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War In History 2007; 14; 428
DOI: 10.1177/0968344507081555

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Junior Officership in the German Army during the Great War, 1914–1918

Alexander Watson

This article reassesses German junior officers' performance in the First World War. Contrary to current historiography, it argues that the peacetime corps's social elitism was successful in ensuring a militarily effective, naturally paternalistic and conscientious leadership. The infamous wartime *Offiziershaß* ('officer hate') did not derive from social segregation between ranks but was rather a form of the 'front-rear' tension common to all belligerent armies, aggravated by material shortage. Despite training and organizational difficulties, the successful dissemination of the corps's aristocratic values to wartime-recruited officers maintained good inter-rank relations within combat units, enabling the army to endure four years of gruelling warfare.

I. Introduction

The German army performed remarkably well in the vicious fighting on the Western Front during the First World War.¹ For four years it successfully repelled materially and numerically superior enemies, suffering minimal disciplinary problems despite the tremendous strain. The role played by junior officers in this process has received surprisingly little attention from historians; research has instead focused mainly on the peacetime corps's development as a distinctive social caste, its aristocratic ethos and its relationship with the rest of pre-1914 German society.² Those few scholars who have considered junior leadership during the First World War have generally repeated the criticisms of postwar

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper to the International Society for First World War Studies' third conference, 'Uncovering the First World War', held at Trinity College, Dublin, 23–25 September 2005. My thanks to the organizers and participants of this conference, and most especially Wencke Meteling, for their help and comments.

² See K. Demeter, *The German Officer-Corps in Society and State, 1650–1945* (London, 1962, 1965); M. Kitchen, *The German Officer Corps, 1890–1914* (Oxford, 1968), and S.E. Clemente, *For King and Kaiser! The Making of the Prussian Army Officer, 1860–1914* (New York, Westport, CT, and London, 1992).

socialists, who argued that the corps's social elitism impeded its ability to carry out its military duties. Heiger Ostertag has suggested that 'the special social character of the army hindered a successful consciousness of the real area of responsibility of an armed force; the military component'.³ Martin Kitchen similarly asserts that the refusal to liberalize the army 'was a significant factor determining Germany's inability to achieve a political equilibrium that might have given the nation reserves of strength to withstand defeat'.⁴ Wolfgang Kruse also supports this view, arguing that the social segregation of officers and men led inevitably to harsh discipline, insensitive handling, and minimal understanding. Poor treatment at the hands of their upper-class leaders ultimately radicalized the German army's working-class soldiers, leading them to bring down the army and support the revolution in 1918.⁵

The negative judgements on the performance of the army's upper-class officers are surprising in light of both its impressive resilience and the emphasis placed by modern research on the crucial role played by junior officers in maintaining soldiers' combat motivation. S.A. Stouffer's study of the American army between 1941 and 1945, for example, found that 'men's attitudes toward their officers had a real importance in determining whether men fought aggressively and stayed in the fight'. Morris Janowitz and Edward A. Shils similarly concluded from their examination of the Second World War Wehrmacht that soldiers' obedience and combat motivation 'depended upon the personality of the officer'.⁶ Further important questions regarding the conclusions of the current German historiographical consensus are raised by Gary Sheffield's extremely valuable research on officer–man relations in the British army during the First World War. Far from damaging the cohesion of the British Expeditionary Force, Sheffield has found that social segregation between ranks actually reinforced its cohesion and resilience. Interaction between officers and men functioned through the paternalism–deference exchange which had characterized peacetime class relations. Upper-class officers, educated to recognize that high position entailed the responsibility not only to rule but also to help social inferiors, took care of their men, who in

³ 'Der besondere soziale Charakter der Armee verhinderte eine erfolgreiche Besinnung auf den eigentlichen Aufgabenbereich einer Streitmacht, auf die militärischen Komponente.' H. Ostertag, *Bildung, Ausbildung und Erziehung des Offizierkorps im deutschen Kaiserreich 1871–1918: Eliteideal, Anspruch und Wirklichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York, and Paris, 1990), p. 214.

⁴ Kitchen, *German Officer Corps*, p. 227.

⁵ W. Kruse, 'Krieg und Klassenheer: zur Revolutionierung der deutschen Armee im Ersten Weltkrieg', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft: Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft* XXII (1996), pp. 532–33.

⁶ S.A. Stouffer, A.A. Lumsdaine, M.H. Lumsdaine, R.M. Williams Jr, M.B. Smith, I.L. Janis, S.A. Star, and L.S. Cottrell Jr, *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, 2 vols (New York, [1949], 1965), II, pp. 126–27, and M. Janowitz and E.A. Shils, 'Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II', in M. Janowitz, ed., *Military Conflict: Essays in the Institutional Analysis of War and Peace* (Los Angeles, 1975), p. 196.

return acknowledged their leaders' authority and accepted their privileges. The superb disciplinary record of the British Expeditionary Force testifies to the success of this relationship; unlike the French army, whose system of officer selection was far more democratic, desertion was insignificant and mutinies virtually unknown.⁷

Contrary to the current historiographical consensus that German junior leadership was generally poor, this paper will argue that many of the factors which made British inter-rank relations so successful also functioned in the Kaiser's army during the First World War. Section II will examine the training, composition, and mentality of the officer corps before and during the war, explaining that its aristocratic ethos demanded that junior leaders look after their men's welfare and lead them by example into battle. Section III will then investigate the widely attested *Offiziershaß* ('officer hate') which spread throughout the army during the war. It will be demonstrated that this was not the direct result of the social divisions in the army but rather an emotion brought about by wartime organizational and circumstantial factors, and aimed primarily at rear-line officers and staff. Finally, in the fourth section, the performance of the junior officer corps will be assessed. It will be argued that although in rear and second-line units inter-rank relations were tense by the end of the war, in the vital combat units, paternalistic and conscientious officers played a crucial role in leading and supporting their men through four years of intense and bloody fighting.

II. Composition, Ethos, and Training

Despite the recruitment of large numbers of upper-middle-class men in the years before 1914, aristocratic values defined the ethos of the German officer corps. Of the 33036 professional (or 'active') officers in pre-war service 30% came from the nobility, but tradition and their disproportionate share of the upper ranks (52% of officers between the ranks of *Oberst* and *General* were aristocrats) ensured that they maintained a dominant influence.⁸ The more fashionable regiments, the Guard, cavalry units, and those stationed in the major cities, often had a very high proportion of aristocratic officers; the new men recruited from the middle class tended to join arms such as the *Fußartillerie*

⁷ G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer–Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2000). For French army officership, see L.V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), pp. 78–79.

⁸ See G. Gothein, *Warum verloren wir den Krieg?* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1919), p. 80, and Ostertag, *Bildung*, p. 45. Gothein's figure for the corps's strength on the outbreak of war is supported by the army's medical history, which quotes an establishment strength of 33 804 professional officers (including medical and veterinary officers) in 1913–14. See Heeres-Sanitätsinspektion des Reichskriegsministeriums, ed., *Sanitätsbericht über das Deutsche Heer (Deutsches Feld- und Besatzungsheer) im Weltkrieg 1914/1918 (Deutscher Kriegssanitätsbericht 1914/18): die Krankenbewegung bei dem deutschen Feld- und Besatzungsheer im Weltkrieg 1914/1918*, 3 vols (Berlin, 1934), III [hereafter *Sanitätsbericht III*], p. 12.

(heavy artillery) which were less prestigious and demanded technical knowledge.⁹ The *Offiziere der Reserve*, who numbered approximately 40 000 men at the outbreak of war, were also drawn predominantly from the upper middle classes. In 1905 businessmen and landowners each made up approximately 13% and higher officials 45% of the Prussian corps.¹⁰ Standards were maintained by strict entry criteria. Professional officers were required to satisfy the financial conditions set by the regiment they entered; they were interviewed by the regimental commander in order to ensure their social suitability and, once they had passed an 11-month course at a *Kriegsschule* and a further period at a *Militärschießschule*, they were obliged to go through an *Offizierswahl* (officer election) in which their moral worth was assessed. Minimum educational standards were also demanded throughout the corps, although only in Bavaria was it necessary to possess the *Absolutorium* (*Abitur* exam). In Prussia, Württemberg, and Saxony it sufficed for the candidate to have attended a *Kadettenanstalt* (cadet institution) or spent nine years at a *Gymnasium*, *Realgymnasium*, or *Oberrealschule*.¹¹ The intake of reserve officers was restricted to those who had completed the sixth class of a *Gymnasium* and passed the *Einjährig-Freiwillige* exam. Proof of their financial suitability was given by the fact that these men were obliged to pay for their year-long training themselves. As in the case of professional officer candidates, the *Einjährig-Freiwillige* had to undergo an *Offizierswahl* successfully before being promoted to *Leutnant der Reserve*.¹²

A uniformly high social standard was considered to be an important precondition in the successful maintenance of the *Standesbewußtsein* or 'caste consciousness' which identified officers as a separate and special group in Wilhelmine society. Only men with the requisite social training and experience were believed to be capable of conforming to the high moral expectations of the corps, centred on the aristocratic concept of

⁹ Ostertag, *Bildung*, pp. 48–50, and W. Deist, 'Zur Geschichte des preussischen Offizierkorps 1888–1918', in H.H. Hofmann, ed., *Das deutsche Offizierkorps 1860–1960* (Boppard am Rhein, 1980), p. 50.

¹⁰ For reserve officer occupations, see H. John, *Das Reserveoffizierkorps im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1890–1914: ein sozialgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Untersuchung der gesellschaftlichen Militarisierung im Wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main and New York, 1981), p. 264. In 1913 the German army possessed 23 000 reserve and 11 000 *Landwehr* officers, according to British intelligence, which reached this conclusion by adding up the names in that year's published army lists. Additional to this figure were perhaps 6000–7000 commissioned reserve medical and veterinary personnel. No definitive estimate for these men exists, but it is known that the army required a little more than 10 000 such men on mobilization in August 1914, approximately 3000 of whom were probably active officers. See General Staff, *German Army Handbook April 1918*, ed. D. Nash (London and New York, 1977), p. 24; *Sanitätsbericht III*, pp. 4* and 8*; and C. von Altröck, ed., *Vom Sterben des deutschen Offizierkorps* (Berlin, 1922), p. 54.

¹¹ Ostertag, *Bildung*, pp. 56–57; M. Samuels, *Command or Control? Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888–1918* (London, 1995), pp. 80–81; and A. Teicht, 'Die Offiziersausbildung in Bayern während des 1. Weltkriegs', Hochschule der Bundeswehr München Pädagogik Diplomarbeit, 1978, pp. 20–22.

¹² Teicht, 'Offiziersausbildung', pp. 23–25. Cf. U. Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society* (Oxford and New York, 2004), p. 159.

honour (*Ehre*). Officers were expected to protect the honour of the corps and of their monarch, to whom they owed direct allegiance. Despite its illegality, duelling was considered to be the proper method of defending personal honour until the early twentieth century, and it was not unknown for men unwilling to undergo such procedures to be refused by regimental commanders. Impeccable social lives were demanded of both professional and reserve officers, transgressions leading to arraignment before an *Ehrengericht* (court of honour) and loss of rank. Such measures were believed to be necessary, for scandals were considered to reflect not just on the worth of the individual but also on the honour and reputation of the entire corps.¹³

Officers' concern with honour was not solely an expression of social snobbery or an excuse for maintaining the corps's privileged societal position: it was also motivated by a genuine belief that only men of the highest moral calibre could lead troops through the hail of fire on the battlefield. Modern psychological and sociological research contends that leadership is most effective when it is by example. This precept was fully recognized by the German army, whose training guidelines observed in 1916 that 'the officer is the model of his men; his example pulls them forward with him'.¹⁴ In the pre-war period, belief in example was even more intense. For active officers, the willingness not only to lead but also to die was considered a necessary duty in order to inspire the rank and file on to further acts of glory.¹⁵ Just as officers imbued with the aristocratic moral codex could be expected to defend their personal honour by duelling in peace, so too in war they could be relied upon to die the *Heldentod* (hero's death) for the honour of king and Kaiser. The social exclusivity of the corps was thus justified by the fact that the men it recruited objectively had the greatest stake in society, were the most patriotically educated, and were imbued with a sense of duty, loyalty, and honour enabling them to fulfil these exacting demands.¹⁶

Upper-class men were favoured not only for their perceived moral strength but also because it was believed that they would provide adequately for subordinates' welfare. The necessity for officers to take an interest in their soldiers had been recognized by the Prussian Army from the promulgation of its liberalizing 'Order on Military Punishment'

¹³ H. Rumschöttel, 'Der bayerische Offizierkorps 1866–1918', in H.H. Hofmann, ed., *Das deutsche Offizierkorps 1860–1960* (Boppard am Rhein, 1980), pp. 93–96; Kitchen, *German Officer Corps*, pp. 22–23; Ostertag, *Bildung*, pp. 197–210; and Demeter, *German Officer-Corps*, pp. 111–46.

¹⁴ 'Der Offizier ist das Vorbild seiner Leute; sein Beispiel reisst sie mit vorwärts.' Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg [hereafter BA-MA Freiburg], PH 3/28, Zum Exerzier - Reglement. Kampfschule. Allgemeines, November 1916. For the modern research, see Stouffer et al., *American Soldier*, II, p. 124.

¹⁵ M. Funck, 'In den Tod gehen: Bilder des Sterbens im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert', in U. Breymayer, B. Ulrich, and K. Wieland, eds, *Willensmenschen: Über deutsche Offiziere* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), p. 231.

¹⁶ For the education of the Wilhelmine upper classes, see M. Kraul, *Das deutsche Gymnasium 1780–1980* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), pp. 100–26.

in 1808, leading to the metamorphosis of the unit *Hauptmann* into the *Kompagnievater* ('company father') during the nineteenth century.¹⁷ By the First World War, such principles had been clearly codified as an integral part of an officer's position. Point 6 of the 1908 *Felddienst-Ordnung*, the service manual of the Prussian Army, demanded that officers adopt a paternalistic attitude towards their men, stating explicitly that 'never resting care for the welfare of his men is the good and rewarding privilege of the officer'.¹⁸ Point 5 similarly reminded officers that 'it is not enough that one orders, nor that one has right in mind; much more influential on subordinates is the way in which one orders'.¹⁹ The model of command relations expressed in these guidelines was based on aristocratic paternalism, embodied in the tradition of *noblesse oblige*. Central to German nobles' identity, this creed not only set its adherents apart as a governing elite but also espoused the principle that 'rule without active care for one's charges is nothing'. It was also adopted by the burgeoning urban upper classes at the end of the century, and youths socialized from an early age into its philanthropic values were naturally viewed as possessing excellent qualifications for the caring, conscientious leadership expected of German officers.²⁰

Despite the belief that upper-class men would possess a natural affinity to command, pre-war German officer training did not neglect to reinforce the values of paternalistic leadership. The notorious *Kadettenanstalten* may have provided little intellectual stimulus but they did place boys preparing for life as active officers within a 'mild and paternal' model of discipline and encouraged them to take responsibility for younger peers.²¹ Whether previous cadets or graduates of civilian *Gymnasien*, men who sought a professional military career all

¹⁷ See Demeter, *German Officer-Corps*, pp. 174–82, and Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München, Abteilung IV: Kriegsarchiv [hereafter HStA Munich/IV], Gen.Kdo I.AK 52, Order of *Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres* concerning physical and verbal mishandling, 18 September 1916.

¹⁸ 'Nie rastende Fürsorge für das Wohl seiner Mannschaft ist das schöne und dankbare Vorrecht des Offiziers.' Kriegsministerium, *Felddienst-Ordnung (F.O.)* (Berlin, 1908), p. 10.

¹⁹ 'Es genügt nicht, daß man befiehlt, auch nicht, daß man das Rechte dabei im Auge hat; vielmehr hat die Art, wie man befiehlt, einen großen Einfluß auf den Untergebenen.' Op. cit., pp. 9–10.

²⁰ 'Herrentum ohne die tätige Fürsorge für die ihm anvertrauten Menschen ist keines.' S. Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer: sozialer Niedergang und politische Radikalisierung im deutschen Adel zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Staat* (Berlin, 2003), pp. 111–13. For the urban upper classes' adoption of similar values, see H. Jaeger, 'Der Unternehmer als Vater und Patriarch', in W. Faulstich and G.E. Grimm, eds, *Sturz der Götter? Vaterbilder im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), pp. 105–06.

²¹ This description is that of the American general Emory Upton, who visited the schools in the 1870s. Quoted in Clemente, *For King and Kaiser*, p. 123. The quality of life and education provided by the *Kadettenanstalten* remains controversial. For criticism (especially of the low intellectual standards and bullying that the system could encourage), see op. cit., pp. 81–135. For a more positive view, see J. Moncure, *Forging the King's Sword: Military Education between Tradition and Modernization: the Case of the Royal Prussian Cadet Corps, 1871–1918* (New York, 1993), especially, for details of leadership training, pp. 179–84 and pp. 199–202.

personally experienced life in the ranks, practised command as NCOs, and were themselves subject to the army's paternalistic impulses, a young *Leutnant* being nominated as their guiding *Fähnrichsvater* ('Ensign Father').²² Training for prospective reserve officers was organized along similar principles: as barrack-room seniors, *Einjährig-Freiwillige* were held responsible for their conscripted comrades' hygiene and tidiness, and expected to set an example of loyalty, obedience, and efficiency.²³ Such instruction was designed to create paternalistic officers not only concerned for men's physical well-being but also capable of guiding conscripts away from the perceived malign influences of Social Democracy and instilling in them feelings of loyalty and duty towards the Kaiser.²⁴ Modern critics might question its success, given contemporary scandals about the verbal and physical mishandling of recruits by superiors. Yet the significance of these cases should not be overestimated: the 800 plaintiffs who brought charges before the courts annually in Prussia were a tiny proportion of the 800 000 men serving in the peacetime army, and the overwhelming majority of complaints seem to have been directed at NCOs rather than officers.²⁵ A useful corrective to the popularized view of professional German officers as upper-class brutes may be found in the experience of Wilhelm Lüthje, who on arrival at a Nuremberg regiment for officer training in 1909 was barked at by the regular *Hauptmann*, who received him: 'first come the horses, then the men, then you yourself!' As Lüthje had not been greeted and was still standing in civilian clothes this surprised him. Yet it clearly made a deep impression, for nine years later, as a veteran *Leutnant*, he criticized a superior in his diary but then rehabilitated him with the words, 'he does, however, understand something; he interests himself in the men and horses, and that is the main thing'.²⁶ Such concern for the well-being of subordinates was in fact unlikely to have been exceptional in peacetime.

²² See Clemente, *For King and Kaiser*, pp. 72–73; Ostertag, *Bildung*, pp. 99–100; and Teicht, 'Offiziersausbildung', p. 21.

²³ Frevert, *Nation in Barracks*, pp. 167–69, and John, *Reserveoffizierkorps*, pp. 119–23.

²⁴ See Frevert, *Nation in Barracks*, pp. 194–95; Clemente, *For King and Kaiser*, p. 162; and also BA-MA Freiburg, PH 3/62, Order of *Generalquartiermeisters* on combating leftist propaganda, 25 July 1917.

²⁵ Kitchen, *German Officer Corps*, pp. 182–84. Evidence that most of the accused were NCOs comes from Saxon Army figures, which record that between 1909 and June 1914 only seven officers were sentenced for mishandling, in contrast to 109 NCOs. See E.-O. Volkmann, *Soziale Heeresmißstände als Teilursache des deutschen Zusammenbruches von 1918: die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruches im Jahre 1918*, Zweite Abteilung, *Der innere Zusammenbruch*, 12 vols (Berlin, 1929), XI.2, p. 123. German NCOs had a particular propensity to resort to unofficial means of maintaining discipline because of fear of their accumulating bad reports and being denied a civil service post at the end of their career. See Samuels, *Command or Control?*, p. 80.

²⁶ 'Zuerst kommen die Pferde, dann die Mannschaften, dann Sie selbst!'; 'Jedenfalls versteht er etwas, interessiert sich für Mannschaften und Pferde, und das ist die Hauptsache.' BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/2797, W. Lüthje, memoir section of diary, p. 8, and diary, 3 September 1918. Owing to German privacy laws, the surnames of the diarists and letter writers quoted in this article have been replaced by pseudonyms.

As another officer remembered after the war, 'the young officer was taught to understand the characteristics of the man from his earlier civilian occupational activity and to be thoroughly concerned with his personal relationships, in order to support him with advice and help if necessary'.²⁷

Heavy casualties and rapid expansion forced the army to commission approximately 220 000 officers during the war.²⁸ The great need for leaders resulted in the loosening of recruitment criteria. In the Bavarian Army, the demand that candidates for the professional corps should have passed *Abitur* was dropped in December 1914. Aspiring reserve officers no longer had to take the *Einjährig-Freiwillige* exam after 1 August 1915 and instead were required only to prove that they had attended six classes of an upper secondary school. Financial and social restrictions were also officially loosened in June and December 1917 in response to officer shortages, to the extent that, as one historian has observed, 'one only still expected from the reserve officer aspirant that he did not damage the reputation of the officer corps'.²⁹ These lowered criteria still did not open up the corps to working-class other ranks lacking the required educational qualifications, a fact greatly criticized by socialists after the war. They did, however, allow young men from the lower middle classes to become eligible for appointment as officers, and it was they who bore the brunt of leading the army at the front in the last years of the conflict.³⁰

The influx of men from outside the corps's normal recruiting grounds prompted the fear that the corps would lose its 'caste consciousness'.

²⁷ 'Dem jungen Offizier wurde beigebracht, die Eigenarten des Mannes aus der Tätigkeit in seinem früheren Zivilberuf zu verstehen und sich eingehend um seine persönlichen Verhältnisse zu kümmern, um ihm nötigenfalls mit Rat und Hilfe zur Seite zu stehen.' F. Altrichter, *Die seelischen Kräfte des Deutschen Heeres im Frieden und im Weltkriege* (Berlin, 1933), p. 57.

²⁸ Because of the fragmentary nature of the sources, this figure is necessarily an estimate. Volkman (Soziale Heeresmißstände, XI.2, p. 33) states that 272 053 active and reserve officers served during the war. Subtracting the approximately 30 000 active and 34 000 reserve officers appointed in peacetime (see footnotes 8 and 10) leaves 208 000 (non-medical or veterinary) wartime commissions. A further 10 000–11 000 medical and veterinary officers (excluding the perhaps 10 000–15 000 emergency *Feldhilfsärzte* and *Feldhilfsveterinäre*) were also promoted during hostilities – see von Altröck, *Vom Sterben*, p. 54. Additionally, there were 21 607 *Feldwebel-Leutnants* (an intermediate rank between NCO and officer) in the Prussian Army and possibly 25 000–30 000 in all of the German contingents combined during hostilities (see Volkman, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.2, p. 36).

²⁹ 'Erwartete man vom Reserveoffiziers-Aspiranten nur noch, daß er das Ansehen des Offizierkorps nicht schädigt.' Teicht, 'Offiziersausbildung', pp. 31, 36, 54, and 85.

³⁰ Altrichter, *Seelischen Kräfte*, p. 232. For an example of a man who benefited from the reduced criteria of wartime, see BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/3788, papers of G. Keddi. Keddi's father was a master carpenter, a profession which would not have satisfied the high standards maintained by the corps in the pre-war period. For criticism of the discrimination against working-class men, see M. Hobohm, *Soziale Heeresmißstände als Teilursache des deutschen Zusammenbruches von 1918: die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruches im Jahre 1918*, Zweite Abteilung, *Der innere Zusammenbruch*, 12 vols (Berlin, 1929), XI.1, pp. 108–09. Men without the necessary educational requirements were able to rise only to the rank of *Feldwebel-Leutnant*.

To some extent, this did indeed take place: Wilhelm Deist has argued that the corps's mentality changed from being aristocratic-agrarian to that of the industrial middle class, the old emphasis on personal loyalty to the monarch retracting in favour of patriotic service to the nation.³¹ Nonetheless, efforts were made to imbue the new officers with those aspects of the aristocratic mentality most applicable to the current conflict. Bavarian training courses in 1915 emphasized that new officers should be inculcated with feelings of duty, honour, and tact, and should be taught to take pride in their responsibility. By 1917, as increasing numbers of lower-middle-class officers entered the army, particular emphasis was placed on 'inoculating' officers with the aristocratic 'caste consciousness'.³² Paternalism also continued to be emphasized as a crucial quality for officership: the army fully recognized, as an order from the chief of the general staff of September 1916 demonstrates, that 'the longer the war lasts, the greater must be the care and personal sympathy of the superior for his subordinate'.³³ The experience of active service supported this view, front formations correspondingly stressing that, in training courses, 'the young officer must become completely conscious of the responsibility-demanding task of constant care for his subordinates'.³⁴ Notice of these concerns was taken when official instructions were compiled for the new lower-class reserve officers in 1917, which ordered that 'it is to be stressed in the instruction that the care for the well-being of the man is one of the most distinguished leadership duties'.³⁵ Once commissioned, these junior officers received constant reminders warning that 'an officer who doesn't care for his men, does not belong in his place'.³⁶

Not only admonitions but also practical tips were issued in order to help the new reserve officers to act paternalistically. A 1917 booklet produced for divisions being transferred to the west after the cessation of fighting in Russia reminded officers that they should know not only

³¹ Deist, 'Zur Geschichte des preußischen Offizierkorps', pp. 40–42.

³² Teicht, 'Offiziersausbildung', pp. 38 and 59–60.

³³ 'Je länger der Krieg dauert, desto größer muß die Fürsorge der Vorgesetzten und seine persönliche Anteilnahme für seinen Untergebenen sein.' HStA Munich/IV, Gen. Kdo I. AK Bund 52, Order of the Chief of the General Staff, 18 September 1916.

³⁴ 'Der junge Offizier muß sich der verantwortungsvollen Aufgabe dauernder Fürsorge für seine Untergebenen voll bewußt werden.' HStA Munich/IV, MKr 1857, Memorandum from *Oberkommando der 6. Armee* to the Prussian War Ministry regarding the training of *Fahnenjunker* and *Reserveoffizier-Aspiranten*, 28 December 1916.

³⁵ 'Im Unterricht ist hervorzuheben, daß die Sorge für das Wohl des Mannes eine der vornehmsten Führerpflichten ist.' HStA Munich/IV, MKr 1857, *Bestimmungen für die Lehrgänge der Anwärter zu Offiziersaspiranten des Beurlaubtenstandes der Infanterie, Jäger und Schützen einsch. Maschinengewehr-Truppen auf Truppenübungsplätzen des Inlandes* (Berlin, 1917), p. 8.

³⁶ 'Ein Offizier, der nicht für seine Leute sorgt, gehört nicht an seinen Platz.' HStA Munich/IV, Gen. Kdo I. AK Bund 52, Order of *Heeresgruppe Deutscher Kronprinz*, 7 November 1918. Cf. Hobohm, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.1, pp. 13–78. Such orders are generally interpreted as proof of neglect by officers, but they may more accurately reflect the deeply ingrained paternalistic concern of the general staff.

their subordinates' names but also their attitudes, characters, and familial relations. It advised that efforts should be made to amuse men outside hours of instruction with sport, competitions, music, and the cinema.³⁷ An array of booklets written by professional soldiers in order to help the quickly trained front-line officers to adapt to their new role reinforced this message. That authored by *Major* Georg Wintterlin echoed and bettered the *Felddienst-Ordnung* when it observed, 'Care for the man [is] the greatest privilege for the officer.'³⁸ Wintterlin emphasized the importance of allowing men to sleep undisturbed after battle, and the need to provide good food and warm quarters. Singing should be promoted and sporting competitions organized, and, ambitiously, he suggested that the men should be encouraged to become teetotal. The guide produced by *Oberst* Eckart von Wurmb echoed Wintterlin's advice on rations and accommodation, and paid particular attention to the importance of ensuring that men's feet were in good condition.³⁹ *Oberst* Schaible, in his 1917 manual, more generally warned against dishonourable behaviour towards subordinates and recommended that demonstrations of trust would help to form a good relationship between the young officer and his men.⁴⁰

By offering this advice, these professional officers were attempting to pass on the ethos of the pre-war army to the young recruits, on whose leadership at the front the fate of Germany depended. While the traditional *Standesbewußtsein* or 'caste consciousness' of the officer corps was certainly designed to distinguish leaders from the led, one of its central tenets was that position entailed responsibility. Aristocratic culture had a long history of paternalism, and it was partly for this reason that social exclusivity was considered so important not only for the peacetime but also the military functions of the officer corps. When heavy casualties and the requirements of a nation in arms necessitated the loosening of social criteria for recruitment into the corps, efforts were made to inculcate the new lower-middle-class reserve officers with the paternalistic ethos. Far from being encouraged to be indifferent, condescending, or even brutal towards their subordinates, officers in the peace- and wartime German armies were given every encouragement to support, care for, and build relationships with the men under their command.

³⁷ BA-MA Freiburg, PH 3/33, Maasgruppe West (Generalkommando VII A.K.), Richtlinien über die Ausbildung von Offizieren und Mannschaften des östlichen Kriegsschauplatzes in der westlichen Kriegsführung, 22 November 1917, pp. 3 and 19.

³⁸ 'Fürsorge für den Mann [ist] das schönste Vorrecht für den Offizier.' G. Wintterlin, *Kriegsgemäße Ausbildung der Kompanie: eine Anleitung für Kompanie- und Zugführer* (Berlin, 1917), pp. 68 and 70.

³⁹ E. von Wurmb, 'Zum Offizier befördert!' *Kameradschaftlicher Ratgeber für junge Offiziere und den Offizierersatz der Linie und des Beurlaubtenstandes* (Berlin, 1917), pp. 43–44.

⁴⁰ C. Schaible, *Standes- und Berufspflichten des deutschen Offiziers: für angehende und jüngere Offiziere des stehenden Heeres und des Beurlaubtenstandes* (Berlin, 1917), pp. 24–25.

III. The ‘Officer Hate’

Traditional historiography has condemned the officer corps on the basis of the well-attested *Offiziershaß* or ‘officer hate’ which swept the German army during the war. One of the earliest, most detailed, and best known accounts of this emotion was a tract written by an *Unteroffizier*, Hermann Kantorowicz, in September 1916, which warned of an ‘irreconcilable hatred against one’s own officer’ among the men. Inequalities in the distribution of rations, pay, and awards were, in his opinion, the primary causes of the bitterness.⁴¹ Independent confirmation of the causes and extent of resentment among the rank and file can be found in a letter censorship report of July 1917 which observed that ‘disparaging criticisms of officers are the order of the day’, and listed unfairness in pay, rations, and leave as being particularly divisive.⁴² After the war, the Reichsarchiv historian Martin Hobohm collected an impressive array of official documents referring to the abuses and discontent within the army. Besides the factors mentioned by the censor and Kantorowicz, he identified severe discipline, insensitive handling, corruption and shirking on the part of officers, unfair promotion, inadequate leave and rest, and inequitable quartering as further causes of tension. For him, it was not the leftist extremists at home who had undermined the army, as the high command claimed, but the poor behaviour of a selfish, elitist officer corps: ‘What was the *Spartakus* movement’, he asked, ‘against the gluttonous, rancorous, haughty fraction among the officers!’⁴³

The primary cause of the ‘officer hate’ was not, as Hobohm saw it, elitism and social discrimination stemming from ‘an obsolete army type’ but rather a front–rear divide also experienced by other armies on the Western Front.⁴⁴ Kantorowicz was quite specific in his analysis of the main targets of the ‘officer hate’:

It is especially the middle officers – *Hauptleute* and staff officers – whom [the man] targets, because these, unlike the *Leutnant*, do not even stake their lives as the price of their supposedly comfortable living, while the restraint of the generals and general staff away from the fire line naturally meets with approval.⁴⁵

⁴¹ ‘Ingrimmigen Haß gegen den eigenen Offizier.’ H. Kantorowicz, *Der Offiziershaß im deutschen Heer* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1919), pp. 11 and 15–21.

⁴² ‘Abfällige Kritiken an Offizieren sind an der Tagesordnung’. BA-MA Freiburg, W-10/50794, Postüberwachung bei der A.O.K. 6. insonderheit 5. Armee, 12 July 1917, p. 15.

⁴³ ‘Was war Spartakus gegen den schlemmenden, schnauzenden, hochmütigen Teil der Offiziere!’ Hobohm, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.1, p. 364.

⁴⁴ ‘Ein überholter Heerestyp.’ Op. cit., p. 373. For front–rear friction in the British army, see Sheffield, *Leadership*, p. 98, and J.B. Wilson, ‘Morale and Discipline in the British Expeditionary Force, 1914–1918’, MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1978, p. 135.

⁴⁵ ‘Zwar sind es besonders die mittleren Offiziere – Hauptleute und Stabsoffiziere –, auf die [der Mann] abzielt, weil diese nicht, wie der Leutnant, wenigstens das Leben selbst als Preis ihres vermeintlichen Wohllebens einsetzen, während er andererseits die Zurückhaltung der Generalität und der Generalstäbler aus der Feuerlinie natürlich billigt.’ Kantorowicz, *Offiziershaß*, p. 13.

Combatants' letters and diaries support this opinion: the artilleryman Heinrich Genscher, for example, was favourably disposed to most of his own officers but referred contemptuously to those in the rear areas as 'lacquer-shoed masters'.⁴⁶ Another soldier, Ernst Vogt, remarked more explicitly that 'the high officers, who almost all keep down in the rear areas at others' expense and lead a good, lazy life [...] are held by the front troops in deepest contempt – yes, great hatred'.⁴⁷ Even front-line officers participated in this 'officer hate': *Leutnant* Hans Muhsal of *Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment 119* spent much time complaining about the incomprehension and crassness of staff officers.⁴⁸

The tension between front and rear was far from an atypically German phenomenon stemming from the social divisions of the Kaiser's army; even as egalitarian and meritocratic an army as that of America in the Second World War experienced what the sociologist Samuel Stouffer termed 'a smoldering resentment' against officers in rear areas and inactive theatres.⁴⁹ In the German case, however, the intensity and extent of resentment were increased by the severe material deficiencies of the second half of the war. Whereas in 1914 and 1915 officers' privileges were accepted by other ranks unquestioningly, the food shortages which began in the spring of 1916 not only catalysed anger against the staff but even divided officers and men in combat units.⁵⁰ Already from early April 1916, men on leave trains could be heard to complain that officers 'indulged to excess, while the soldiers don't even have the bare necessities'.⁵¹ Despite the establishment in December 1916 of so-called *Menagekommissionen*, boards of officers and men whose job was to ensure that food was distributed fairly, and the constant warnings to officers not to flaunt their better rations, criticism did not abate.⁵² Although, as the historian Avner Offer has shown, the army maintained an energy ration throughout the war, men complained of starvation: 'O Deutschland, hoch in Ehren, / Du kannst uns nicht ernähern!' went one widely sung satirical ditty of

⁴⁶ 'Lackschuhen[e] Herren.' BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/2735, H. Genscher, letter to father, 13 March 1915.

⁴⁷ '[Die] hohen Offizieren, die fast alle sich in der Etappe auf Kosten anderer herumdrücken und ein gutes faules Leben führen [...] stehen bei der Fronttruppe in tiefsten Verachtung – ja großem Hass.' BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 1/3183, E. Vogt, diary/memoir, 5 April 1918.

⁴⁸ BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 1/3109, H. Muhsal, diary, 27 and 29 March 1915, 13 January 1916, 24 August 1917, 24 February, and 12 April, 1918.

⁴⁹ S.A. Stouffer, E.A. Suchman, L.C. DeViney, S.A. Star, and R.M. Williams Jr, *The American Soldier: Adjustment during Army Life*, 2 vols (New York, [1949] 1965), I, p. 369.

⁵⁰ See the documents reproduced in Hobohm, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.1, pp. 13–79 and 377–421. Only one order from this large collection originated in mid-1916, strongly indicating that criticism peaked in the second half of the war.

⁵¹ 'Im Ueberfluss schwelgten, während die Soldaten selbst nicht das Notwendigste hätten.' Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 11352 Stellv. Gen-Kdo. XIX A.K. Nr. KA(P) 24139, Kriegsakten betr. Eisenbahnüberwachungs-Reisen, p. 67, report dated 13 April 1916.

⁵² HStA Munich/IV, Gen. Kdo I. AK Bund 52, Order of the *Generalquartiermeister*, 26 December 1916.

1917.⁵³ Only when officers ate with the men and shared their food did criticism cease, but the enforcement of such a policy was steadfastly refused by the high command because of the belief that separation between officers and men was a precondition of good discipline. This was certainly a mistake: officers who did eat with their subordinates often actually gained in respect. It is significant, for example, that a captured NCO of the elite 4th Assault Battalion who ‘spoke in glowing terms’ about his officer mentioned specifically that he messed with the unit’s NCOs behind the lines.⁵⁴

In the atmosphere of increasing war weariness and bitterness, the junior officer corps required a high level of tact and skill in order to continue to provide effective leadership. Unfortunately, by the middle years of the war, few experienced peacetime officers were left at the front. Partly to blame for this situation was the exclusivity of peacetime officer recruitment, which had created a corps too small to fill more than two-thirds of the 119 754 officer posts in the fully mobilized German army.⁵⁵ Heavy fighting during the first year and a half of hostilities, costing the lives of 17% of active officers and 9% of the reserve, and the withdrawal of experienced personnel from the front to the command of new formations exacerbated the army’s need for new leaders.⁵⁶ By early 1915 the army was not only promoting soldiers who had attended but failed the demanding reserve officer courses of peacetime but also commissioning middle-class men lacking any experience of pre-war military service. As the conflict wore on, these so-called *Kriegsoffiziere* came to dominate front-line commands.⁵⁷

Blamed by postwar defenders of the professional officer corps for aggravating this discontent, the *Kriegsoffiziere* do indeed seem to have laboured under a number of significant disadvantages compared with their predecessors.⁵⁸ First, although their training did provide instruction on how to look after their subordinates, including an emphasis on

⁵³ The words mean: ‘O Germany, high in honour, / you cannot feed us.’ See W. Schuhmacher, *Leben und Seele unseres Soldatenlieds im Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main, 1928), p. 173. German rations’ calorie content declined from 3100 at the beginning of the war to 2500 in the winter of 1917–18. See A. Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford, 1989), p. 60, and Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918: die Kriegsführung an der Westfront im Jahre 1918*, 14 vols (Berlin, 1944), XIV, p. 31, footnote 1.

⁵⁴ The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA], WO 157/192, Summary of Information, Fourth Army, 1 March 1918. For the belief that discipline could be damaged if men and officers ate together, see Hobohm, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.1, p. 51.

⁵⁵ See C. Jany, *Geschichte der Preußischen Armee vom 15. Jahrhundert bis 1914*, 5 vols (Osnabrück, 1933, 1967), IV, pp. 329–30. Retired officers and NCOs appointed to *Offizierstellvertreter* (deputy officers) were used to fill empty command positions. See L. Rüdiger von Collenberg, *Die deutsche Armee von 1871 bis 1914* (Berlin, 1922), p. 118.

⁵⁶ Volkman, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.2, p. 34, and Hobohm, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.1, pp. 176–77.

⁵⁷ During 1915, regiments were ordered to send young soldiers with secondary schooling back to Germany for officer training. Such was the need for new leaders that already by mid-November 1915, the Prussian Army alone had commissioned 59 718 new officers.

See Altrichter, *Seelischen Kräfte*, p. 232, and Volkman, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.2, p. 34.

⁵⁸ Volkman, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.2, p. 89. Cf. Altrichter, *Seelischen Kräfte*, p. 213.

paternalism, it was very short. Active officers were commissioned after an eight- (later twelve-) week course. *Heimatkurse* (home courses) established to train reserve officers suffered from a lack of suitable instruction personnel.⁵⁹ Usually, this was offset by the fact that men in possession of the *Einjährig-Freiwilligen Befähigungsschein* (the qualification necessary to be considered for promotion) had served a considerable period of time in the ranks and as NCOs before becoming officers.⁶⁰ On occasion, however, it did result in men with an inadequate grasp of their duties being promoted. One prisoner from the elite *württemberger Infanterie-Regiment 125*, for example, told his British captors in August 1917 that many of his unit's officers were students or businessmen with only four weeks of inadequate training. Some were unable even to dig a trench or fortify a position. The presence of such incompetent leadership may have contributed to the mutiny of three of the regiment's companies in the same month.⁶¹

On the whole, however, official documents testify to the military competence of most *Kriegsoffiziere*. Where their main problem lay was in their inability to capture their subordinates' hearts and minds: as late as October 1918 the Bavarian War Ministry believed that purely military training ('rein[e] militärisch[e] Ausbildung') was adequate but that officers required more instruction in exerting personal influence on their soldiers ('menschlich[e] Einwirkung auf den Untergebenen').⁶² The difficulty was partly caused by the youth of many of the new leaders, recruited as the supply of older men possessing the requisite social qualifications dwindled. The boys promoted during the war lacked the experience of the older peacetime active and reserve officers, and the privileges they received caused bitterness among the other ranks. As Kantorowicz observed, high rates of pay in peacetime were justified, as officers were fully trained professionals and older than the short-service conscripts they led. The sight of youthful *Leutnants* being given 320 marks per month, more than 20 times their own pay, embittered other ranks in the second half of the war, however. Men condemned an army which commissioned 'boys of 19 years', who 'understand nothing of the world, already have big mouths and pocket large salaries'.⁶³ Far from easing this criticism, the social expansion of the wartime corps sometimes actually encouraged it, men condemning

⁵⁹ Teicht, 'Offiziersausbildung', pp. 83–84 and 86.

⁶⁰ Letter and diary evidence suggests that often the period of probation was as much as two years. See, for example, BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/3788, G. Keddi, letters, and MSg 2/2735, H. Genscher, letters.

⁶¹ TNA, WO 157/23, Summary of Information (GHQ), 28 August 1917, p. 3. For details of the mutiny, see op. cit., 30 August 1917, p. 2.

⁶² HStA Munich/IV, MKr 4751, Order of Bavarian War Ministry regarding officer training, 8 October 1918.

⁶³ 'Buben von 19 Jahren'; 'verstehen von der Welt nichts, haben schon große Mäuler und stecken große Gehälter ein.' BA-MA Freiburg, W-10/50794, Postüberwachung bei der A.O.K. 6. insonderheit 5. Armee, 12 July 1917, p. 20. See also Kantorowicz, *Offiziershaß*, pp. 17–19.

newly promoted officers of inferior social status 'who never saw so much money in their lives'.⁶⁴ Not simple class tension but rather the thought that some men were unfairly benefiting from the war was the primary factor behind the 'officer hate'.

Structural changes in the German army during the war also inflamed the 'officer hate'. According to establishment statistics, officer shortages continued to worsen until July 1916, when the ratio of officers to men in the field army stood at 1 to 44.31, in contrast to the 1 to 38.75 of August 1914.⁶⁵ The shortfall in leaders obliged existing officers to take on more responsibility; however, perhaps concerned to preserve the structure and prestige of the peacetime corps, the army rarely awarded promotion. The result was a process of rank appreciation, whereby middle- and junior-ranking officers were gradually distanced from the soldiery. An examination of one regiment, the *bayerische Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment 23*, sheds light on this development. At its departure for the front in mid-January 1915, the regiment was led by an *Oberstleutnant* (lieutenant-colonel). Its three battalions were commanded by another *Oberstleutnant* and two *Majore* (majors) and, in the first battalion, one *Major*, two *Hauptleute* (captains), and an *Oberleutnant* (lieutenant) acted as company commanders. By September 1916 heavy casualties had resulted in the middle and lower officer ranks being given more responsibility. Although the same *Oberstleutnant* continued to command the regiment, two *Hauptleute* and a *Major* had been removed from front-line service in order to command its battalions, leaving, in *I. Bataillon*, three *Leutnants* and an *Oberleutnant* as company leaders. In February 1918 these ranks continued to lead the companies. Alterations had taken place further up the scale, however, with a *Major* now commanding the regiment and *Hauptleute* leading each of the battalions. Thus, after four years of war, each rank had effectively received a promotion: *Majore* filled posts which had belonged to *Oberstleutnants* at the outbreak of hostilities, *Hauptleute* replaced *Majore* as

⁶⁴ 'Die in ihrem Leben noch nie so viel Geld gesehen haben.' Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftabteilung, Berlin [hereafter Staatsbib. Berlin], MS Boruss. fol. 1084, F. Brussig, diary, 1 February 1916.

⁶⁵ See *Sanitätsbericht III*, pp. 3*–4*. According to these nominal figures, the proportion of officers to men gradually recovered from mid-1916, once more reaching the level of August 1914 in December 1917. The accuracy of these statistics in reflecting the actual officer strength of the field army is, however, difficult to determine. A small sample of regimental histories suggests that in the infantry, the main combat arm, officer complements were lowest in 1914, improved during 1915, and then often dropped again during the heavy fighting of 1916. By the second half of 1917, according to these histories, numbers were higher than previously, although statistics from the Bavarian Army demonstrate that even then a shortage of infantry officers persisted: while the artillery, technical troops, and the train all possessed more than their entitlement of *Leutnants*, in the infantry, they remained 12% below establishment in August 1917 and just under 9% in August 1918. See Teicht, 'Offiziersausbildung', pp. 63 and 122, and the histories cited below in footnotes 66 and 67.

battalion commanders, and *Leutnants* commanded not just platoons but also companies.⁶⁶

Not only did this process create the unfortunate impression of an officer corps gradually withdrawing from danger, but it also made it more difficult for front-line officers, the *Leutnants*, to fulfil their paternalistic duty to their subordinates: whereas before the war these men had led platoons of 80 soldiers, by 1916 the low officer establishment of many units meant that they were placed in command of companies numbering 150 or 200 other ranks.⁶⁷ Rather than carrying out duties themselves, they were forced to delegate to NCOs, who increased in numbers and importance: whereas in August 1914 there was nominally 1 officer to 3.72 NCOs, the ratio had become 1 to 4.32 by July 1918.⁶⁸ Although officer numbers seem to have recovered by the end of 1917, the ongoing command decentralization deriving from innovations in assault tactics and, from 1917, elastic defence continued this trend. According to one regimental historian, under the new circumstances of the *Materialschlacht*, 'the former tasks of the battalion commanders now lay in the hands of junior leaders', a state of affairs which encouraged *Leutnants* to devolve power downwards to their NCOs.⁶⁹ Officers in all arms found that they could rely on this capable and experienced body of veterans. *Leutnant* Lüthje, for example, serving in the transport, considered it unnecessary to accompany small supply columns personally to the front, instead sending *Unteroffiziere* to supervise.⁷⁰ Infantry commanders were probably particularly prone to such behaviour. Already by March 1916, British intelligence believed that

⁶⁶ K. Roth, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 23* (Munich, 1927), pp. 219–29. Cf. the similar pattern of changes reported in W. Schmidt, O. Winkelmann, and M. Altermann, *Das Königlich Preußische 3. Posensche Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 58 im Weltkriege* (Zeulenroda, 1934), pp. 9, 69, 130, and 156.

⁶⁷ According to British intelligence, by 1918 (despite the nominal increase in officers since mid-1916) German platoons were usually commanded by *Offizierstellvertreter* or *Vizefeldwebel* rather than *Leutnants*. Regimental histories, however, reveal considerable variation in the officer complement of different units. In *württemberger Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment 121*, for example, the number of officers in each battalion actually increased until 1918, from 22 in 1914 to 35 in July 1917. Under such circumstances, platoon leadership by NCOs would scarcely have been necessary. The brunt of the officer shortage may have fallen on wartime-founded regiments, such as the *bayerischer Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment 23*, whose *I. Bataillon* possessed only 15 officers on departure for the front in January 1915 and only 12 (as opposed to the establishment strength of 23) in September 1916. See General Staff, *German Army Handbook*, p. 44; G. vom Holtz, *Das Württembergische Reserve-Inf.-Regiment Nr. 121 im Weltkrieg 1914–1918* (Stuttgart, 1922), pp. 83–88; and Roth, *K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 23*, pp. 219–29. All figures exclude medical and veterinary officers.

⁶⁸ Calculated from *Sanitätsbericht III*, p. 4*.

⁶⁹ 'Die früheren Aufgaben der Bataillonskommandeure lagen jetzt in den Händen von Unterführern.' Graf von der Schulenburg, ed., *Das Infanterie-Regiment Keith (1. Oberschlesisches) Nr. 22 im Kriege 1914–1918* (Berlin, n.d.), p. 144. For command decentralization, see Samuels, *Command or Control?*, pp. 158–97, and B.I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics. Innovation in the German Army, 1914–1918* (Westport, CT, and London, 1989, 1995), particularly p. 94 and pp. 101–02.

⁷⁰ BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/2797, W. Lüthje, diary, 25 May 1918.

NCOs were commanding sections of the German front line alone. 'The officer', one report argued, 'probably under orders from the higher authorities, usually keeps in a position of comparative safety.'⁷¹

From a purely operational perspective, the policy of delegating much everyday responsibility at the front from young *Kriegsoffiziere* to battle-hardened NCOs was probably sensible. From the viewpoint of morale, however, it was dangerous. Janowitz and Shils found when investigating cohesion and disintegration in the Second World War Wehrmacht that any reduction in face-to-face contact between officers and their men 'sometimes tipped the balance of the submissiveness–rebelliousness scale, in the successful manipulation of which lay the secret of the effective control of the German Army'.⁷² The limited number of officers at the front could prompt men to question what right they had to their privileges and invited the accusations of shirking made by Hobohm after the war.⁷³ The strain of the greater demands made on junior officers could also encourage them to treat subordinates insensitively or abusively, behaviour highly damaging for unit morale. Deserters' statements testify that poor handling by superiors was a major factor in prompting men to abscond from the army.⁷⁴ It could also undermine officers' authority, rendering their own units militarily worthless. One company commander of the *bayerische Infanterie-Regiment 16* captured in October 1917 told interrogators of the mutinous spirit in his unit, explaining that the soldiers had threatened to shoot their *Bataillonskommandeur* if he came up to the front line, and had nearly killed a *Leutnant*.⁷⁵

The junior officers who led the German army during the second half of the war carried out their duties under extremely difficult circumstances. Normal tensions between front-line troops and rear-line officers were intensified by the food shortages which beset the German army from 1916. The resultant 'officer hate' threatened to sour relations between combat troops and front officers, who also benefited from the privileges of rank. The *Kriegsoffiziere* who bore the burden of leadership at the front during the second half of the war were less well prepared than their predecessors to retain their soldiers' loyalty. Not only were they comparatively poorly trained but they were also expected to shoulder more responsibility than pre-war officers. Many were very young, a fact which made their privileges even more difficult to accept for many older men in the ranks. The gradual distancing of the officer

⁷¹ Imperial War Museum, Department of Documents, London, K.85/3374, First Army, German Methods of Trench Warfare, 1 March 1916. Cf. also R. Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, rev. edn (London, 1929, 1960), p. 136, who claimed that by the autumn of 1915, NCOs rather than officers usually led German front-line patrols.

⁷² Janowitz and Shils, 'Cohesion and Disintegration', p. 198.

⁷³ Hobohm, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.1, pp. 176–85.

⁷⁴ See the interrogation report in TNA, WO 157/1, Summary of Information (GHQ), 28 August 1915, and Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe [hereafter GLA Karlsruhe], 456 F 8/231, Tätigkeitsbericht der Militärpolizeistelle Karlsruhe (Oktober 1917 – März 1918), 1 March 1918, p. 7.

⁷⁵ TNA, WO 157/25, Summary of Information (GHQ), 12 October 1917.

corps from non-commissioned ranks and from the front, the growth in war weariness and hunger, and the inexperience of front-line officers presented the potential for discontent and rebellion in the German army during the final years of the war.

IV. Performance at the Front

Despite the difficulties experienced by the German army and its junior officer corps during the war years, there was, however, surprisingly little indiscipline until the end of hostilities. In the estimation of the historian Christoph Jahr, no more than 50 000 of the 13.2 million men who served during the conflict deserted.⁷⁶ While group indiscipline did manifest itself in some companies and battalions during the summer and autumn of 1917, nothing similar in scale to the French mutinies of the same year ever took place.⁷⁷ Rather, until well into 1918, the combat performance of the army remained extremely good: as Niall Ferguson has demonstrated, ‘between August 1914 and June 1918 the Germans consistently killed or captured more British and French soldiers than they lost themselves’.⁷⁸ Such prowess would hardly have been possible had German junior officers and men been at loggerheads.

The key to junior officers’ success in overcoming the ‘officer hate’ and maintaining control over their units lay with the credos of paternalism and leadership from the front cultivated by the peacetime officer corps. The letters and diaries of combatants testify to the continued relevance of these aristocratic concepts for front-line leadership in the modern *Materialschlacht*. Officers were judged by other ranks first according to their willingness and ability to fulfil their leadership function on the battlefield. Those who used their authority to increase their own safety were regarded with contempt by their subordinates. Genschler, for example, was disgusted by some reserve officers who set the men to build what he referred to as ‘Angstrohren’ (bolt-holes) for their benefit.⁷⁹ Franz Brussig, serving in a third-line *Armierungsbataillon* (labour battalion), was outraged when his officers reported sick after the unit was ordered to Verdun: ‘Yes, those are heroes,’ he observed bitterly. ‘Until now they’ve lived like the Lord God in France and now, when it’s off to Verdun and time to throw one’s life into the ring, they

⁷⁶ C. Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten: Desertion und Deserteure im deutschen und britischen Heer 1914–1918* (Göttingen, 1998), pp. 128 and 155. Jahr’s figures, based on detailed archival research, supersede Deist’s argument that desertion was much greater. See W. Deist, ‘The Military Collapse of the German Empire: The Reality Behind the Stab-in-the-Back Myth’, *War in History* III (1996), pp. 186–207.

⁷⁷ For details of this indiscipline, see B. Ziemann, *Front und Heimat: ländliche Kriegserfahrung im südlichen Bayern 1914–1923* (Essen, 1997), p. 189.

⁷⁸ N. Ferguson, *Pity of War* (London, 1998), pp. 445 and 300–02. Cf. T.N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807–1945* (London, 1977), pp. 330–32.

⁷⁹ BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/2735, H. Genschler, letter to father, 20 March 1915.

creep away.’⁸⁰ Second, junior officers were disliked if they did not act paternalistically and care first for their men’s needs. Brussig’s hatred of his officers began when his unit was ordered to build elaborate housing blocks to be shared by two officers, while the men were crammed 42 strong into buildings of similar size. Drunken singing by *Leutnants*, which kept the company awake at night, did little to improve relations.⁸¹ *Gefreiter* Kurt Reiter was similarly annoyed when his unit was stationed in quarters devoid of means to warm up food, while his officers had an oven.⁸² Complaints about officers collecting food to send home and unfairness in the distribution of rations, leave, and decorations were all virulent not because of inequality as such, but because officers were putting their own interests before those of their men. Where officers provided leadership and paternalism, inter-rank relations were normally good. As Dr Neter, one of the veterans who testified at the postwar investigation into the German army’s collapse, observed:

I always had the impression that the men willingly acknowledged the operational privileges of the officer (better rations and accommodation), but only under the condition, that the officer showed himself worthy of these privileges. [...] Where the officer provided first for his men and only then for himself, I never saw particular envy or bitterness.⁸³

The historiography has long acknowledged that German officers did generally prove extremely conscientious in fulfilling their leadership duties; in contrast to the 13.3% of NCOs and men killed, 15.7% of reserve officers and a frighteningly high 24.7% of active officers fell during the First World War.⁸⁴ Obscured by the debate on the ‘officer hate’, however, is the fact that many also conscientiously carried out their paternalistic duties. Probably the most successful were the upper-class active officers at the beginning of the conflict. Combatants commented

⁸⁰ ‘Ja, das sind Helden. Bis jetzt gelebt wie der Herrgott in Frankreich und jetzt wo es vor Verdun geht und das Leben aufs Spiel gesetzt werden soll, da verdüften sie.’ Staatsbib. Berlin, MS Boruss. fol. 1084, F. Brussig, diary, 18 March 1916. Cf. also the song of the 5. *bayerische Infanterie-Division* mocking the *Hendenaber* (artillery colonel) for staying in the rear ‘because it appears to him to be safer there’ (‘weil es ihm dort sicherer scheint’), reproduced in Schuhmacher, *Leben und Seele*, p. 169.

⁸¹ Staatsbib. Berlin, MS Boruss. fol. 1084, F. Brussig, diary, 22 and 20 August 1915 respectively.

⁸² BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 1/161, K. Reiter, diary, 5 December 1917.

⁸³ ‘Ich hatte stets den Eindruck, daß die Mannschaft die betätigten Vorrechte des Offiziers (bessere Verpflegung und Unterkunft) willig anerkannt, aber nur unter der Voraussetzung, daß der Offizier sich dieser Vorrechte würdig zeigte. [...] Wo der Offizier zuerst seine Leute versorgte und dann erst sich, sah ich nie eine besondere Mißgunst oder Erbitterung.’ Quoted in Hobohm, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.1, p. 129.

⁸⁴ Volkmann, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.2, p. 35. Officer fatalities were proportionally greater than those of other ranks in every month between August 1914 and July 1918 except for November and December 1915, January 1916, and January 1917. See *Sanitätsbericht III*, p. 132*.

admiringly on the 'purposeful appearance of a professional officer, behind which in most cases are concealed knowledge and understanding of the common soldier', and complaints against officers made late in the war often referred nostalgically to the professionals' exemplary behaviour in 1914 and 1915.⁸⁵ Reserve officers also developed affection for their subordinates and were often very moved when they were killed. *Leutnant* Lütjje, for example, knew the men in his artillery column well and the death of one particularly brave soldier left him grieving.⁸⁶ After Ernst Huthmacher's death in action, his *Hauptmann* wrote a letter of condolence to his wife, referring to the *Gefreiter* in glowing terms and admitting 'his death touched me very deeply'.⁸⁷ Perhaps the best refutation of the charges of universal selfishness and callousness among officers appears in Kurt Reiter's diary. In his entry for 16 June 1916, Reiter recorded that his unit had received notification that morning that one of its NCOs had died in hospital and that this news had hit his *Hauptmann* hard. When, an hour later, an artillery driver reported that a shell had landed in the company positions, killing two NCOs and wounding a further five men, the officer found that he could no longer cope. As Reiter continues:

With the words 'My men, my men' he collapsed into a faint. As indeed known, he was very nervous and anxious. He then lay unconscious for some time and lapsed into spasms often during this period. As he came to after an hour, he was no longer able to speak and looked absently in front of him. Our *Hauptmann* had become a psychiatric casualty.⁸⁸

Given the concern evinced for their subordinates by many officers, it is perhaps not surprising that nervous breakdowns were reportedly more common among junior officers than other ranks.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ 'Zielbewußte Auftreten eines Berufsoffiziers, hinter dem in den meisten Fällen Kenntnisse und Verständnis für den gemeinen Soldaten verborgen sind.' BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/2735, H. Genscher, letter to father, 20 March 1915. For late complaints, Hobohm, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.1, Document 16b (p. 45) and 26 (pp. 67–71).

⁸⁶ BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/2797, W. Lütjje, diary, 15 and 16 May 1918.

⁸⁷ 'Mir ging sein Tod sehr nahe.' Deutsches Tagebucharchiv, Emmendingen [hereafter DTA], 930, E. Huthmacher, letter from Hauptmann Fischer to Frau Huthmacher, 4 August 1915.

⁸⁸ 'Mit den Worten "Meine Leute, meine Leute" brach er ohnmächtig zusammen. Wie ja bekannt, war er ja sehr nervös und ängstlich. Er lag dann einiger Zeit bewußtlos und fiel in der Zeit des öfteren in Krämpfe. Wie er nach einer Stunde zu sich kam, war er seiner Sprache nicht mehr mächtig und sah wie geistesabwesend vor sich her. Unser Hauptmann war nervenkrank geworden.' BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 1/161, K. Reiter, diary, 16 June 1916.

⁸⁹ See L. Scholz, *Seelenleben des Soldaten an der Front: hinterlassene Aufzeichnungen des im Kriege gefallenen Nervenarztes* (Tübingen, 1920), pp. 221–23. The large number of reported breakdowns among officers probably principally reflected contemporaries' greater willingness to acknowledge psychiatric disease in commissioned ranks than in their subordinates. However, some research conducted during the Vietnam War does suggest that officers are indeed placed under more stress than other ranks in battle. See P. Watson, *War on the Mind: The Military Uses and Abuses of Psychology* (London, 1978), pp. 209–11.

Officers' paternalistic concern for their men expressed itself in multifarious forms. A few examples from letters and diaries suffice to give an idea of how such behaviour manifested itself and how it strengthened both officers' authority and unit cohesion: Genscher recounted how in October 1914 pipes sent as gifts to his regiment were distributed by his *Oberleutnant* by means of a race. Such a competition was not only fun for the men but was fair and probably encouraged unit cohesion.⁹⁰ Three years later, *Kanonier* Konstantin Kramer recorded that after he and two comrades won the Iron Cross for bravery, his battery commander appeared at their barracks with a box of fine cigars under his arm – a rare luxury in late 1917. He and his unit spent a pleasant evening talking and smoking in, as Kramer put it, 'real comradeship'.⁹¹ Helmuth von Obergassel, an *Oberleutnant* serving at the opening of the Verdun offensive in February 1916, contravened regulations and sent men back to fetch a 25 litre barrel of rum for his company in the front line. Significantly, when his battalion commander heard of this action, far from admonishing the *Oberleutnant* he praised him for his independence.⁹² Officers' generosity also helped to ease the considerable material shortages suffered by German soldiers. In September 1915, for example, *Hauptmann* Helmuth Fuchs, a capable professional officer in *Füsilier-Regiment 40*, gave a pair of his own socks to a man who had attempted to make good a deficiency by cutting some from sandbags.⁹³ Food, the key problem in the second half of the war, was also an area in which officers could do good work. Tasting his men's food was one of the prescribed duties of the company commander, allowing him to keep in touch with his men's needs effectively. One soldier, whose letter was read by the censor, complained that 'the hunger is always greater' but also recorded significantly that 'the officers see that the men can't hold out any more, so we should get more to eat'.⁹⁴ Similarly, the artilleryman Kurt Reiter was impressed when a new *Hauptmann* expressed astonishment at the paucity of his men's rations and ordered warm food to be sent up to the trenches. When the officer was severely wounded by shellfire one month later, Reiter once again praised his kindness and recorded the genuine regret felt by the men.⁹⁵

The soldiers of Reiter's unit were far from exceptional in feeling affection for their officer. Graffiti in leave trains' lavatories, for example, not only criticized but also defended officers. Underneath the ubiquitous rhyme 'den Offizieren Mannschaftsbrot und Mannschaftsessen, / dann wäre der Krieg schon lang vergessen' ('To officers men's bread and

⁹⁰ BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/2735, H. Genscher, letter to father, 24 October 1914.

⁹¹ 'Echter Kameradschaft.' DTA, 506, K. Kramer, diary, 6–7 December 1917.

⁹² BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 1/805, H. von Obergassel, diary, 24 February 1916.

⁹³ BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 1/2965: H. Fuchs, diary, 7 September 1915.

⁹⁴ 'Der Hunger ist immer größer'; 'Die Offiziere sehen das die mann schaften [*sic*] nicht weiter können so sollen wir mehr essen kriegen.' BA-MA Freiburg, W-10/50794, Postüberwachung bei der A.O.K. 6. insonderheit 5. Armeekorps, 12 July 1917, p. 21.

⁹⁵ BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 1/161, K. Reiter, diary, 12 July and 8 August 1916.

men's food, / Then the war would already be long forgotten') scribbled in one toilet, police found the comment 'is that a real German heart? With God for King and Fatherland.' The demand 'Soldiers shoot your officers' was met with the words 'rogue, traitor, miserable rascal'.⁹⁶ Diaries too reveal that some men were fond of their officers. Genscher hero-worshipped his professional officer, the 20-year-old *Leutnant* von Horstig.⁹⁷ *Leutnant* Muhsal, a company commander in *Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment 119* who closely identified with the soldiers under him, was pleasantly surprised in 1916 when 15 who were being transferred to active regiments sent him a goodbye card: 'pleased me very much; there is more recognition in that than in the best regimental despatch', he noted in his diary.⁹⁸

None of this is to deny that abuses of authority took place, or that poor training and greater responsibilities in the second half of the war had an effect on inter-rank relations. The elitist 'caste consciousness' of the corps could sometimes encourage arrogance and disrespect towards subordinates: already in 1915 and early 1916, various army authorities were forced to issue orders warning against verbal and physical mishandling on the part of officers.⁹⁹ In third-rate units such as Brussig's *Armierungsbataillon*, officership was sometimes very poor, making service for the ordinary soldiers extremely unpleasant. Brussig recorded that in his battalion, discipline was so harsh that there was 'absolutely no difference between us and galley slaves'.¹⁰⁰ The men were not protected from bullying or insults by the NCOs, and their self-confidence was undermined by harsh and insulting treatment. 'We are so disrespectfully handled', wrote Brussig, 'that we are ashamed to be before the French civilian population.' An attempt to write home about his grievances resulted in persecution by officers and punishment.¹⁰¹ Most poor inter-rank relations, however, were probably to be found in rear-line units, particularly during the second half of the war. The primary cause of tension here was not class conflict but rather the age difference

⁹⁶ 'Ein echtes deutsches Herz will das sein? Mit Gott für König und Vaterland'; 'Soldaten erschießt Eure Offiziere'; 'Schurke, Verräter, Lump elendiger.' GLA Karlsruhe, 456 F8/260, Reports of *Eisenbahnüberwachung* on graffiti found in leave train lavatories, dated 30 March 1917 and 17 November 1917. In folder, pp. 575 and 748.

⁹⁷ BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 2/2735, H. Genscher, letter to father, 28 January 1915.

⁹⁸ 'Hat mich sehr gefreut, da steckt mehr Anerkennung drin, als im schönsten Regts.Befehl.' BA-MA Freiburg, MSg 1/3109, H. Muhsal, diary, 25 November 1916.

⁹⁹ An examination of the Bavarian Army's papers found no warnings about mishandling in 1914 but a number in the following year and in early 1916. The Bavarian War Ministry issued orders to this effect on 12 May, 7 September and 9 November 1915, and 20 April 1916. Similar warnings from the Deputy Command of the I Bavarian Army Corps were promulgated on 17 November and 31 December 1915, 31 January 1916, and 19 February 1916. See HStA Munich/IV, Gen. Kdo I. AK Bunde 52 (Akt. 4) and 591 and MKr 11254.

¹⁰⁰ 'Absolut kein Unterschied zwischen uns und Galeerensklaven.' Staatsbib. Berlin, MS. Boruss. fol. 1084, F. Brussig, diary, 3 February 1916.

¹⁰¹ 'Wir werden so würdelos behandelt, dass wir uns vor der französischen Zivilbevölkerung schämen.' Op. cit., 4 September 1915. Cf. also 20 and 22 August and 10, 11, and 16 September 1915.

between officers and other ranks. These units were largely composed of older men who were, as the postal censor of 5. *Armee* observed, ‘more serious and [...] more sensitive’ than their younger peers.¹⁰² Not unreasonably, these middle-aged soldiers objected to youthful officers’ far better pay and quarters, and, as Kantorowicz remarked, disliked intensely ‘having to be taught about the dangers of sexual intercourse by eighteen-year-old *Leutnants*’.¹⁰³ Unsurprisingly, numerous official memoranda confirm that the command of these older men posed serious problems for youthful *Kriegsoffiziere*.¹⁰⁴

In contrast, in the crucial combat units on which Germany’s war effort and future rested, relations were generally happier, even at the end of hostilities. The men were better fed and younger, no soldier over 35 being considered suitable for infantry service in the *Materialschlacht* after April 1917, and the experience of combat often loosened formal discipline and brought men of all ranks together.¹⁰⁵ This is confirmed by a study of combatants’ letters undertaken by the Reichsarchiv historian Hermann Cron, who discovered that although inter-rank relations in rear-line units at the end of the war were often extremely tense, those in fighting units were satisfactory or even good.¹⁰⁶ This finding goes far in explaining why, despite severe shortages, disgruntlement with staff, and terrible danger, German soldiers continued to fight until their army’s position became truly hopeless in the second half of 1918. It also sheds some light on the army’s eventual collapse which, contrary to Kruse’s argument, was not characterized by radical leftist indiscipline. Rather, as the historian Ulrich Kluge observed, ‘a revolutionary movement never caught hold of the western army; the confrontation between men and officers, which the home army had on all sides experienced, failed to materialize here’. Mutinies continued to be virtually unknown and, as recent research by Christoph Jahr has shown, discipline generally held until the last weeks of the war.¹⁰⁷ Instead, the mass surrenders, which

¹⁰² ‘Ernster und [...] empfindlicher.’ BA-MA Freiburg, W-10/50794, Postüberwachung bei der A.O.K. 6. insonderheit 5. *Armee*, 31 August 1918, p. 76.

¹⁰³ ‘Von 18jährigen Leutnants über die Gefahren des Geschlechtsverkehrs belehren lassen müssen.’ Kantorowicz, *Offiziershaß*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, the documents in HStA Munich/IV, MKr 1857, Memoranda from *Oberkommando der 6. Armee* to Prussian War Ministry of 28 December 1916 and 30 June 1917 on officer training. Also, HStA Munich/IV, MKr 1858, memorandum of 11. *bayerische Infanterie-Division* to Bavarian War Ministry of 18 December 1917 on officer training.

¹⁰⁵ Ziemann, *Front*, pp. 62–64. For the loosening of discipline at the front, see P. Plaut, ‘Psychographie des Kriegers’, in W. Stern and O. Lipmann, eds, *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie. 21. Beiträge zur Psychologie des Krieges* (Leipzig, 1920), pp. 88–89. See also the order warning against loosening discipline in closed units in HStA Munich/IV, Gen. Kdo I. AK Bund 104, Akt. 4, Order from *Oberkommando, 6. Armee* on saluting, 1 March 1916.

¹⁰⁶ Volkmann, *Soziale Heeresmißstände*, XI.2, pp. 135–37. Cf. Schuhmacher, *Leben und Seele*, p. 173.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Eine Revolutionsbewegung hat das Westheer nie erfaßt; die Konfrontation von Mannschaften und Offizieren, die das Heimatheer allenthalben erlebt hatte, blieb hier aus.’ U. Kluge, *Soldatenräte und Revolution: Studien zur Militärpolitik in Deutschland 1918/19* (Göttingen, 1975), p. 104. See also Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten*, p. 166.

Ferguson has argued decisively crippled the army at the front, not only involved but were often led by junior commanders, 4728 of whom were among the 186 053 soldiers captured by the British army during its final '100 Days' advance. Sharing their subordinates' war-weariness and sense of hopelessness after the reverses of 1918, many officers, in a last act of paternalism, led their men out of an already lost war and into Allied captivity.¹⁰⁸

V. Conclusion

The German officer corps was a socially elitist institution which relied on aristocratic values to justify and fulfil its position of leadership. Contrary to the criticism of postwar left-wing critics and some modern historians, many of these values did remain relevant to early twentieth-century warfare; while the intense monarchical loyalty of the old Prussian aristocracy may have had limited attraction for many soldiers in a conscript army, leadership from the front and paternalism proved themselves extremely valuable qualities on the Western Front. These duties were fully accepted by the aristocratic and upper-middle-class officers of the pre-war corps, and great efforts were made through training and constant reminders to inculcate them into the new lower-middle-class officers promoted as a result of the exigencies of war.

While in the British army, as Gary Sheffield has shown, paternalism successfully justified officers' privileges and helped to create a strong, cohesive, and contented force, the history of the German army during the conflict was less happy. From about mid-1916 a growing resentment against officers' privileges and command began to make itself felt. Its primary cause was the extreme shortages which had begun to affect the German army, particularly of food. Bitterness was directed mainly against middle-ranking staff officers rather than the junior officers commanding within battalions; nonetheless, these latter also experienced some problems. Short training and changes in the organization and tactics of the army resulted in more senior officers becoming more distant from the men, and inexperienced junior officers being given an increased level of authority which sometimes overstretched their abilities.

¹⁰⁸ To give just one example, British intelligence files contain an account of one German officer who actually went across no man's land to surrender and then requested permission to return to his position in order to fetch the men of his platoon, who also wished to give themselves up. See TNA, WO 157/199, Summary of Information, No. 287, Fourth Army, 1 October 1918, p. 7. For German prisoners, see War Office, ed., *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914–1920* (London, 1922), p. 632. For a fuller discussion of the collapse of the German army at the end of the war, see N. Ferguson, 'Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War: Towards a Political Economy of Military Defeat', *War in History* XI (2004), pp. 155–62, and ch. 6 in my forthcoming book, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, in Press).

Overall, however, the junior officer corps performed well. The creed of paternalism was embraced by the majority of officers, who attempted to protect men from the worst effects of shortages and front-line service. Relations were least successful in second-line and rear formations composed of middle-aged troops who were often irreconcilably bitter at their youthful officers' privileges. In the all-important combat units, which generally contained younger men, interaction between officers and their subordinates was generally harmonious, however. By adopting the aristocratic values of the old officer corps, paternalism and leadership from the front, junior officers played a crucial part in upholding the impressive performance and resilience of the German army on the Western Front during the First World War.