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## English “strafe”: Suggestion on the semantic shift ‘punish by shelling’ (WWI) to ‘fire a machine gun from a low-flying airplane’ (WWII) [Student suggestion]

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ENGLISH *STRAFE*: SUGGESTION ON THE SEMANTIC SHIFT 'PUNISH BY SHELLING' (WWI) TO 'FIRE A MACHINE GUN FROM A LOW-FLYING AIRPLANE' (WWII)

Gerald Cohen

In Cohen 2011 I compiled material on 'to strafe,' but a gap remained; I was puzzled as to how the concept 'punish the enemy with shelling' (WWI) mutated to 'fire a machine gun from a low-flying airplane' (WWII).

A student in my German class (Zane K. Peterman) suggested a possible answer:

'During WWI early bombers were two seat bi-planes. the passenger/rear-gunner would drop large bombs from the back seat. This might provide the context for the semantic shift of *strafe* with artillery to the strafing done with airplanes.'

Mr. Peterman also sent me the following photo:



REFERENCE

Cohen, Gerald 2011. Origin of English *strafe*: overwrought anti-British hatred in WWI Germany and the ridiculing reaction it evoked. *Comments on Etymology*, vol. 40, no. 8 (May 2011), pp. 1-22.