

Call for Papers

The 6th International Conference of the Military Welfare History Network

War Disabilities: Experiences, Actors, and Care Systems

Thursday 1st and Friday 2nd July 2027 – University of Antwerp, Belgium

The 6th International Conference of the Military Welfare History Network will take place at the University of Antwerp in July 2027 and will focus on how war disabilities have been experienced, negotiated and categorised throughout history. It will consider which war disabilities were recognised and classified, who was involved in this process, and how it affected care options for soldiers, their families, and other military personnel.

Throughout history, wars have always left physical and mental traces on soldiers and civilians alike. Alongside their experiences and perceptions, the available support options provided by polities and various social actors have differed significantly. Taking care of disabled warriors or non-combatants impacted by warfare is considered the responsibility of family or social peers or of governmental instances. Eligibility criteria and categorisations of war disabilities have varied considerably both historically and regionally, and in relation to different categories of military personnel. Military welfare systems provide care based on notions of un/fitness and dis/ability resulting from military service, while the extent to which levels of un/fitness could be distinguished varied. Some care systems distinguished between injuries and sickness, while others did not. Some required proof that unfitness was a direct result of acts of war; others did not. The distinction between psychological and physical injuries was an important category in some systems but not in others. Some systems relied heavily on medical categorisations, while others relied on them less. War disabilities could be considered permanent or the subject of recovery attempts. The relationship between an inability to serve and a general inability to work was also shifting and ambivalent. Agreeing to medical care after acknowledging one's disability, or refusing to do so, contribute to design combatants' identity and their relation to their occupation.

This conference aims to encourage dialogue between military welfare history and disability history, scrutinising and historicising the notion of war disabilities itself. It

invites contributions from researchers specialising in any historical period and region of the world that consider concepts and experiences of war disabilities within and outside of military welfare systems and/or poor relief/civil welfare.

Suggested topics (not limited to):

- Living with war disabilities (with and without support)
- Discourses of war disabilities
- The relationship between specific tasks of military labour throughout history and notions of un/fitness
- Definitions and levels of un/fitness and processes of standardisation in care systems
- The role of medicalisation and medical personnel vs. military experts in recognizing and categorising war disabilities
- The relationship between unfitness in the military context and a general inability to work
- Tasks and requirements of invalid battalions and similar units
- Treatment and notions of in/curability of war disabilities
- Criteria of support in military welfare vs. poor relief/civil welfare systems
- Actors of the care system

Submission Guidelines:

Abstracts: Please submit an abstract of 250 words outlining your proposed paper's theme, approach, and sources.

Bio: Include a brief biographical note (max 50 words) with your institutional affiliation and contact details.

Submission email: militarywelfarehistory@gmail.com

Deadline: 31 January 2027

Notification of acceptance will be provided by mid-February 2027.

Keynotes

The keynote speakers will be Prof David M. Turner (Swansea University), who will present on disabled veterans' agency in the era of the Napoleonic Wars, and Prof Kathryn Hurlock (Manchester Metropolitan University), who will present on medieval war trauma and disability.

Conference Details

Organisers: Dr Julia Heinemann, Dr Christophe Masson, Dr Axel Tixhon, Dr. Reinout Vander Hulst and Dr Paul Huddie (MWHN Coordinator)

Scientific committee: Dr Sabine Jesner, Dr Christian Laes, Dr Sophie Richelle, Dr Julia Heinemann, Dr Christophe Masson, Dr Axel Tixhon, Dr. Reinout Vander Hulst and Dr Paul Huddie

Date: Thursday 1st and Friday 2nd July 2027

Location: University of Antwerp, Klooster van de Grauwzusters, Lange Sint-Annastraat 7, B-2000 Antwerpen

Format: Individual presentations (20 minutes) followed by Q&A (10 minutes).

The conference fee is 30 Euro.

Conference Publication

We envisage the publication of selected papers in a volume or a special issue of a journal, as well as in the podcast series of the Military Welfare History Network.

University of Antwerp

We look forward to your submissions and to a stimulating exchange on disability history and military welfare history.