple Kodak pictures, such as you can make. (Duke, *Pictures from Home*, 1917)

The text of this advertisement tackles the gap between those at home and their loved ones on the battlefield through two complementary approaches. Firstly, it pledges to transform family members on the homefront into active participants in the war, by drawing a parallel between soldiers who engage the enemy directly and family members who contribute not with firearms, but with the 'shot' of a camera, uplifting morale on the front lines. Both shooting and 'snapshooting' are explicitly depicted as equally crucial national duties during wartime. While providing family members with a sense of involvement in aiding the nation despite their geographical distance from the frontline, the campaign promises to deliver a sense of peace to the troops through the same images. According to the campaign's message, by viewing snapshots that create an illusion of peace, soldiers will practically 'relieve' peace amidst the heart of war.

If the posters portrayed the gaze of the direct war-witnesses on their photos from home, in the *Kodakery* magazine, Kodak shifted the focus to the gaze of the amateur photographer on the landscapes of the home front, guiding him on the production process of these images:

The sea means more than ever it meant at any time in history. The very sky becomes the background for a new kind of spectacle of which the ancients never dreamed. (...) We can no longer look at the sea without thinking of hidden monsters of metal, and of ships they have sent to the bottom. We no longer can look at the sky without thinking not only of the battles on so many horizons but of the certain future of peaceful air transit, of post routes in the blue. (Allister, 1917, 1–2)

The article 'The Kodak in War Times' equates two acts: the first, seeing 'a new kind of spectacle', in Kodak's terms, implies a direct eyewitness position on the battleground. The second, seeing 'a spectacle with a new meaning', refers to the civilian view of landscapes from peacetime that indirectly evoke aspects of the conflict. Through this equivalence, the banal pastoral images of seashores and skylines in vacation-time made familiar by pre-war Kodak campaigns were presented as war testimonies: the viewpoint of the amateur photographer documenting a pastoral sea indicates the war's effects on reality just as much as the soldier's perspective on a ship or submarine. It is implied that the public's view of the scene has changed to such an extent that even an image of the most pastoral sky image expresses a sensation of fear in the fighter aircraft and a desperate yearning for peace. In this manner, the Kodak campaign encouraged the masses, anxious about the future of their homeland and relatives on the front, to purchase cameras and film and snap their intact environment, out of a duty to witness the war.

This shift in the spatial conception of war testimony is enabled through two changes of terminology. Firstly, the article substitutes the confined term 'war sphere,' limited to the battleground, with the broader term, invented by Kodak, of the 'picturesqueness of war time' (Ibid., 1–2) to encompass not only the battlefield but also areas indirectly connected to the conflict. Secondly, it replaces the notion of the 'peace sphere' with the expression 'plenty

left,' indicating spaces traditionally linked to amateur photography before the war and which remained accessible during the conflict:

There is a story in every sign of the great struggle toward that final peace in which the brotherhood of the world will, like the modern game hunters, do their shooting with nothing more harmful than a camera. (...) There is 'plenty left', for it is not actual war, or even implements of war, not forts or ships or arsenals that alone constitute the picturesqueness of wartime. (...) You are very likely to forget the 'which and where'. Take my word for it and make a specific memorandum. (Ibid., 1–2)

In contrast to conventional photojournalistic photos, which readily allow viewers to identify scenes from conflict settings as war testimonies, the Kodak model presents a potential risk: serene nature of the photographs may lead both the photographer and the viewer to overlook their role as war testimonies. In the absence of external indicators specifying the historical context, viewers might assume the images were captured during peacetime, consequently risking the oversight of the inherent 'beauty' of war. The campaign elucidates that the innovative technology of the autographic camera addresses this concern by enabling viewers to position themselves in relation to the conflict, commemorating and affirming that the photo was taken during wartime, even if the visual horrors of war are not explicitly present. Adding a date and title to the photo is what gives value to the 'plenty left': wartime visions that are photogenic and accessible, and, at the same time, reflect feelings of agony and distress (like the 'good-byes' of family members who are leaving for the front).

The concept of peace constructed in the quote above is inseparable from Kodak's marketing tool: the company created an imaginary vision of wartime photos in the days of future peace; and in calling on the amateur photographer to take photos for the sake of peacetime, The Kodak camera was marketed as a hope-inducing consumer product during times of uncertainty. In peacetime, the status of the snap-witness was at risk of being misunderstood, and the sacrifices of the population on the home front were at risk of being unacknowledged. The Kodak campaign implied that the autographic camera would ensure the preservation of the memory of the hardships of the war, while maintaining the continuity of the pleasant and pastoral aesthetics of the family album after the armistice.

The success of this campaign, inspiring the public to capture pristine landscapes as testimonials of war (Figure 5), may illuminate a solemn reality regarding the often



Figure 5. Representative snapshots of WWI soldiers in touristic destinations.

overlooked witnesses of conflict: there has been extensive research on the personal, political, social, and therapeutic inspirations that drive eyewitnesses to testify to the visions of atrocities. (Adrienne, 1992, 174) But what motivates a person located in a safe space, watching a rising sun or a picturesque ocean, to record that setting as war testimony? This phenomenon may reveal a form of distress, created by the dichotomous conception of warzone and home front, in those who experience war at a distance. As Favres explains, detachment from the frontline creates a dual struggle: an anxiety provoked by the war itself combined with a feeling of misunderstanding and lack of control over a catastrophe that is taking place in a distant and abstract space. (Favret, 2009, 10) Kodak channelled feelings of culpability and illegitimacy to invent a new testimonial role, based on the assemblage of a peaceful landscape and an autograph that situated the snapshot in wartime, which created a language to express the feeling of losing one's grip on a collapsing world.


Due to the construction of the intact home front as a legitimate sphere for delivering war testimonies, visions of war no longer had to be experienced as distant and abstract. Instead, they could take on the stable, material forms of photos that could be developed, carried, and shared, based on the personal and individual perspectives of a close and familiar environment. In this manner, Kodak presented a testimonial model that depended on the purchase of its latest merchandise, which provided new feelings of attachment, stability, and clarity on the home front.

Revisiting the temporal divide between peacetime and wartime

The second strategy that the Kodak campaign employed involved challenging the idea of a temporal boundary between peacetime and wartime. The perturbation of temporality was inherent to Kodak's campaign since the invention of the snapshot camera: as seen in Figure 6, which presents advertisements from 1913 featuring three generations of a family gathered together, flipping through a family album, despite amateur photography being a recent innovation primarily consisting of recent snapshots, the older generations were consistently portrayed as nostalgically reminiscing over childhood photos curated in the album. By creating a temporally implausible form of self-perception for the elderly, the campaign effectively bolstered mass photography, implying that individuals could cherish a nostalgic look at their own current pictures in the distant future. The embracement of WWI challenged this marketing method: how do we evoke an imagery of a potential nostalgic future where amidst the heart of war, uncertainty envelops any expectation of its end?

To confront these challenges, Kodak pushed the boundaries of this temporal continuum, aiming to replace the conventional notions of wartime and peacetime as two successive alternating periods (Möller, 2017, 316). First, to evoke a nostalgic perspective on an ongoing war, the campaign revisited three distinct phases: the outbreak of conflict, the duration of the war, and the post-war era. First, it created a new representation of the outbreak of war. As depicted in Figure 7 (on the left), which showcases representative photographs from regional American journals capturing the departure day as moments of sorrow, weeping, and solemnity, in Western culture, the outbreak of war is frequently envisioned through the portrayed scene of a father departing for the front. This image serves as a doxa, evoking fears and distress within the community, immersed in the haunting uncertainty that this farewell might signify the family's ultimate reunion, intensified by the pervasive fear that the father may never return from the front. Opposing this doxa, as seen in Figure 7, Kodak's advertisement portrays this tragic moment in line with the Kodak visual heritage: as a smiling, harmonious, cohesive, and tranquil family celebration, a moment that, unless the father is in uniform, could easily be imagined as part of a vacation or a Sunday picnic. As exemplified in Figure 7 on the right, displaying smiling photographs of the departure day, this new visual

If it isn't an Eastman, it isn't a Kodak.



The Kodak Story

The story of the Kodak album—it's a continued and never concluded story that grips you stronger with every chapter—a story that fascinates every member of the family from grandmother to the kiddies because it's a personal story full of human interest. Let Kodak keep that story for you.

Ask your dealer, or write us, for "At Home with the Kodak," a delightfully illustrated little book that tells about home pictures—flashlights, groups, home portraits and the like—and how to make them. It's mailed without charge.

EASTMAN KODAK CO., ROCHESTER, N. Y.

The Story of the

KODAK ALBUM

It's the intimate, personal story of the home—a picture story that interests every member of the family. And the older it grows, the more it expands, the stronger its grip becomes; the greater its fascination.

Ask your dealer or write us for "At Home with a Kodak."

EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY,
ROCHESTER, N. Y., *The Kodak City.*

Figure 6. The elderly's unattainable gaze on their childhood photos in the Kodak pre-war campaign.

heritage influenced countless families to create similar cheerful and touching images of this moment, counteracting the norms of photojournalistic testimony.

The poster's text creates a dual view of the conflict: 'When we have won this war – when our boys sail home across seas forever freed from pirate submarine (...) first in their hearts and minds will be the thoughts of home. (...) Kodak pictures such as you can take, will help to turn the dark cloud inside out, till the boys come home.' (Duke, *Before He Goes*, 1917). On the one hand, the campaign represents the battle as an event that will have occurred in the distant past; it will be seen as happily ended by both the families welcoming home the safely returned soldiers and the nation celebrating its victory ('When we have won this war'). (Duke, *Before He Goes*, 1917) On the other hand, this poster calls on the public to take pictures of moments that are unequivocally part of wartime, by exploiting general anxiety. By indicating that a photo of a family member leaving for the front may become priceless, this Kodak campaign indirectly implies that this could be his last picture before he is killed on the front, to encourage photographic documentation. Simultaneously with these two contradictory scenarios, taking daily snapshots is presented as an almost mystical act with the power 'to turn the dark cloud inside out'; to operatively turn an actuality of war into a reality of peace.

The correlation between the peaceful visions preceding going to war and the fearful wartime experience is also significant in the *Kodakery* journal: 'Some of the most interesting



Figure 7. Above: Tragic images of the departure day in WWI photojournalistic testimonies versus touching snapshots in personal family albums (personal archive) below: the moment of departure in Kodak's WWI campaign.

'war' pictures that have been published were taken by Kodak travellers in times of peace and innocent of the fact that the subjects would so soon become of both news and historic interest. Many Kodakers' landmarks the war has destroyed; but the records of points of interest like Malines, Rheims, Brussels, and Ostend are preserved in indestructible film. This fact alone would put the world under everlasting obligation to photography.' (Anonym, *The Kodak as a news getter*, 1915) Kodak creates a definition of the war image that is not limited to the duration of the war itself: a photograph taken during peacetime, portraying an area that would become a target during the conflict, is presented as a wartime image: since it is necessary for our understanding of the reality that the war later corrupted, it is retroactively made into a war photograph. Through this temporal classification, the article attributes a duty to bear witness to every person at any time. This is because the demolition may occur everywhere, retrospectively turning any peaceful photograph into a significant testimony of war. Expanding the concept of war testimony to events that occurred before the conflict broke out guaranteed long-term income for the Kodak company, creating an

'everlasting obligation to photography' (Ibid., 18) in any political situation. The campaign fuelled the public's anxiety about the comprehensive destruction of their reality, encouraging them to continuously waste film on documenting each and every moment in a vulnerable and destroyable world.

This construction of peace and war not only involved the redefinition of pre-war snapshots as war testimonies, but also the configuration of the future post-war period as indivisible from the conflict: 'Instead of a past wrapped in a veil of mystery, history would be flooded with light. No hearsay evidence to guide the chronicler of events in that case; not speculation and theory merely, but, instead, exact information pictorially presented in a way that a child might understand. With the Kodak in our hands, the past can never get very far away from the present again. This is photography's incalculable service to mankind.' (Ibid., 18) The text establishes hierarchical relations between conventional testimony, viewed as inferior, and amateur photography, presented as the most credible form of testimony. First, the inferiority of conventional methods of testimony stems from a gap between direct witnesses and their addressees, who cannot visually comprehend the personal, intimate experience of the conflict. The consequence of this gap is a detachment from war in future generations, leading them to forget about the conflict as a result. Filling this gap for the first time, the campaign asserts that snapshots visually communicate millions of individual experiences, enticing every person, regardless of the time period, to 'see' war as a direct eyewitness. *Kodakery* markets its products by declaring that the fact WWI is the first conflict photographed by the masses fundamentally changes the relationship between the eyewitness and the recipient. Secondly, the magazine asserts that snap testimonies are superior, given that, unlike other testimonial forms, they not only communicate the past to future generations but also fundamentally change the meaning of time: 'the past can never get very far away from the present again.' (Ibid., 18) Thanks to the multitude of photographs from the front and the home front, the campaign ensures a perpetual war commemoration that faithfully captures the exact wartime perception the witnesses sought to convey.

Through its fusion of image and discourse, Kodak's campaign skilfully exploited photography's dual temporality – what Barbie Zelizer (2010) calls the '*as is*' and '*as if*' – to blur the boundary between wartime and peacetime. On one hand, the snapshot captures the *as is* of war: a soldier departing, a city still standing, a farewell gesture. On the other hand, the same image functions *as if* it belonged to a peaceful continuum – framed with warmth, intimacy, and joy. Rather than confront viewers with war's violence, Kodak invited them to imagine it already past, already survived, already nostalgic. This temporal sleight of hand redefined wartime documentation as a pre-emptive act of mourning, turning photographs into both testimony to the present and a projection of the peace one hopes to remember. This collapsed temporality reveals a profound understanding exploited for profit, encompassing two types of anxiety that may not necessarily find representation, emphasis, and legitimation in Western wartime society. The first is a collective paranoia that the conflict will never end. (Kennedy, 2004, 213) Playing on the urgent yearning for a glimmer of hope within the stark landscape of complete uncertainty, the Kodak campaign suggested observing the war through the lens of the camera, as if it had already ended. Instead of experiencing the fearful reality out of a sense of uncertainty, the mediation of the camera permitted an experience that only lasted for a moment, from the illusionary position of a future peacetime in which the events of the conflict were just another momentary page in the stable, undisturbed family album.

The second form of wartime anxiety refers to the interpretation of the conflict in future peacetime: first, the fear of being forgotten, both on a personal level, in the event of falling in battle, and in a collective sense, as the war will be forgotten over time; and second, the fear that violent acts committed by the soldiers will be considered barbaric and inexcusable after the cessation of hostilities. (Wittman, 2011, 77) Responding to that first fear of being forgotten, Kodak created the illusion during WWI that through snap shooting, the

eyewitness's perspective of the war would forever remain the way in which the conflict would be perceived. Second, responding to the fear of being remembered judgmentally, Kodak gave the soldier an initial feeling of control over the perception of his service in future times, since, thanks to snap-witnessing, the war would be documented from the soldier's point of view, ensuring identification with his worldview and ideology in future generations.

'Kodak knows no dark days': the flash as an extension of the witness's eyes

The Kodak campaign's third strategy involves reconstructing the connection between the war witness's eyes and the evidentiary tool. As Vuori and Andersen explain, our comprehension of our individual stance in connection to the global political situation relies on an enduring system of connotations. (Vuori and Andersen, 2016, 50) In the western collective imagination, which associates the white colour palette with purity, divine light, and innocence, peace, and objects linked to the aim of peace, such as the white flag, have frequently been represented with light, bright colours. War, and the modern battlefield in particular, have conventionally been associated with dark and gloomy colours. (Vuori and Andersen, 2020, 58.) This association between dark colours and the conflict has become exceptionally typical since WWI, as photojournalism produced an explicit quotidian visualization of the conflict, which emphasized the physical impact of the battlefield on soldiers and landscapes in dark colours, augmenting a sense of emotional gloominess and hopelessness in the public. (Chouliaraki, 2019, 318).

This correspondence between the period of conflict and darkened photography challenged Kodak's pre-war marketing legacy. The primary models of the snapshot camera had a technical difficulty with clearly developing shots taken in the dark. Therefore, Kodak principally publicized everyday moments, with lit spaces, such as parks and beaches in daylight, serving as the background of Kodak moments. 'Vacation days are Kodak days,' (Duke, *Vacation Days are Kodak Days*, 1904) states one advertisement from 1904 that features a smiling woman in a picturesque garden (Duke, *Kodak Knows No Dark Days*, 1916). With the phrase 'No darkroom at any stage of the work' (Duke, *Kodak Knows No Dark Days*, 1916), the poster's subtitle contrasts the darkroom required by professional photography with the lighted spheres where snapshots are both taken and developed. In 1914, Kodak developed two new products that refined indoor photography: the flash sheet and a flash sheet holder. To create a demand for these novel commodities, Kodak had an interest to promote the shooting of interiors. To do so, it created an analogy between the flash technique that brought light to dark rooms and the ability of the snapshot to show lightened, optimistic visions in dark times.

This advertising campaign used the phrase 'Kodak knows no dark days': a paronomasia that associated the flash technique with the creation of joy in the 'dark' period of war. In terms of content and composition, this poster echoed the 'Vacation days are Kodak days' one from 1904: in both, a young woman is posing on the left side of the poster, and a man on the right is taking her picture. However, in contrast to the pre-war photo, taken spontaneously in the daylight of a vacation in nature with a branch of a flowering tree behind the lady, in the 1917 campaign, the snapper aims an artificial flash sheet at a woman seen in a closed room (see [Figure 8](#) on the right). The flowering branch is replaced by a synthetic flower-patterned curtain, a single decoration that, in the final photo, will give the illusion of a colourful background (while the gloomy room drained of colour stays out of the frame). In this way, the campaign implied that the flash sheet would bring an instantaneous moment of hope and light to a darkened period of war (see [Figure 8](#) on the left).

This new marketing of darkened spaces was completed by a re-updated advertising in *Kodakery* of the bright vacation destination of Kodak's campaigns from the beginning of the century, ensuring that as many spaces as possible would be the objects of amateur wartime

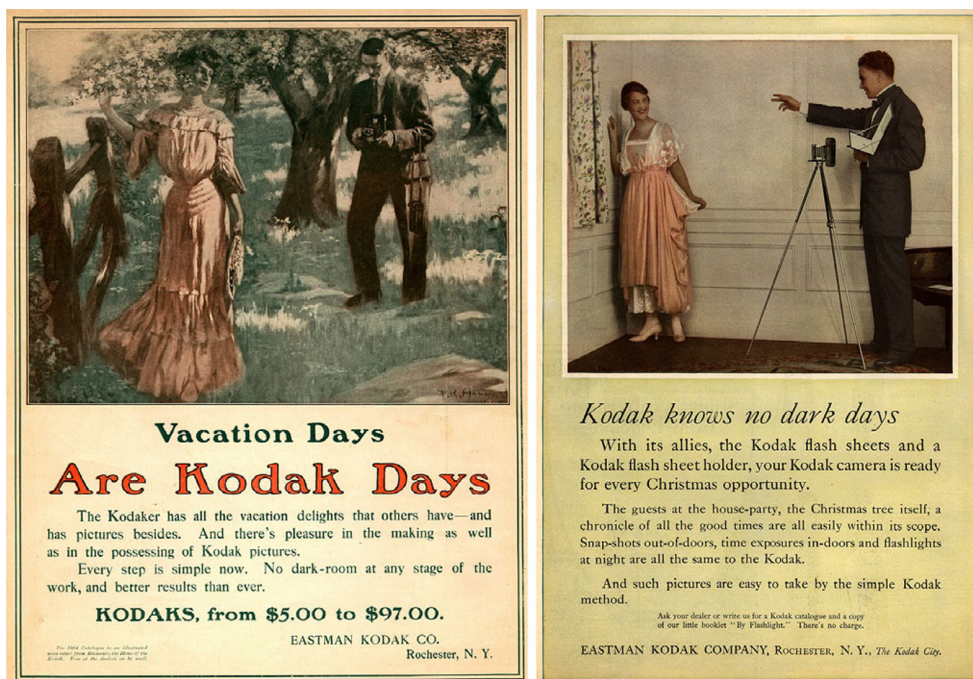


Figure 8. 'Kodak days' in pre-war versus in wartime campaigns (above) pre-war photographs as testimonies of war in Kodakery (beyond).

photography. For instance, as depicted in Figure 8 (last illustration), featuring an excerpt from the Kodakeries article 'The Kodak in War Time,' published in 1915, a series of amateur photographs from sunny touristic destinations – such as the Monte Carlo seashore, the Capitoline Hill in Rome, and glimpses of Venice – are labelled as war images:

The pictures from Europe that open this number of *Kodakery* are a reminder of the fascination that will attach to Europe when the war clouds have cleared away and visitors from overseas may flock again to the lands so long tortured by siege and onslaught. How many thousands of Kodaks will hurry to the scenes celebrated by war news when the day of peace comes? (...) We must not dwell on the sombre side, even if it must belong to history. Beauty always triumphs and we should enjoy not only our own aloofness from danger, but evidence of the beauty that still remains and that will remain after the sombre chapter ends. (Ibid., 6–7)

Here, Kodak makes use of the familiar analogy that links peace to light and war to darkness to promote Kodak's products as a tool to make 'flashes' of peace during the war. The text describes two testimonial forms. The first, the clouded 'sombre side', refers to testimony of the dreadful aspects of war; the second focuses on sunny and shiny 'scenes of beauty' in wartime. In this way, through images of light and darkness, pictures such as those of vacation destinations seen in the article, which reflect Kodak's campaigns since the beginning of the century, are presented as testimonies that are of equal importance as testimonies of war's atrocities, in a different lighting.

The same article also uses the analogy between dark/light and war/peace to promote the snap shooting of a third sphere: the battlefield:

Happily, there is a cheerful side to war photographs. Soldiers at play, soldiers laughing in the very shadow of the trenches, testify to the fact that gloominess is no help to efficiency. Commanders in the field have encouraged amusements as helping to lift the strain of prolonged effort and hardship. (Allister, 1917, 5)

Kodakery describes the battlefield through the lexical field of photographic lighting. The magazine constantly uses words like ‘shadow’ and ‘gloominess’ to refer to the war. This terminology is both materialist, indicating the tangible darkness in the trenches, and allegorical, designating the soldier’s dark state of mind. *Kodakery* juxtaposes this with the ‘lighter side of the soldier’s life’. This side involves moments of joy, laughter, and playfulness in the battleground. Shooting the ‘dark’ side of the war is implied to be at risk of harming the soldier’s efficacy and morale. In contrast, snap-shooting the ‘lighter’ side of the conflict is described both as an operative tool for winning the war and as a therapeutic means of introducing comfort and hope in a time of difficulty and suffering. In this fashion, Kodak instilled a sense of duty to capture snapshots when the inclination to photograph picturesque landscapes was under threat of waning.

Employing a metaphor of light and darkness, Kodak promoted the idea of capturing photographs typically associated with wartime during peacetime and vice versa: envisioning a future where the aftermath of war, trenches, and devastated villages would be commemorated to mark the armistice. Until that time, the public’s responsibility was perceived as photographing ‘scenes of beauty,’ deliberately avoiding the depiction of current devastation. By amplifying concerns that familiar landscapes could be obliterated at any moment and subtly influencing feelings of guilt in the face of others’ suffering, Kodak encouraged the public to acknowledge the existence of a ‘bright’ aspect amid the tumult of war and to transmit this awareness to future generations. Capitalizing on the guilt and distress of witnesses immersed in despair and yearning for a glimmer of hope in a disheartening reality, Kodak’s campaign markets a ‘bright’ and optimistic eyewitness perspective through the lens of a consumer product: the flash camera.

‘The kaleidoscope of war’: A fragmented concept of peace and war

The fourth strategy involved deviating from the linear visual chronology of war, in favour of a fragmented portrayal of the conflict as a collection of micro-stories that collectively narrate the war’s tale, inspired by the arrangement of a family album. This fragmented portrayal has long been a hallmark of Kodak’s advertising. Since the 19th century, the campaigns have urged the public to acquire a ‘Kodak Album’ to craft their family story. This family album was publicized as a testimonial work of literature, with a narrative, plot, and chapters: ‘The story of the Kodak album: it’s a continued and never concluded story that grips you stronger with every chapter’. (Duke, *The Kodak Story*, 1914).

While in the 19th century the family album structure responded to the sense of separation from the extended family (Sontag, 2003, 41), in WWI, it was the nuclear family that was divided, with the departure of family members for the front line. By prioritizing a linear collective narrative of the war over the diverse personal stories of its witnesses, the media failed to alleviate the distress caused by the detachment from loved ones: as explains Rosenberg and Grafton, as of the 18th century, the linear timeline format became the norm, and the ideal standard for what history looked like. The timeline, a linear graphic representation of the passage of times of peace and war, emphasizes overarching patterns and the overall story, with the aim of clearly communicating the uniformity, directionality, and irreversibility of historical time. (Rosenberg and Grafton, 2010, 23) However, as Renauld Dulong explains, a linear construction of war may unintentionally negate the personal

experiences of witnesses, commonly confused, chaotic, and hard to communicate, invalidating their testimony when they fail to clearly express their distress (Dulong, 2000, 118).

Capitalizing on this distress, Kodak's campaign promoted a consumer product – the Kodak Album – that individuals can purchase to experience a sense of harmony between the personal and collective narratives of war. Adjusting the familiar slogan 'the story of the Kodak album' for the new circumstances, Kodak now invited women to participate not only in the familial narrative but also in the creation of the collective narrative of history: 'The Kodak story of the war: War is not all fighting – but to thousands of young American on shipboard and in camp it will be a new world, will open up a new life (...) It's a genuine part of the Nation's present job to keep tight the bonds between its fighters the those at home who can follow only with their hearts. Pictures from home and to home can do their part'. (Duke, *The Kodak Story of the War*, 1917) Instead of a distant historical narrative, this advertisement presents history as a collection of personal experiences – both from soldiers witnessing the war firsthand, capturing moments of discovery and joy, and from loved ones photographing home; thus validating two equally valid ways to engage with the narrative of war through photography: one through direct observation and the other through emotional connection.

In *Kodakery*, Kodak used several rhetorical strategies to promote the 'Kodak album' as a way for witnesses neutralized by the timeline configuration of war to heal. First, the campaign described the imagery of the war as a kaleidoscope composed of a multiplicity of serene images: 'It is impossible not to see the great war again and again as a tremendous drama. In sheer bigness, it outranks all the dramas of history. It is so big that we lose sight of the many dramas that go to make it – the little dramas that come closer to the lives of individual men and women than the vast spectacle of a whole world at war.' (Wallace, 1918b, 4) Like a fractal that is self-similar to the individual microunits of which it is composed, *Kodakery* defines the conflict as a 'big drama' that is self-similar to the smaller dramas experienced by each of the war witnesses. This fragmented configuration offers the witness a sense of self-value and control: contrary to the image of the war as a great drama in which the individual is secondary and insignificant, here it is the snap-witness who is positioned as a central player, influencing and contributing to history. It is the snap-witness who creates history and records it, and then controls how to mediate and immortalize it: the development of the snapshot integrates an accessible, personal, and comprehensible war testimony into both the familial and the global war story.

Additionally, the construction of the conflict as a fragmented album offers an ethical, compassionate, and humane self-image at a time when examining the destruction caused directly and indirectly by individuals might otherwise raise moral qualms: 'In the turning kaleidoscope of the mighty struggle, we read again and again the story of humanity. (...) The humours, the sufferings, the tender brotherhood things, often little in themselves but made big by their vital association with the heart interests of plain men held together by danger and courage'. (Wallace, 1918a, 6) Here, the conversion of violent war images that might be controversial in the future serves as an everlasting certification of the humanity of the person photographed and of the war as a whole. First, the image guarantees that the family album will preserve a humane and empathetic image of the family members' engagements in the conflict. Secondly, in contrast to the violent testimony of war that creates an essential dissimilarity between images of peace and war, thereby enabling profound criticism of war in peacetime, Kodak encourages the creation of identical peacetime and wartime imagery. It thus equates 'the story of the war' with 'the story of humanity' and thwarts an external critical vision of the war in the future.

The prominence of this model, promoted by Kodak is evident in countless family albums, like the two WWI albums depicted in Figure 9, where each page seamlessly blends cheerful soldiers, pastoral battlefield landscapes, and snapshots of leisure time on the homefront. Without forcing witnesses to situate their testimonies in relation to the war timeline, Kodak



Keep the story with a Kodak

Today it's a picture of Grandmother reading to the children. Tomorrow it may be Bobbie playing traffic policeman or Aunt Edna at the wheel of her new car or Brother Bill back from college for the week-end or—

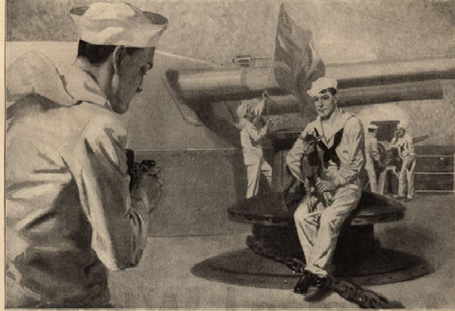
There's always another story waiting for your Kodak.

Free at your dealer's or from us—"At Home with the Kodak," a well illustrated little book that will help in picture-making at your house.

Autographic Kodaks \$6.50 up

Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N.Y. *The Kodak City*

In using advertisements, see page 4. 93



The Kodak Story of the War.

War isn't all fighting—but to thousands of young Americans on shipboard and in camp it will be a new world, will open up a new life. New ties will be formed, new friendships cemented. The daily routine on shipboard and in camp, the shore leave in strange cities, the pictures of comrades—all these things will make a heart gripping Kodak story for the folks at home.

It's a genuine part of the Nation's present job to keep tight the bonds between its fighters and those at home who can follow only with their hearts. Pictures from home and to the home can do their part.

There's room for a little Vest Pocket KODAK in every sailor's and soldier's kit. The expense is small, six dollars. The cheerfulness it may bring is great. They are on sale by Kodak dealers, everywhere.

EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY, ROCHESTER, N. Y.

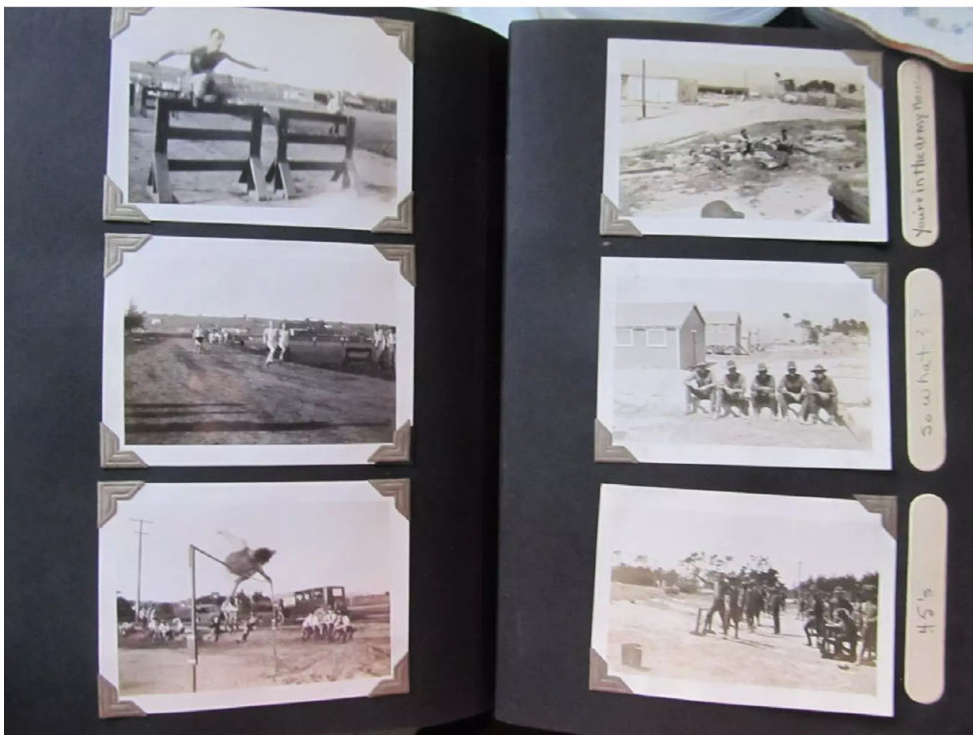


Figure 9. Pre-war Kodak family story (left) versus Kodak story of war (right) a representative Kodak album, composed of cheerful soldiers, pastoral landscapes from the battlefield, and snapshots of vacations on the homefront (above) – personal archive.



Figure 9. Continued.

gave their individual stories a collective historical value: the family album situated and gave tangible representation to their personal experience, allowing witnesses to take active roles in the shaping of the historical narrative.

Conclusion

This article has unearthed a forgotten genealogy in the history of war photography: Kodak's WWI campaign, which transformed the figure of the war witness into the snap-witness – an amateur photographer trained not to record suffering, but to frame moments of war as if they were peace. This mechanism acquires new urgency when considered in light of its three contemporary afterlives: within the domestic sphere, across digital platforms, and through the militarization of visual technologies.

Firstly, while family albums are designed for repeated childhood viewing, violent testimonies of war are often deemed inappropriate for children and actively withheld – by parents, educators, or media filters. As a result, these albums – composed of sanitized, affective fragments – risk becoming the primary visual archive through which children first encounter war, long before they are exposed to its brutal realities. In doing so, they instil a seductive and distorted vision of peace and conflict in the next generation – one that omits suffering while aestheticizing violence as familiarity, nostalgia, or pride.

Secondly, the snap-witness visual logic – originally crafted for intimate, domestic circulation – has grown even more powerful within the immersive, behaviourally engineered architectures of social media. On platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram, the aesthetic Kodak pioneered – smiling soldiers, luminous ruins, playful gestures at the front – resurfaces as a highly effective visual unit. In conflict zones such as those in Ukraine and Gaza, soldiers' images circulate widely (see Figure 10), offering fleeting emotional rewards and drawing viewers into compulsive loops of viewing, sharing, and rewatching. In this algorithmically magnified environment, smiling soldiers and luminous ruins risk becoming visual cues that justify and even glorify destruction and occupation – precisely because they are framed as authentic, 'firsthand' representations of conflict.

Thirdly, retracing the genealogy of the snap-witness reveals the camera itself – one of the objects most closely associated with the capacity to testify to the truth of modern warfare – not as a neutral instrument, but as an active participant in a consumer economy whose interests may lie not in exposing the horrors of war, but in producing them. Kodak's dual role during WWI – supplying both amateur cameras and military-grade explosives – was an early sign of this entanglement. Today, the convergence is far more advanced: surveillance



Figure 10. Contemporary soldiers on social media.

systems, drones, and satellites use photographic technologies to identify and eliminate targets; AI-driven platforms scan social media images in real time, parsing location, lighting, and body language to infer strategic data. In some cases, even cheerful wartime snapshots – shared innocently on platforms like Instagram – are harvested to locate soldiers and guide missile strikes (Emde and Huet, 2025). The very aesthetic crafted to reframe war as peace has thus become a tool for precision violence.

This study opens the door to a broader research agenda. Future study may trace the evolution of this visual grammar across 20th- and 21st-century wars and examine how the snap-witness persists or mutates in different conflictual, colonial, and post-postcolonial contexts, as well as how does this imaginary of peace in wartime affects ‘peaceful’ societies. It may explore how wartime snapshots have migrated from the family album to digital platforms, and how contemporary literature and visual art engage with these historical and contemporary archival residues. Recognizing the economic, political, and technical forces that shape how we share our political realities may allow us to return their gaze – not to simulate peace, but to summon it.

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