At the end of the library sections dedicated to the major wars of modern times one often finds titles of memoirs and studies on ‘forgotten’ fronts, armies, and soldiers. The considerable number of books that have actually been published in the last century attempting to introduce to the wider public what they consider as the forgotten stories of a variety of groups of combatants stands as a clear sign of a widespread feeling of exclusion that is encountered after the end of a war by a number of its participants. It also indicates a particular appeal among the public of the image of the serviceman who underwent so many hardships, or even lost his life, and after the war was not awarded the honours and recognition due to a hero. It seems that the persistent use of the specific term ‘forgotten’ touches on a popular combination of chords of social pride and guilt.

It was the First World War that triggered for the first time the publication of a substantial number of books representative of this particular genre. Letters from the Forgotten Army was the title of a book published as early as 1920, referring to the British forces that served at the Balkan front. The Balkan front was one of the few fronts of the Great War on European soil, other than the Western Front, in which substantial numbers of British soldiers fought. It has also been a major source of ‘forgotten army’ literature, alongside the Italian, the Middle Eastern, and the East African fronts. It is interesting, however, that although
many studies that have been published on these fronts do make use of
the term ‘forgotten’ in their titles, none has actually tried to describe
how this feeling of exclusion was experienced by the soldiers. Instead,
as these studies are mainly aimed as tributes to the sacrifices of those
who fought in forgotten fronts—reclaiming the latter from the realm
of the forgotten—they concentrate on describing the history of the
fronts, the soldiers’ everyday lives, their heroic achievements, the battles
in which they fought, and the importance of their contribution to the
general war effort.

Focusing on the story of the ‘forgotten’ British army of the Balkan
front—popularly known as the ‘Salonika Army’—this chapter will
attempt to explain exactly this feeling of exclusion from public memory,
the reasons behind it, and the veteran soldiers’ reactions to it. In relation
to the broader debates on memory, the unique context of the
development of a ‘forgotten front’ experience, in which the normally
well-hidden functions of image-reading and image-making lay unusually
exposed, offers a good opportunity to examine the way popular culture
constructs its images of war. This chapter will specifically look at the
dynamics of the relationship between public and private memory.

The background of the history of the memory of the Balkan front
opens a new window of research that helps the better understanding
of the ways in which popular images and memory were constructed
within the context of the First World War, outside the usual framework
of the Western front experience. After a description of the processes
though which the Balkan front soldiers—and then veterans—felt that
public opinion sidelined them, the chapter will examine the reasons
that led to the actual exclusion of the Balkan front experience from the
British popular memory of the war. Then it will move on to look at
the means employed by the veteran soldiers to counteract that feeling
of having served in an army that had been forgotten.

_Marching to Oblivion_

The British army went to the Balkans as part of a joined Franco-Brit-
ish force that landed at the northern Greek city of Salonika in late
1915. The initial purpose of the allied presence in the region was to
provide assistance to Serbia and to exert pressure on Greece to join the
Entente. However, before they managed to establish contact with the
Serbian front, Serbia was defeated. In the meantime, Greece, instead