

War Experiences in Rural Germany

THE LEGACY OF THE GREAT WAR

A Series sponsored by the Historial de la Grande Guerre Péronne-Somme

General Editor

JAY WINTER

Previously published titles in the Series

Antoine Prost

IN THE WAKE OF WAR

'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society

Patrick Fridenson

THE FRENCH HOME FRONT 1914-1918

Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau

MEN AT WAR 1914-1918

Gerald D. Feldman

ARMY, INDUSTRY, AND LABOR IN GERMANY 1914-1918

Rosa Maria Bracco

MERCHANTS OF HOPE

Adrian Gregory

THE SILENCE OF MEMORY

Armistice Day 1919-1946

Ute Daniel

THE WAR FROM WITHIN

German Working-Class Women in the First World War

Annette Becker

WAR AND FAITH

The Religious Imagination in France, 1914-1930

David W. Lloyd

BATTLEFIELD TOURISM

Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War
in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939

Alex King

MEMORIALS OF THE GREAT WAR IN BRITAIN

The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance

Margaret H. Darrow

FRENCH WOMEN AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

War Stories of the Home Front

Alon Rachamimov

POWS AND THE GREAT WAR

Captivity on the Eastern Front

Antoine Prost

REPUBLICAN IDENTITIES IN WAR AND PEACE

Representations of France in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Georges Connes (trans. Marie-Claire Connes Wrage,

edited by Lois Davis Vines)

A POW'S MEMOIR OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The Other Ordeal

War Experiences in Rural Germany
1914–1923

BENJAMIN ZIEMANN

Translated by
Alex Skinner



Oxford • New York

English Edition
First published in 2007 by

Berg

Editorial offices:

1st Floor, Angel Court, 81 St Clements Street, Oxford, OX4 1AW, UK
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

© Benjamin Ziemann 2007

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form
or by any means without the written permission of Berg.

Berg is the imprint of Oxford International Publishers Ltd.

First published in 1997 as *Front und Heimat: Ländliche Kriegsfabrungen im
südlichen Bayern 1914-1923* by Klartext Verlag, Essen

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Ziemann, Benjamin.

[Front und Heimat. English]

War experiences in rural Germany, 1914-1923 / Benjamin Ziemann
; translated by Alex Skinner.—English ed.

p. cm.—(The legacy of the Great War)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-84520-244-6 (cloth)

ISBN-10: 1-84520-244-9 (cloth)

ISBN-13: 978-1-84520-245-3 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 1-84520-245-7 (pbk.)

1. World War, 1914-1918—Germany—Bavaria. 2. Soldiers—Germany—
Bavaria—History—20th century. 3. Rural population—Germany—Bavaria—
History—20th century. 4. Bavaria (Germany)—Rural conditions. 5. Bavaria
(Germany)—History—20th century.

I. Title.

D534.Z5413 2007

940.3'433091734—dc22

2006032830

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13 978 1 84520 244 6 (Cloth)

ISBN-10 1 84520 244 9 (Cloth)

ISBN-13 978 1 84520 245 3 (Paper)

ISBN-10 1 84520 245 7 (Paper)

Typeset by JS Typesetting Ltd, Porthcawl, Mid Glamorgan
Printed in the United Kingdom by Biddles Ltd, King's Lynn

www.bergpublishers.com

Contents

List of tables	vii
List of abbreviations	ix
Foreword	xiii
Introduction	1
1 Depression, August 1914	15
2 Military Cohesion, 1914–18	29
2.1 Fluctuation	30
2.2 Routines of Everyday Life	41
2.3 Discipline and Ideology	57
3 War Weariness, 1914–18	73
3.1 Injustice	74
3.2 Expectations and Disappointments	82
3.3 Disobedience	99
4 Mentalities, 1914–18	111
4.1 Homesickness	111
4.2 Religious Stabilisation	124
4.3 National Identity?	137
5 Village Communities, 1914–23	155
5.1 Peasant Wives, 1914–18	155
5.2 Agrarian Economy and Inflation, 1914–23	166
5.3 Agrarian Mobilisation: Protests and Politics	181
5.4 Social Conflicts	191

Contents

6	Veterans, 1918–23	211
6.1	Demobilisation, 1918–21	212
6.2	Defensive Mobilisation: Paramilitary Groups, 1918–21	227
6.3	Veterans' Associations	240
6.4	War Memorials	252
	Conclusion	269
	Select Bibliography	277
	Index	287

List of Tables

2.1	Number of ordinary soldiers and NCOs in the Bavarian army (field and replacement army)	31
2.2	Deaths among Bavarian military personnel according to age group, 1914-18	34
2.3	Military personnel living in Bavaria on 1 December 1916 according to age group	36
2.4	Average monthly losses among German troops (fallen and missing) on the Western and Eastern Front (per thousand of total strength)	52
6.1	Voting in elections to the Bavarian <i>Landtag</i> on 12 January 1919 in special constituencies established for barracks and field hospitals (% of valid votes)	219
6.2	Results of elections to the Bavarian <i>Landtag</i> on 12 January 1919 in self-administered towns and districts (% of valid votes)	221

List of Abbreviations

ABA	Archiv des Bistums Augsburg
ABP	Archiv des Bistums Passau
AEM	Archiv des Erzbistums München und Freising
<i>AJS</i>	<i>Archiv für Sozialgeschichte</i>
AK	Armee Korps (army corps)
AOK	Armeeoberkommando (army supreme command)
BA	Bezirksamt (district administration)
BArch	Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (Federal Archive Berlin-Lichterfelde)
BA/MA	Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv Freiburg (Federal Military Archive Freiburg)
BBB	Bayerischer Bauernbund (Bavarian Peasants' League)
BfZ	Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte Stuttgart
BHStA/II	Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München, Abt. II
BHStA/IV	Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München, Abt. IV: Kriegsarchiv
<i>BKZ</i>	<i>Bayerische Krieger Zeitung</i> (Bavarian Warrior's Newspaper)
BSB	Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Handschriftenabteilung, Schinnereriana
Btl.	Battalion
BVP	Bayerische Volkspartei (Bavarian People's Party)
BZAR	Bischöfliches Zentralarchiv Regensburg
DDVP	Deutsche Demokratische Volkspartei
Div.	Division
E./Ers.	'Ersatz' (unit situated in Bavaria, sending replacements to the related unit at the front)
E.W.	Einwohnerwehr (Citizens' militia)
GG	<i>Geschichte und Gesellschaft</i>

List of Abbreviations

GK	Generalkommando (general command of an army corps)
HMB	Halbmonatsbericht (fortnightly report)
Inf.	Infantry
I.R.	Infantry regiment
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
K.M.	Kriegsministerium (War Ministry)
Ldw.	Landwehr (units of the territorial army, consisting of conscripts aged 30–45)
Ldst.	Landsturm
L.I.R.	Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment
MA	Ministerium des Königlichen Hauses und des Äußern (Bavarian Ministry of the Royal House and the Exterior)
MdL	Mitglied des Landtags (Member of the Bavarian Diet)
MdR	Mitglied des Reichstags (Member of the Imperial Diet)
Minn	Ministerium des Innern (Bavarian Home Office)
MK	Ministerium für Kultus und Unterricht (Bavarian Ministry for Culture and Schools)
ML	Ministerium für Landwirtschaft (Bavarian Ministry for Agriculture)
MSPD	Majority Social Democratic Party
Ndb.	Niederbayern (Lower Bavaria)
Obb.	Oberbayern (Upper Bavaria)
OHL	Oberste Heeresleitung (German Army Supreme Command)
R./Res.	Reserve
Rgt.	Regiment
RP	Regierungspräsident (head of regional administration in Upper Bavaria, etc.)
Schw.	Bayerisch Schwaben (Bavarian Swabia)
SHStAD	Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
StAA	Staatsarchiv Augsburg
StAL	Staatsarchiv Landshut
StAM	Staatsarchiv München
StA	Stadtarchiv
stv.	stellvertretend (deputy; related to units of the replacement army)
Uffz.	Unteroffizier (non-commissioned officer)
USPD	Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany
WB	Wochenbericht (weekly report)

List of Abbreviations

WUA	Das Werk des Untersuchungsausschusses der Verfassunggebenden Deutschen Nationalversammlung und des Deutschen Reichstages 1919–1930, Vierte Reihe: Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruches im Jahre 1918
ZBLG	<i>Zeitschrift für Bayerische Landesgeschichte</i>
ZBSL	<i>Zeitschrift des Bayerischen Statistischen Landesamtes</i>

Foreword

Belinda Davis was the first to suggest that my work about the First World War and its consequences should be translated into English, and she gave helpful advice on how to change the presentation of my argument for an anglophone readership. Jay Winter accepted my manuscript for publication in this series and offered help at a crucial moment. Richard Bessel has provided intellectual inspiration, hospitality and – most crucially – friendship, and not only during my stay at the University of York in 2003/4. I wish to express my gratitude to these persons and to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which funded my year in York with a Feodor Lynen fellowship.

Over the years I have accumulated a great debt of gratitude to several friends who have always been supportive and ready to share their insights into the history of violence in the twentieth century. My thanks go to Christine Brocks, Christa Hämmerle, Christian Jansen, Frank Kebbedies, Thomas Mergel, Josef Mooser, Dirk Schumann, Bernd Ulrich and particularly to Thomas Kühne.

Alex Skinner has translated my manuscript with verve and professionalism. Many of the quotations from war letters and diaries, written by ordinary peasants and their wives, are crafted in a peculiar style, very often without any punctuation and in blatant breach of the rules of grammar. For the convenience of the reader and because the specific flavour of the original is almost impossible to convey, these quotations have been translated into grammatically correct English.

*Benjamin Ziemann
Sheffield, May 2006*

Introduction

The notion that the First World War was an important, if not *the* most important, turning point in twentieth-century German and European history has become a commonplace in historical research. Between 1914 and 1918, in economics, science, politics and culture, traditional structures were transformed or destroyed, models of a new social order were introduced and the knowledge passed from one generation to the next was radically devalued.¹ In Germany and other European countries, front-line soldiers constitute the key symbol of the First World War's drastic consequences. As early as the 1920s, they were seen as embodying the discontinuity produced by the experience of war, as a model of uprooting, brutalisation and the aggressive reordering of social relations, epitomised by front-line camaraderie. Soldiers' experience of violence, and how this was processed, passed down and symbolised in the inter-war period, provides an excellent basis upon which to discuss and evaluate theories asserting that the First World War was a profound turning point. Did the experience of war, particularly that of German soldiers, facilitate the breakthrough of a semantics rooted in the symbolic world of artistic modernity, as Modris Eksteins has claimed? Is there evidence of a 'war culture' among soldiers, a system of collective representations, intimately bound up with a 'powerful hatred of the opponent'?² Questions such as these, discussed in recent studies, have yet to be answered in empirically grounded fashion.

1. Recent research, however, has stressed continuities rather than the dramatic change previously assumed. See especially Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996.

2. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*; Audoin-Rouzeau/Becker, *Understanding*, quote pp. 102-3. The best general discussion of the First World War as a caesura is Jay Winter/Geoffrey Parker/Mary Habeck (eds), *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2000.

The way many historians use the example of German soldiers from 1914–18 to back up their hypotheses stands in marked contrast with the current state of empirical research. We still lack a comprehensive social and experiential history of German soldiers between 1914 and 1918. Klaus Latzel, Anne Lipp, Aribert Reimann and Bernd Ulrich have presented key initial findings on the content of letters written by German soldiers and of trench newspapers.³ None of these studies, however, has attempted to link the experiences of war as a history of mentalities with the analysis of structural factors, as Richard Bessel and Ute Daniel have done in their pioneering studies of wartime German society on the home front.⁴ In order to examine the effects and repercussions of the war and how people dealt with these experiences after 11 November 1918, we must in any case look beyond the end of the war. Researchers studying how specific social groups or milieus experienced the Great War and how they came to terms with this in the Weimar Republic tend to work in isolation from one another, however, failing to examine how their research ties in with other work. Some recent studies have furnished us with significant insights into the aestheticisation and symbolisation of wartime violence in the 1920s. Only Sven Reichardt, however, has succeeded in linking the symbolisation of war experiences with the models of social order characteristic of a specific social group in his innovative study on the group culture of SA storm troopers.⁵ Most studies of the

3. Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis-Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 1998; Lipp, *Meinungslenkung*; Aribert Reimann, *Der Große Krieg der Sprachen. Untersuchungen zur historischen Semantik in Deutschland und England zur Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Essen: Klartext 2000; Ulrich, *Augenzeugen*; see the review article by Belinda Davis, *Experience, Identity, and Memory: The Legacy of World War I*, *JMH* 75 (2003), pp. 111–31. A still valuable account on German soldiers during the First World War is the expert report by liberal historian Martin Hohohm for the parliamentary committee of investigation into the causes of the German collapse in 1918, published in 1928. See WUA, vol. 11/1. For more information on Hohohm see Hans Schleier, *Die bürgerliche deutsche Geschichtsschreibung der Weimarer Republik*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1975, pp. 531–74.

4. Bessel, *Germany*; Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen*. See also the brilliant study by Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience. The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994.

5. Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden. Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole 1923 bis 1945*, Vierow: SH-Verlag 1996; Sven

Introduction

collective representation of wartime experiences, moreover, focus on representatives of elite culture or bourgeois social groups. Very few deal with the symbolism of memories of war among the lower classes such as urban workers, most of whom were members of the Social Democratic Party and its veterans' association, the *Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold*, with a membership of more than one million one of the largest veterans' associations during the Weimar Republic.⁶

The present work tackles some of these issues through a regional study. The aim here is to produce empirically robust findings by focusing on a specific region and social group. Future researchers will then be in a position to compare these findings with those for other regions or groups. I have chosen to study the rural inhabitants of southern Bavaria: peasant farmers, their wives and sons, farm labourers and maids (female rural workers and servants) from the districts (*Regierungsbezirke*) of Upper and Lower Bavaria and Bavarian Swabia, a region dominated by medium-sized farms of up to 20 hectares. This choice may appear random and artificial, but it is anchored in the significance of this social group and its spatial origins to the history of the First World War in Germany.

This significance is, first of all, quantitative in nature. Unlike the student volunteers and middle-class intellectuals whose letters home have so often been quoted and interpreted as representative of wartime experience, soldiers from a rural background were by no means a marginal group. Large numbers of such men served in the Bavarian or German army.⁷ From 1914 to 1918 around half the soldiers in the Bavarian army and about a third of those in the German army as a whole worked in agriculture in civilian life. Students and other soldiers

Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde. Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienischen Squadristismus und in der deutschen SA*, Cologne: Böhlau 2002, chapter 5. For an overview of recent research, see Ziemann, *Erinnerung*.

6. See Ziemann, *Republikanische Kriegserinnerung*.

7. Until 1918 the German army consisted of contingents from Bavaria, Prussia, Saxony and Württemberg, under a common Imperial Supreme Command. Bavaria, like the other contingents, had a war ministry of its own, but the Prussian War Ministry was in charge of all matters and decisions of major importance. Unless otherwise stated, all references in the main text and footnotes refer to Bavarian army units. On the use of war letters written by students, see Manfred Hettling/Michael Jeismann, *Der Weltkrieg als Epos. Philipp Witkops 'Kriegsbriefe gefallener Studenten'*, in: Gerhard Hirschfeld/Gerd Krumeich (eds), *Keiner fühlt sich hier mehr als Mensch... Erlebnis und Wirkung des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Essen: Klartext 1993, pp. 175–98.

and officers from the educated middle class, meanwhile, made up no more than about 2 per cent of all army personnel. Among the rural-agrarian regions of the German Empire, Bavaria was a special case in certain respects. By 1914 agricultural modernisation had had a far greater impact on other major farming regions in Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony or Westphalia. Peasants there had already been subject to partial embourgeoisement. Bavarian peasants' life-world and culture was vastly more traditional in character.⁸

Religion also played an important role here. Almost the entire rural population of southern Bavaria was Catholic. Alongside Baden, the Rhineland, Westphalia and Silesia, 'Altbayern' (old Bavaria) was one of the core Catholic regions of the German Empire. The Catholicism of Altbayern diverged somewhat from its socio-politically active, bourgeois counterpart, which dominated in the industrialised parts of the Rhineland and Westphalia. Traditional rituals and symbols, such as family prayers, pilgrimages and pictures of saints, continued to play a far greater role in rural Bavaria. Popular piety was more vigorous and imbued the culture more than in other Catholic regions. Nonetheless, the Catholics of Altbayern were not completely untypical of German Catholics as a whole, who made up roughly one-third of the country's population in 1914.⁹ The differences and similarities with other social groups can be discussed further. What I want to bring out here is that Bavarian soldiers from a rural background were not a marginal group. They made up around half of all Bavarian and roughly 5 per cent of all German soldiers called up between 1914 and 1918. This was a significantly larger group than all the students, professors, writers, artists and doctors who served in the German army taken together. Yet to this day it is the latter group which tends to serve as material for academic discussions of the front-line experiences during the Great War. The voices of rural soldiers have as yet scarcely been heard in the research. In future, rather than privileging the middle class, researchers should produce more comparative analyses of the wartime experience of soldiers drawn from the ranks of industrial workers, the other major group within the German army alongside peasants.¹⁰

8. See Chapter 1 and the comparative research in Jacobeit, *Idylle*.

9. See Chapter 4.2; Thomas Mergel, Mapping Milieus. On the Spatial Rootedness of Collective Identities in the 19th Century, in: Jim Retallack (ed.), *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics, 1830-1933*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press 2000, pp. 77-95.

10. See the evidence in Kruse, Klassenheer; idem, *Krieg und nationale Integration*; Cohen, *The War Come Home*.

Introduction

Within the Bavarian army, soldiers from a rural background formed a group with a unique social profile and specific behaviour patterns and interpretive models, through which they came to terms with the experience of total war. Some of these models were unique to them, at least some important characteristics. This applies, for instance, to the significance of piety to soldiers' psychological stability in the face of the death and destruction at the front, or to the 'hatred of Prussia' which lays bare the limits of national integration within the German Empire. Other interpretive models, meanwhile, were also common among soldiers from other social groups. This applies to soldiers' complete rejection of aggressive nationalism, as advocated, for instance, by the German Fatherland Party, founded in 1917.¹¹ Bavarian peasant soldiers are, however, highly significant to the history of the First World War in another respect. In recent years, historians have put under scrutiny the connections and continuities in the exercise of violence from the First to the Second World War. Michael Geyer has analysed this as an increasing 'societalisation of violence'.¹² The primary focus here is the readiness of *Wehrmacht* soldiers to use extreme violence in the war against the Soviet Union from 1941 until 1945. Was the violent mentality of German soldiers in Operation Barbarossa anchored in a substantial prehistory during the First World War, particularly as far as German troops on the Eastern Front are concerned? Such questions are important and legitimate. Vejas G. Liulevicius' study of the German occupation regime of the Commander *Ober-Ost* during the First World War has already produced major findings.¹³

Interest in continuities, however, should not cause us to take autobiographical accounts by soldiers during the First World War seriously only insofar as they reveal the aggressive self-image of decidedly nationalist and racist actors and thus point directly to the Second World War.¹⁴ Such material exists; from August 1914 on, it is in

11. See Reimann, *Große Krieg*, pp. 167–222; Kruse, *Klassenheer*.

12. See the discussion in Ziemann, 'Vergesellschaftung der Gewalt'; for a general discussion of recent trends in military history see Kühne/Ziemann, *Was ist Militärgeschichte?*

13. Vejas G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000.

14. See Robert L. Nelson, 'Ordinary Men' in the First World War? German Soldiers as Victims and Participants, *Journal of Contemporary History* 39 (2004), pp. 425–35.

fact largely to be found among soldiers at the Eastern Front.¹⁵ However, we are not indulging in misconceived ‘historicism’ when we stress the clear limits of such constructions of continuity. To do so is to strive to achieve a balanced understanding of the structure of violence typical of the First World War. The great majority of all German soldiers, after all, served on the Western Front. On average, from 1914 to 1918 the field army (*Feldheer*) in the West comprised some 2.78 million men, compared to 1.3 million on the Eastern Front.¹⁶ This applies to Bavarian soldiers as well, the vast majority of whom served in Belgium and France; only a minority was posted on the front in Russia. Most thus fought within the system of violence typical of the First World War, based around stationary trench warfare. This reduced the individual initiative of infantrymen to a minimum and made killing at a distance by means of artillery the predominant form of killing and thus also of culpability.¹⁷ To grasp the wartime experience of German soldiers in the First World War and its symbolic representation in the post-war period, the first essential is to analyse this system of violence and its structural peculiarities.

The first key aim of this study is thus to analyse the social configurations of the army, the wartime experience of regular soldiers and the models they used to interpret their lived experience of the front, taking rural soldiers from southern Bavaria as an example. One of the central aims here is to evaluate the assertion that front-line soldiers were generally ‘brutalised’ by their experience of the destructiveness and indifference to human life at the front. George L. Mosse, and in a different way Omer Bartov as well, have advocated this theory to explain why the paramilitary defence associations (*Wehrverbände*) in the Weimar Republic, particularly the National Socialist ‘storm troopers’, were so attractive and why their members were so keen to fight. They rely, however, not on the empirical reconstruction of German soldiers’ wartime experiences, but on the ideological self-stylisation of the *Freikorps* (‘free corps’) and SA fighters.¹⁸ Recent research has, however, already pointed to the fact that within the National Socialist

15. See the examples in Ziemann, *German Soldiers*, p. 263–4.

16. *Sanitätsbericht*, p. 5*.

17. See Chapter 2.2.; Ziemann, *Soldaten*; Bernd Hüppauf, *Räume der Destruktion und Konstruktion von Raum. Landschaft, Sehen, Raum und der Erste Weltkrieg, Krieg und Literatur/War and Literature* 3 (1991), pp. 105–23.

18. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, pp. 159–181; Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation*, New York, Oxford:

movement it was above all the younger generation, born from 1900 on, who derived this violent cultural style from the 'experience of the front'. They had in fact experienced the war merely as young victory watchers and grew into this violence-prone tradition via their elders' accounts of wartime experience.¹⁹

The present work, however, aims to go beyond a mere history of the mentalities of ordinary German soldiers. It also intends to bring out the inner connections and interactions between wartime experiences at the front and at home and thus to analyse both settings as one all-embracing context. Previous work in this vein is thin on the ground. To what extent front and home front were related and integrated is thus still perhaps 'the most important question on the historical agenda' in relation to the First World War.²⁰ The understanding of this issue has long been hampered by the fact that the literary topos of the front-line soldier alienated from his home and family, found in the work of Erich Maria Remarque and many other authors of the 1920s and 1930s, is still extremely influential. This issue thus requires separate empirical examination.²¹ The links and interactions between front and home front were generally a result of the totalisation of warfare, which reached its first peak from 1914 to 1918. 'From above', that is, from the vantage point of the military leadership, this link consisted above all in the fact that the popular mood at both front and home front became an important resource for waging war. To mobilise the population, the war required adequate ideological legitimisation. To counter the growing war weariness, the German authorities deployed censorship and propaganda. This involved trying to stem the exchange of anti-war opinions which came about as a result of the 'wailing letters' sent by women at home and the stories told by men on furlough in

Oxford University Press 1996, pp. 15–50. For a general conceptual critique of this argument see Ziemann, *Violent Society*?

19. Patrick Krassnitzer, *Die Geburt des Nationalsozialismus im Schützengraben. Formen der Brutalisierung in den Autobiographien von nationalsozialistischen Frontsoldaten*, in: Jost Dülffer/Gerd Krumeich (eds), *Der verlorene Frieden. Politik und Kriegskultur nach 1918*, Essen: Klartext 2002, pp. 119–48.

20. See the contributions in Gerhard Hirschfeld/Gerd Krumeich/Dieter Langewiesche/Hans-Peter Ullmann (eds), *Kriegserfahrungen. Studien zur Sozial- und Mentalitätsgeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Essen: Klartext 1997; Jay M. Winter, *Catastrophe and Culture. Recent Trends in the Historiography of the First World War*, *JMH* 64 (1992), pp. 525–32, quote p. 531.

21. See chapters 2.2. and 4.1.

their villages.²² 'From below', from the perspective of rural soldiers and their wives and friends in the villages, this connection between front and home front arose from the attention each side paid to the other's personal situation and the social developments marking each sphere. Interpretations of these realities were exchanged in letters or while men were home on leave; the rural population tended to develop a shared experience of war on the basis of this exchange of interpretations. For women and 'war wives' (*Kriegerfrauen*) in particular, however, gender-specific perceptions and interpretations of the war and their personal situation were in many respects inconsistent with this tendency.²³

The dynamics of rural society on the home front and the experiences of those living there were largely shaped by state control of the agrarian economy, which began in 1915 and lasted to varying degrees until late 1923. What is more, farmers' wives were largely powerless in the face of this system of maximum prices, farm inspections and confiscation.²⁴ The present work asserts that circumstances on the home front imbued the wartime experiences of peasant soldiers at least as much as their lived experience at the front. The command economy was accompanied by inflation, which also began during the war, peaking in the hyperinflation of 1922/23. Money as a means of payment was increasingly withdrawn from circulation and people sought refuge in physical assets (*Sachwerte*). Inflation triggered a wave of political irrationalism, not only in cities such as Munich but also in the countryside. It changed political discourse as well as the values and moral conceptions of the people; it thus moulded their experience long term. In choosing to focus in the present work on the inflation decade from 1914 to 1923, I follow a periodisation which has already proved its value in many earlier studies.²⁵

How veterans came to terms with their experience of war and violence has as yet hardly been examined for Germany as a whole. The seminal study of demobilisation in Richard Bessel's book on

22. See Chapter 2.3.

23. See Chapter 5.1., and for a more general interpretation Ziemann, *Geschlechterbeziehungen*.

24. The key account dealing with these developments is the regional study of the Rhineland and Westphalia by Moeller, *Peasants*.

25. See Chapter 5, and the important study by Martin H. Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt. Revolution, Inflation und Moderne. München 1914-1924*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1998, which can be read as a parallel to my description of events in the Bavarian countryside.

Introduction

Germany after the First World War is one exception. Yet we still lack work on Germany of the kind produced by Antoine Prost, who has furnished us with an in-depth study of the organisational culture, ideology and symbolic representation in war memorials of the French 'anciens combattants'. These issues are examined here empirically with reference to four thematic fields for the 1918–23 period.²⁶ We look first at the technological, social and social-moral aspects of demobilisation, probing how men returning home from the war fit back into post-war society. We then turn to the citizens' militias (*Einwohnerwehren*), an important paramilitary organisation, and investigate whether former front-line experiences encouraged or hampered their development and militancy. The *Einwohnerwehren* thus also serve as a litmus test of the theory that soldiers were 'brutalised'. The key forum for the representation of soldiers' wartime experiences at the local level was the veterans' association, whose organisational culture we examine on the basis of a somewhat patchy source material. Finally, we look at the construction and symbolism of war memorials in provincial rural villages. Among other things, I discuss whether the memorials' symbolic messages were largely shaped by the aggressive suppression of defeat and revanchism, as researchers have claimed for the vast majority of German war memorials.²⁷

The present work is a history of experience (*Erfahrungsgeschichte*). This simply means, first of all, that it concentrates on how individuals subjectively constitute, interpret and reinterpret social reality in a ceaseless process of communication. The concept of experience used here involves three distinctions.²⁸ The first can be expressed better in German than in English parlance, because the former has two words for the English 'experience'. *Erfahrung* (experience) is distinct from *Erlebnis*, the immediate sensory impressions with which we are

26. See Chapter 6; Bessel, *Germany*; Prost, *War*. By way of contrast, see the important regional study of the Prussian province of Saxony: Schumann, *Politische Gewalt*.

27. See Jeismann/Westheider, *Bürger*. On the denial of Germany's defeat and the stab-in-the-back legend, see Boris Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Desintegration. Das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914–1933*, Düsseldorf: Droste 2003.

28. See the useful reflections in Nikolaus Buschmann/Horst Carl (eds), *Die Erfahrung des Krieges. Erfahrungsgeschichtliche Perspektiven von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2001; Koselleck, *Einfluß*.

constantly bombarded. As understood in the sociology of knowledge, experiences are those impressions to which individuals pay attention. Through this process of interpretation, sensory impressions can be passed on in the medium or even long term, allowing people to fit new impressions into a pre-existing framework and endow them with meaning. In this process, the second distinction, between experiential space and horizon of expectations (Reinhart Koselleck), is of key importance. This distinction brings out the divergent temporal structures within which experiences are accumulated, changed or devalued.²⁹ The third distinction, important to understanding the present work, is between experiences and discourses. The concept of experience stresses the subjective aspect of the construction of social reality and how communicative acts of speaking and writing can mould and change such constructions. It is related to the life-worlds and socialisation processes of specific social groups. The concept of discourse, meanwhile, emphasises the objective and often inflexible aspect of this construction of reality, that is, the limits of what may be said and written about certain subjects within the public sphere.³⁰

The dominant media involved in the communicative construction of experience were letters and private conversations, whether in a dugout at the front, a train compartment or the village tavern. The public discourse on the reality of the war at the front and how to remember its horrors in appropriate fashion drew its strength above all from media with extensive reach: regimental histories with their huge print run, war novels and war films, both of tremendous importance for the self-descriptions of Weimar society, and numerous printed collections of war letters, which allegedly bore witness to the 'real', 'genuine' front-line experience.³¹ During the war itself, the military authorities took steps to mould the public *discourse* on the 'experience of the front' to stem the negative effect of soldiers' *actual experiences* of the war on

29. The key text is Koselleck, *Space of Experience*.

30. For a helpful conceptualisation see Kathleen Canning, *Feminist History After the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience*, *Signs* 19 (1994), pp. 368–404.

31. See, for example, Bernadette Kester, *Film Front Weimar: Representations of the First World War in German Films of the Weimar Period (1919–1933)*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2003; Markus Pöhlmann, *Kriegsgeschichte und Geschichtspolitik: Der Erste Weltkrieg. Die amtliche deutsche Militärgeschichtsschreibung 1914–1956*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2002, chapter 5; Ulrich, *Augenzeugen*.

Introduction

public opinion. Until November 1918, they failed almost entirely in this. Whether they managed to do so in the Weimar Republic and, if they did, to what extent are reconsidered at the end of this study.³²

Finally, some comments on the sources. Since the loss of the files of the Prussian army in the spring of 1945, the holdings of Section IV of the Bavarian Hauptstaatsarchiv in Munich offer by far the most comprehensive and varied military source materials for the period from 1914 to 1918.³³ The present work has drawn extensively on these holdings, particularly files of the Bavarian War Ministry and the Deputy General Command of the 1st Bavarian Army Corps. Another important source genre, scarcely used as yet in studies about the First World War, is represented by court-martial files. They often include highly informative war letters (*Feldpostbriefe*), which can be linked with the soldier's biography and the event which led to their being put on record. Moreover, the statements and interrogation transcripts from the court proceedings also offer a variety of evidence related to everyday realities, conflicts and behaviour patterns at the front.

This study thus relies by no means only on evaluation of war letters. Accounts by military chaplains, for instance, are fertile sources of information on the front-line experience, as are the war diaries kept by rural soldiers. Soldiers' letters are, however, the best source for analysing the subjective interpretive models of soldiers. The letters used in this work come from two sources above all. The first comprises series of letters from archival or private collections. They cover extended periods of up to a year, in rare cases much longer than that; they often include the other side of the story, letters from friends and relatives. Correspondence such as this does allow us to trace personal developments and analyse individual backgrounds, though this information could not always be integrated into the present book.

Another treasure trove of war letters are the reports produced by the postal surveillance offices established from April 1916 in divisions and army high commands (*Armee-Ober-Kommandos*). These carried out random checks and summarised their findings in monthly reports featuring selected excerpts. These reports are interesting because they

32. This distinction is a major topic in the innovative study by Lipp, *Meinungslenkung*. See the Conclusion below.

33. The most important source for the home front are the weekly or fortnightly reports on the general mood of the population (hereafter: WB and HMB) by the district administrations or the head of the regional administration in Upper and Lower Bavaria and Bavarian Swabia (hereafter: BA and RP).

were intended to convey the mood among the troops in representative fashion. The surviving evidence, however, in contrast to that for the French army, is patchy.³⁴ I was, however, able to analyse and evaluate for the first time one source containing excerpts of letters under surveillance, sent from both the front and home front. From March 1917 on, art historian Adolf Schinnerer scrutinised letters passing through Railway Post Office Munich I. As well as summing up the mood among the population in representative fashion, he wished to document statements relevant to cultural history. This makes this material, which comprises somewhat more than 1,000 excerpts, most of them fairly lengthy, particularly interesting for the historian.³⁵

Any researcher using war letters for a history of wartime mentalities must pay attention to the relevant source criticism. These relate, first of all, to how much we may generalise on the basis of the interpretations in these letters. We cannot hope to achieve statistical certainty. Nonetheless, the reports produced by the postal surveillance offices do in fact support many generalisations. Censorship is another problem. The external censorship of letters was carried out by military authorities, by officers in companies or regiments until 1916 and then by the postal surveillance offices. Given that around 28 billion war letters were sent during the First World War, however, it was impossible to check everything.³⁶ Self-censorship is a more serious problem. Most soldiers' letters were addressed to parents, or wives in the case of married soldiers. Some topics were taboo, especially when soldiers wrote to their wives, such as extra-marital sexual relations at the front. These were mentioned only when a Catholic soldier expressed his outrage at the behaviour of many of his comrades.³⁷

34. See the important study by Annick Cochet, *L'opinion et le moral des soldats en 1916 d'après les archives du contrôle postal*, 2 vols, Thèse du doctorat, Paris 1986.

35. Adolf Schinnerer, *Leitsätze für die Briefabschriften*, n.d.: BHStA/IV, stv. GK I.AK. The excerpts are located in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Handschriftenabteilung, Schinnereriana (BSB).

36. For details of military censorship see Ulrich, *Augenzeugen*, pp. 78-105.

37. See the example in Chapter 4.1. Useful methodological reflections on the use of war letters can be found in Klaus Latzel, *Vom Kriegererlebnis zur Kriegserfahrung. Theoretische und methodische Überlegungen zur erfahrungsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung von Feldpostbriefen*, *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 56 (1997), pp. 1-30.

Introduction

It is, however, methodologically pointless to search war letters for subjects such as the exploitation and maltreatment of Belgian and French civilians by the occupying German forces and then to complain when it proves impossible to locate them.³⁸ The fact that such things were not mentioned does not mean that they did not happen. It does indicate, however, that they were only marginally relevant, if at all, to how the soldiers subjectively constructed their experience, even bearing in mind the possible impact of self-censorship. It is solely for this purpose that the present work draws on soldiers' letters. I do not deploy them as evidence of the 'objective' facts and events which shaped the course of the war, which can be studied through many other sources. Their value lies in how they reflect the subjective construction of a wartime reality that moulded the collective experience of rural soldiers and their families.

To mention another example: letters sent by Bavarian peasants from the front are almost entirely free of passages alluding proudly to the pleasure of killing, of the kind Joanna Bourke has presented in her *Intimate History of Killing* from British and American examples.³⁹ This finding is surely due, first of all, to the fact that letters to one's wife do not seem like the best place to boast of such a flagrant offence against the Fifth Commandment, and not only for pious Catholics. Such passages, however, are also missing in letters to male relatives, in which soldiers express their abhorrence at the 'murder' at the front in many different ways and invoke at length the victimisation of the soldiers through the wartime violence.⁴⁰ This does not of course mean that soldiers from a rural background did not kill deliberately, knowing exactly what they were doing; some may have enjoyed it. If they did, such pleasure found no place in the subjective construction of identity to which the letters and diaries bear witness.⁴¹ But how Bavarian peasants constructed their subjective war experience is what this book aims to uncover.

38. This point is misunderstood by Nelson, 'Ordinary Men', p. 428.

39. Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-century Warfare*, London: Granta Books 1999; see my critique in *Mittelweg* 36 9 (2000), 1, pp. 58-9. The arguments about a 'killing instinct' in Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, London: Penguin 1999, chapter 11, are out of touch with the historical reality.

40. See chapters 3 and 4.

41. For general reflections on this problem see Peter Gleichmann/Thomas Kühne (eds), *Massenhaftes Töten. Kriege und Genozide im 20. Jahrhundert*, Essen: Klartext 2004.

1

Depression, August 1914

Upper and Lower Bavaria, the Upper Palatinate – all areas of Altbayern – and Swabia are commonly referred to as southern Bavaria. Here, however, this term is used for the area within the responsibility of the Deputy General Command (*stellvertretendes Generalkommando*) of the 1st Bavarian Army Corps. A range of responsibilities and tasks fell to this institution and the military commanders in charge of it after the declaration of the state of siege on 1 August 1914. These initially comprised genuine military issues such as ensuring that the front-line units recruited in this district were supplied with soldiers and resources, and commanding the subordinate units of the replacement army (*Besatzungsheer*). This competence soon expanded to the regulation of labour policy, food supply and press censorship. Geographically, the 1st Army Corps took in the *Regierungsbezirke* (the largest administrative division of a *Land*) of Upper Bavaria – minus the districts of Ingolstadt, Schrobenhausen and Pfaffenhofen – and Swabia, along with the southern half of the districts of Lower Bavaria with ten of its district authorities.¹

Before the war, most southern Bavarians still worked in agriculture. In 1907 agriculture occupied almost 70 per cent of the economically active population in Lower Bavaria, about 53 per cent in Swabia and around 59 per cent in Upper Bavaria – excluding the flourishing city of Munich.² The rural population lived in numerous scattered villages and small market towns, the number of isolated farms and small hamlets increasing as one neared the Alps. While only around a third of the German population lived in rural communities in 1925, more than 50 per cent of Bavarians lived in settlements of fewer than 2,000 people, and almost 20 per cent

1. See the map in Deist, *Militär und Innenpolitik*, pp. 1530–1. On the remit of the Deputy General Commands see *ibid.*, pp. XL–XLIV.

2. The figure for Upper Bavaria as a whole was almost 40 per cent. Calculated on the basis of *Die Kriegs-Volkszählungen vom Jahre 1916 und 1917 in Bayern*, Munich: Lindauer 1919, p. 164.

in those with fewer than 500 inhabitants.³ In line with industrialisation, apart from the few cities, urbanisation in Altbayern remained a 'selective phenomenon' until well into the 1920s, generally concentrated in small, monostructural industrial towns. It was thus only from the turn of the century that people developed a pronounced awareness of the differences between urban and rural ways of life. The migration of rural workers to the towns meant that peasants saw urbanisation as something negative.⁴ Experientially, the lives of those remaining in the villages were restricted to the local area and a highly circumscribed sphere of influence; they were integrated very little into national structures of communication. This horizon was expanded only occasionally during festivals, pilgrimages or when visiting markets. Even these activities, though, were firmly embedded in the regional setting.⁵

In contrast to the Rhenish Palatinate and Lower Franconia, where the division of inheritance fragmented ownership, the inheritance law which dominated in Altbayern passed on everything to a sole heir, favouring the continuity of peasant farms, almost all of which worked their own land.⁶ Southern Bavaria was a classical farming region. The largest group, both in terms of the number of farms and the area under cultivation, was made up of medium-sized farms of 5–20 ha.⁷ Such farms worked around 42 per cent of the land in Upper Bavaria and 45 per cent in Lower Bavaria; in Swabia the figure was about 56 per cent. In southern Bavaria, this group of farms lay more often than elsewhere in the German Empire at the upper limit of 20 ha. Large estates of over 100 ha meanwhile were few and far between in Altbayern.

How did rural Bavarians respond to the outbreak of the First World War? Recent studies have shown that, in many cities and towns of the German Empire, the notion, popular for so long, of an all-embracing enthusiasm for war in August 1914 is a myth. By thoroughly checking

3. Schulte, *Dorf*, p. 32; figures in Bergmann, *Bauernbund*, p. 12.

4. Klaus Tenfelde, Stadt und Land in Krisenzeiten. München und das Münchener Umland zwischen Revolution und Inflation 1918–1923, in: Wolfgang Hardtwig/Klaus Tenfelde (eds), *Soziale Räume in der Urbanisierung*, Munich: C.H. Beck 1990, pp. 37–57, quote p. 42.

5. Blessing, Umwelt.

6. Axel Schnorbus, Die ländlichen Unterschichten in der bayerischen Gesellschaft am Ausgang des 19. Jahrhunderts, *ZBLG* 30 (1967), pp. 824–52, p. 831.

7. *Die Landwirtschaft in Bayern. Nach der Betriebszählung vom 12. Juni 1907*, Munich: Lindauer 1910, pp. 15–36.

the available evidence, they have shown that the masses who approved of the war consisted largely of members of the nationalistic middle-class, particularly supporters of the youth movement and members of the student fraternities. The vast majority of the working class, meanwhile, was despondent about the war.⁸ Setting the record straight for rural areas is a hard task, particularly because the provincial press, which stoked popular belligerence through its biased reporting, cannot be drawn upon as a source, particularly for the highly censored period following declaration of the state of siege. These publications tended to focus on events in Berlin and paid little heed to those in the countryside because of the dearth of spectacular mass gatherings; they simply took it for granted that the nation could 'rely' on the rural population. Even some of the small number of available memoirs have been distorted by the successful myth of enthusiasm for war. A Franconian peasant thus disseminates the image of widespread enthusiasm in his notes. Drawing on his own experience, however, he relates how, when mobilisation began, his sister came running to harvesters working in a field in tears to tell one of the young men that he had been called up. The harvesters 'seemed to have turned to stone'. It was only when soldiers began to depart that a certain enthusiasm kicked in.⁹ Nevertheless, there are plenty of accounts which provide us with a detailed picture of the rural state of mind shortly before and after mobilisation. In October 1914 the state counsellor in the Ministry of the Interior, Gustav von Kahr, called on the district bailiffs to produce war chronicles to record events related to mobilisation. Some district authorities, apparently in response to this appeal, then requested that teachers and priests produce such reports.¹⁰ Such accounts, produced at the level of the boroughs, are essential to precise historical reconstruction.

In most rural communities an increasingly tense atmosphere had developed in the weeks of the July crisis. Particularly after Austria's ultimatum to Serbia on 23 July, there was 'serious concern about the war for the first time' in many places, as reported for the village of Walda by the Neuburg district authority.¹¹ This news stoked the 'tension, even

8. See Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*; Christian Geinitz, *Kriegsfurcht und Kampfbereitschaft. Das Augusterlebnis in Freiburg. Eine Studie zum Kriegsbeginn 1914*, Essen: Klartext 1998; Kruse, *Krieg*, pp. 54–61, 91–8.

9. Peter Högl (ed.), *Konrad Dürr, Erinnerungen und Gedanken aus meinem Leben*, Öllingen: Gelchsheim 1987, p. 51.

10. Gustav von Kahr, 6.10.1914: StAM, LRA 82665.

11. Catholic parish of Walda, 29.11.1914: StAA, BA Neuburg 7214.

agitation', in the villages, and fears now began to grow that Germany would be caught up in a war between Austria and Serbia.¹² The declaration of war by Austria-Hungary on Serbia on 28 July further 'intensified these concerns' about the possibility of war.¹³ Such presentiments of war may have been further intensified by the fact that some conscripts, granted furlough to help out with the harvest, were recalled to the barracks even before the proclamation of impending war on 31 July.¹⁴

The anxieties and fears inspired by the possibility of war had thus built up steadily in the weeks before mobilisation. In just a few communities, people were so preoccupied with harvest work that mobilisation came like a 'bolt from the blue'.¹⁵ There is very little evidence that mobilisation was experienced as the end of a 'state of uncertainty' following weeks of increasing tension. In such places, a general 'dismay' was usually the first response to such news.¹⁶ To interpret the outbreak of war as a positive route out of the uncertainty which had built up during the weeks of the July crisis, as contemporaries did for the cities, thus fails to capture the realities of rural Bavaria.

Before mobilisation, the 'state of war' or state of siege was declared on 31 July. In Bavaria, executive power was now transferred to the commanders of the three army corps.¹⁷ The final threshold had been crossed; mobilisation and war had become inevitable. 'As everywhere,' it was reported from one village at the time, 'here too the declaration of a state of war has caused great dismay in every quarter.' A 'very fearful atmosphere' sometimes developed when the domestic state of war was confused with a declaration of war on another country.¹⁸ The news that the first day of mobilisation was set for Sunday 2 August 1914 reached most villages during the evening of 1 August.

Only two accounts which refer to the response immediately after mobilisation was announced reflect general resoluteness in the face of war. In the parish of Karlskron people were of the opinion that 'we

12. Head teacher Wagner from Neuschwettingen, 21.12.1914: StAA, BA Neuburg 7214.

13. Primary school teacher Ganshorn from Karlshuld, 4.12.1914: StAA, BA Neuburg 7214.

14. Catholic parish of Dezenacker, 27.11.1914: StAA, BA Neuburg 7214.

15. Körber, a teacher from Oberhausen, n.d.: StAA, BA Neuburg 7214.

16. Head teacher from Obermaxfeld, 3.12.1914: StAA, BA Neuburg 7214.

17. Albrecht, *Landtag*, pp. 74-8.

18. Ihlmeider, a teacher from Bertoldsheim, 5.12.1914: StAA, BA Neuburg 7214.