

### **IN FLANDERS FIELDS THE BOMBS STILL BLOW: THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACIES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR A TALK BY TAIT KELLER**



Though its fury has calmed, the Great War is not yet over. Nature bears witness to the enduring conflict. Opposing forces along the Western Front fired over a billion shells at each other a century ago. Now these relics form a lethal substratum of soil and are slowly making their way back to the surface. The once devastated meadows appear to bloom, but hidden armaments haunt the land; rusting devices still maim and murder, reinforcing narratives of the Great War's waste. Yet today the restricted zones so saturated with old shells also serve as armed nature reserves. Weapons that once wrecked the land now guard it against human intrusion. The Great War's impact on the natural world remains full of irony.

This talk will explore the ways in which the First World War ushered in a century whose magnitude of environmental change matched its terrible violence. Only by taking the environment into account can we fully understand the trauma of war and how this conflict in particular shaped the most basic levels of human existence for years afterwards. We live with the ecological consequences of the conflict even now. By understanding how warfare and ecosystems coevolved over the course of this global conflict we can better appreciate the trajectory of military violence, human victimization, and environmental change during the twentieth century.

Tait Keller is an assistant professor of History and the Director of Environmental Studies and Sciences at Rhodes College. His research focuses on the evolving relationships among individuals, states, and the environment, particularly in times of crisis and conflict. He earned his B.A. in History at the University of Rochester in 1997 and his M.A. in German and European Studies and Ph.D. in History at Georgetown University in 2001 and 2006.

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