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Andrew Donson

# Why did German youth become fascists? Nationalist males born 1900 to 1908 in war and revolution\*

A widely known but less understood characteristic of fascist movements in post-1918 Europe was their reliance on males who did not serve in the First World War or served only a limited and usually bloodless tour of a few months. In Germany, the Nazis were the party of the disaffected front soldier, but around half of the members in the party and the SA who joined before 1933 were too young during the war to be conscripted. Voters of all ages cast their ballots for the Nazis in elections, but males born 1900 (the last birth year conscripted in the summer of 1918) to 1908 (the birth year of the youngest German schoolboys in 1914) galvanized the right and carried out its violence.<sup>1</sup> As teenagers or men in their early twenties, they also overwhelmed the *Freikorps* and other fascist paramilitary organizations before the rise of the Nazis. Boys as young as fourteen practised with groups like the *Jungwolf*. According to some estimates, by the mid-1920s more than half the members in the *Stahlhelm* were too young to have served in the war, and officers considered these youth among the most reliable and radical militia troops.<sup>2</sup> How and why did these young men, the ages of Martin Bormann (born 1900), Rudolf Höss (1900), Heinrich Himmler (1900), Ernst von Salomon (1902), Werner Best (1903), Reinhard Heydrich (1906) and Baldur Schirach (1907) develop their aggressive and violent traits? The participation of young men born from 1900 to 1908 in

\*I am grateful to Geoff Eley, Jeff Wilson, Andy Evans, Rebecca Wittmann and the many other colleagues and anonymous readers who offered extensive criticism of this article.

<sup>1</sup>On the party, see M. Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders 1919–1945* (Cambridge, 1983), 140–6; *idem*, 'Generationskonflikt als Entwicklungsfaktor in der NS-Bewegung vor 1933', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, xi (1985), 232–3; and J. Falter, 'The young membership of the NSDAP between 1925 and 1933: a demographic and social profile' in C. Fischer (ed.), *The Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes in*

*Weimar Germany* (Providence, 1996), 83. On the SA, see R. Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany, 1925–1934* (New Haven, 1984), 33–45; and C. Fischer, *Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic, and Ideological Analysis, 1929–1935* (Boston, 1983), 48–50.

<sup>2</sup>H. Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik, 1918–1920* (Boppard am Rhein, 1969), 48, 51; J. Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington, 1977), 63–4, 171–3; and H. Siemering, *Die Deutsche Jugendbewegung* (Berlin, 1931), 32–50.

Nazism and fascist paramilitary politics after 1918 indicates that violent resentment did not originate in the front experience alone.

This article traces the experiences on the home front that frustrated these most spirited agitators of German fascism. It argues that for a set of boys who attended secondary schools (*Gymnasien, Realschulen, Realgymnasien*, etc.) and elementary schools (*Mittelschulen, Volksschulen*, etc.), reading, recreation, schooling, pre-military training and home life nurtured fantasies about being a soldier and raised unrealistic expectations about Germany's military superiority and chances for victory. Most of these boys were from either middle-class families in big cities or families of a variety of classes in Protestant villages, towns and small cities, though there were numerous exceptions to this generalization. These boys' school compositions in 1915 and descriptions of their games and antics on the street throughout the war suggest that they eagerly consumed coarse and graphic descriptions of glorified German soldiers. From 1914 to 1918, they believed resolutely and joyfully in the superiority of the German army. My survey of the 211 autobiographies collected by Theodore Abel suggests that in order to maintain this idea during the shock of defeat, most early Nazis born 1900 to 1908 crystallized a belief in November 1918 that traitors at home had foiled military victory. Also, almost all had one or more of the following: a very nationalist family, an education in a military academy or, more likely, from 1914 to 1918 a stint in a military youth company, a great enthusiasm for military victories and war games, or an attempted registration with the army rejected because of age. The early Nazis in this cohort dreaded that the war would end before they could volunteer. Stunned by defeat and denied the opportunity to prove their manhood, they began to believe the legend that the army was not conquered on the battlefield but stabbed in the back by the worker-supported Republican government.<sup>3</sup>

A stab in the back by the working class seemed logical to these boys in part because they saw that the youth who volunteered for patriotic projects and pre-military training at the end of the war came primarily from families in the trade and professional classes. Urban working-class and rural Catholic boys, by contrast, fled the patriotic labour projects and military youth companies after the first six to twelve months of the war. After 1915 pedagogues, social reformers and state officials vilified working youths for seeking high wages, splurging on the cinema, demanding a negotiated peace and organizing strikes to end the war.<sup>4</sup> Working youths' rejection of patriotic activity stoked nationalist youths' resentment.

The existing literature has theorized that young men born 1900 to 1908 turned to fascism because of the severe unemployment they faced after 1918 and the haven to the unemployed that right-wing organizations like the SA offered them.<sup>5</sup> The literature has also shown that males of this cohort were radicalized because the leadership of moderate political parties was

<sup>3</sup>For how Abel got the autobiographies, see his *Why Hitler Came into Power* (New York, 1938), 2–4; and his diary entries from 28 June 1934, 3 July 1934 and 17 December 1935, Theodore Abel Collection, boxes 13 and 14, Hoover Institution Archive (TAC-HIA). On the autobiographies of those born 1900 to 1908, see also P. Merkl, *Political Violence under the Swastika: 581 Early Nazis* (Princeton, 1975), 28, 149–53, 238–9, 270–82, 302–4.

<sup>4</sup>M. Stadelmaier, *Zwischen Langemarck und Liebknecht: Arbeiterjugend und Politik im I. Weltkrieg*

(Bonn, 1986); and D. Linton, 'Who Has the Youth has the Future': *The Campaign to Save Young Workers in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1991), 186–218.

<sup>5</sup>D. Geary, 'Jugend, Arbeitslosigkeit und politischer Radikalismus am Ende der Weimarer Republik', *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, xxxiv (1983), 304–9. Undermining this interpretation, Theodore Abel estimated that 80 per cent of early Nazi Party members were never unemployed: Abel, *op. cit.*, 313–15.

aged and did not attend to their economic woes – in contrast to the leadership of the Nazi Party, which actively mobilized them.<sup>6</sup> I argue that another reason motivated the violence and radicalism of men in this cohort: the *Freikorps*, the SA, the Nazi Party, and other right militarist and nationalist groups offered young men the chance to act out their puerile masculine fantasies and play out their dreams of becoming nationalist soldiers. These organizations also served as avenues in which to express the resentment they had developed during the war and revolution against working-class Germans who, in their minds, had supported peace.

My view that fascism evolved out of a militarist male youth culture that radicalized after 1914 implies that the First World War was a far greater rupture than historians who emphasize continuity have sometimes considered. Nationalism, militarism and hatred of compatriots long preceded 1914. But, as a wide body of recent scholarship suggests, historians need to consider the remarkable degree that the war destabilized the social order, impelled men to extreme violence and fundamentally recast European political culture.<sup>7</sup>

### WAR PEDAGOGY

In August and September 1914 advocates of a movement going under the name of war pedagogy (*Kriegspädagogik*) motivated teachers and administrators to change the tone, content, methods and purposes of German education by using the war and the perceived universal enthusiasm for it as a topic in all academic subjects, from writing to physical science. In its extreme forms in Protestant small cities, towns and villages, war pedagogy glorified military heroes and whetted pupils' interest in the destructive power of weaponry. It cultivated love for the Fatherland and willingness to sacrifice for the national cause. Elementary schoolteachers, in particular, created a pedagogy more populist and inclusive in its nationalism. According to reports of teachers and administrators, the more amiable atmosphere in the classroom in turn encouraged more open and assertive expression of male pupils' militarist, nationalist and violent fantasies. The good feeling in schools and the willingness to cultivate nationalism and violence varied, of course, by region, period and type of school. However, evidence from the pedagogical press indicates that even during the years of deprivation (1916–18), secondary schoolboys from Catholic and Protestant cities and elementary schoolboys from Protestant towns, villages and small cities generally received an education that encouraged militarism, fierce national loyalty and masculine fantasies about being a soldier.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>L. E. Jones, 'German liberalism and the alienation of the younger generation' in K. Jarausch and L. E. Jones (eds), *In Search of a Liberal Germany* (New York, 1990); and M. Martiny, 'Sozialdemokratie und Junge Generation am Ende der Weimarer Republik' in W. Luthardt (ed.), *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterbewegung und Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt, 1978).

<sup>7</sup>See the literature sponsored by Jay Winter: V. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge, 2000); A. Roshwald and R. Stites (eds), *European Culture in the Great War* (New York, 1999); and Maureen Healy, *Vienna*

*and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (New York, 2004). See also S. Audoin-Rouzeau and A. Becker, *14–18: Understanding the Great War* (New York, 2003); J. Horne and A. Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, 2001); and A. Dobson, *Authority and Upheaval in Leipzig, 1910–1920* (New York, 2000).

<sup>8</sup>For some overviews of war pedagogy, see W. Jannel, *Kriegspädagogik: Berichte und Vorschläge* (Leipzig, 1916); W. Flitner, *Der Krieg und die Jugend* (New Haven, 1927); U. Bendele, *Krieg, Kopf und Körper: Lernen für das Leben – Erziehung zum Tod* (Frankfurt, a.M., 1984); and E. Demm,

Before the war, administrators and teachers in both primary and secondary schools had been among the most zealous supporters of nationalism and the military. All secondary schoolteachers had the privilege of serving in the army *einjährig-freiwillig* (one-year voluntarily) and thereby becoming reserve officers. Active in the Conservative and National Liberal Parties and enthusiastic supporters of the imperialist state, they made up a fifth of the local chairmen in the radical nationalist Pan-German League. In Prussia, few ever protested against taking the compulsory oath to cultivate patriotism and love of the emperor in youth.<sup>9</sup> The more critical elementary schoolteachers, after intensive lobbying by their professional organizations, earned the full *einjährig-freiwillig* privilege in 1900. Over half in Prussia and 90 per cent of them in Bavaria took advantage of it in the hope of becoming reserve officers. Favouring reform at home and imperialism abroad, elementary schoolteachers after the turn of the century voted overwhelmingly for the Progressive and Centre Parties, whose nationalism and colonial policy differed little in substance (though much in tone) from the Conservative and National Liberal Parties. For those elementary schoolteachers who leaned toward the left after 1900, the system of clerical school inspectors to enforce regulations about their curricula and behaviour ensured that none openly opposed the militarist, conservative agenda of the German state. Further securing their political reliability was their socialization in the strict teacher training colleges and the practice of dismissing them if they voted for the anti-militarist Social Democratic Party or, in some cases, the left-liberal parties.<sup>10</sup>

After Wilhelm II endorsed the increasingly strident nationalist demands on the curriculum in 1890, weekly hours of German in elementary schools increased, and history instruction in most schools focused more on Germany's nation-building period – especially its wars and its heroes. Subsequent national decrees required that all schools celebrate Sedan Day and the birthdays of the Kaiser and other Hohenzollern family members. Songs in music instruction increasingly favoured militarist and nationalist lyrics. School libraries stocked their shelves with memoirs of volunteer soldiers and other nationalist stories. Pupils in secondary schools in Berlin had the day off to attend the Kaiser's autumn military parade. Other schoolboys wrote essays with titles like 'Foundation and justification for national pride'.<sup>11</sup> In one interpretation,

'Deutschlands Kinder im Ersten Weltkrieg: Zwischen Propaganda und Sozialfürsorge', *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift*, LX (2001), 51–98. See also the following dissertations: E. Emminger, "'Und der ganze Unterricht muss auf die große Uhr des Weltkrieges eingestellt werden!'" Die Auswirkungen des Ersten Weltkrieges auf die Volksschule im Königreich Bayern 1914 bis 1918' (University of Augsburg, 1988); H. Lemmermann, 'Kriegserziehung im Kaiserreich' (Bremen, 1984), 254–379; H. Reissig, 'Die Lehrerseminare in Preußen im Ersten Weltkrieg' (Berlin, 1987); and B. Weber, 'Pädagogik und Politik vom Kaiserreich zum Faschismus' (Königstein/Ts., 1979).

<sup>9</sup>R. Bölling, *Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Lehrer* (Göttingen, 1983), 51–2; H. J. Apel, 'Gymnasiallehrer mit "Verständnis und Taktgefühl für die heranwachsende Jugend": Die "standesgemäße" Ausbildung der Gymnasiallehrer im Seminar des wilhelminischen Gymnasiums (1890–1918)' in

K.-E. Jeismann (ed.), *Bildung, Staat, Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1989), 315; and B. Weber, *op. cit.*, 84.

<sup>10</sup>R. Bölling, *Volksschullehrer und Politik: Der Deutsche Lehrerverein 1918–1933* (Göttingen, 1978), 9–10, 19, 24–5; F. Meyer, *Schule der Untertanen: Lehrer und Politik in Preußen, 1848–1900* (Hamburg, 1976), 200–3; D. Skopp, 'Auf der untersten Sprosse: Der Volksschullehrer als Semi-Professional im Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, VI (1979), 383–402; H. Stübiger, 'Der Einfluss des Militärs auf Schule und Lehrerschaft' in C. Berg (ed.), *Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte 1870–1918* (Munich, 1991), vol. IV, 523; and Reissig, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup>H. J. Frank, *Geschichte des Deutschunterrichts* (Munich, 1973), 511–18, 528–31; Lemmermann, *op. cit.*, 146–7; G. Petrat, *Schulerverziehung: Ihre Sozialgeschichte in Deutschland bis 1945* (Munich, 1987), 225–36; J. Vogel, *Nationen im Gleichschritt:*

this socialization explains why middle-class Germans embraced war in 1914 and most eligible secondary schoolboys volunteered for it.<sup>12</sup>

However the implementation of nationalism and militarism in schools before 1914 had limits and faced resistance. The German Historians Congresses in the 1890s rejected the Kaiser's demand to 'awaken love of the Fatherland' through history instruction. Consequently, history textbooks respected British liberalism and lauded the French for introducing the principle of equality before the law, and their accounts of Prussian battles were dry and sober and refrained from glorifying war itself. Furthermore, many writers in the pedagogical press opposed a curriculum that emphasized modern German history to the exclusion of other countries and periods. The humanistic curriculum based on Greek and Roman civilization continued to thrive in the *Gymnasium*, and while the army supported emphasis in the *Realschulen* on modern history and languages, it rarely had any direct influence on the nationalism and militarism of the curricula. Decrying militarism in schools were not only socialist functionaries like Karl Liebknecht and Clara Zetkin but influential middle-class pedagogues like Gustav Wyneken, Ernst Roloff, Wilhelm Rein and Wilhelm Lamszus. *Pädagogische Zeitung*, the influential journal of the Berlin Teachers' Association, occasionally printed anti-militarist tracts.<sup>13</sup>

Voluntary and government-imposed censorship at the outbreak of war silenced most critics of militarism and extreme nationalism, however. Furthermore, as late as the end of 1915, almost all teachers who wrote in the pedagogical press asserted that the war was a positive event for schoolchildren. The mantras of administrators, inspectors, teachers and educational theorists were 'war is the great educator' and 'let the schoolchildren experience the greatness of the times'. Authors in the pedagogical press reached the general consensus that teachers had a duty to bring the war into the classroom for national renewal and mobilization for war. Even Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, the pacifist and first notable pedagogue publicly to oppose the war, moderately agreed with this idea as late as the summer of 1915.<sup>14</sup>

Facilitating the change in curriculum were two developments. First, the district school administrators and inspectors throughout Germany allowed teachers to abandon the prescribed curricula. No longer having to follow the state lesson plans (*Lehrpläne*), they could focus their

*Der Kult der 'Nation in Waffen' in Deutschland und Frankreich 1871-1914* (Göttingen, 1997), 76-7, 89, 144-62; W. Langsam, 'Nationalism and history in the Prussian elementary schools under William II' in E. M. Earle (ed.), *Nationalism and Internationalism* (New York, 1950), 244; and M. Kraul, *Das deutsche Gymnasium 1780-1980* (Frankfurt a.M., 1984), 101-11, 120-2, quotation on 121.

<sup>12</sup>H.-U. Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918* (Leamington Spa, 1985), 121-2; C. Berg, 'Militär und Militarisierung' in Berg (ed.), *op. cit.*; and Frank, *op. cit.*, 544, 547.

<sup>13</sup>J. Albigetti, *Secondary School Reform in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, 1983), 254-6, 282, 306, quotation on 254; J. Olson, 'Nationalistic values in Prussian schoolbooks prior to World War I', *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 1 (1973), 51; K. D. Erdmann, 'Geschichte, Politik und Pädagogik - aus den Akten des Deutschen Historikerverbandes', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft*

und Unterricht, xix (1968), 10-11, 13; O. Apelt, *Der deutsche Aufsatz in den oberen Klassen der Gymnasien* (Leipzig, 1910), 2-3; Manfred Messerschmidt, 'Militär und Schule in der wilhemischen Zeit', *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilung*, xxiii (1978), 51-76; R. Höhn, *Sozialismus und Heer* (Bad Harzburg, 1969), 332-4; J. Olson, 'The Prussian Volksschule, 1890-1914: A Study of the Social Implications of the Extension of Elementary Education' (Ph.D., New York University, 1971), 159; and Lemmermann, *op. cit.*, 31-41, 48-9, 55-6, 76-9.

<sup>14</sup>Fr. W. Foerster, 'Neue Jugend', *Schulblatt der Provinz Sachsen*, lrv (29 September 1915), 433-4; and, for more extensive citations, Andrew Donson, 'War Pedagogy and Youth Culture: Nationalism and Authority in Germany in the First World War' (Ph.D., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2000), 88, 118.

instruction on the war.<sup>15</sup> Second, making this task easy were the millions of soldiers' letters, war poems, heroic obituaries, cheerful war reports, patriotic war sermons and prescriptions for good patriots that filled trade journals, daily newspapers and edited collections. Articles in the pedagogical and daily presses by all types of elementary and secondary schoolteachers – male, female, Protestant, Catholic, urban and rural – attested to the fruitful ways teachers could use this war literature to reinforce schoolchildren's commitment to war and raise their excitement about it. In their exuberance about national renewal, teachers and pedagogical theorists circulated the idea that *every* academic subject could and should generate enthusiasm for the war mobilization.<sup>16</sup>

One historian has wrongly assumed that this militarism of war pedagogy involved a strengthening of the notoriously strict German drill system.<sup>17</sup> In fact, many authors in the pedagogical press advocated using the active, so-called child-centred methods suggested before 1914 by reformers and psychologists. They claimed these methods could amplify the pupils' zeal for the war by engaging pupils more personally and bringing the present into the classroom. Teaching was now supposed to be a method of 'the heart' that encouraged enthusiasm for the national cause.<sup>18</sup>

Extreme in their nationalism and militarism and, at the same time, sensitive to the psychology of their pupils, practitioners of these new pedagogical initiatives tapped into schoolboys' fascination with soldiers and national greatness and promoted fantasies about the heroism, power and excitement of war. Reading soldiers' letters or other stories in class was supposed to mediate the 'thrill' of war. Studying the war heroes of the Old Testament – David, Joshua and the Maccabees – was believed to cultivate the warrior spirit and reaffirm the notion that the current war was a 'holy war'. Calculating the tons of ammunition necessary to destroy French divisions not only exercised skills in arithmetic but also aroused pupils' imaginations about Germany's destructive power.<sup>19</sup> According to the *Vossische Zeitung*, teachers accomplished this goal of making the war immediate in this assembly for elementary schoolboys in Berlin-Moabit in September 1915:

With no small anticipation, the 'boy battalions marched' under the leadership of their teachers into the hall. The hall was packed up to the last seat; many had to stand, but

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, Schepp, 'Unsere Schulen in der Kriegszeit', *Lehrer-Zeitung für Ost- und Westpreußen*, XLV (3 October 1914), 812; M. Treuge, 'Unsere Schülerinnen und der Krieg', *Die Lehrerin*, XXXI (7 October 1914), 205–6; and 'Zum Schulanfang', *Düsseldorfer General-Anzeiger*, 10 September 1914, in Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf (StdDüss) III 1701, Bl. 29.

<sup>16</sup>Some examples: Jannel, *op. cit.*; 'Maßhalten in der Einübung von Kriegsdichtungen und Kriegsliedern', *Preußische Volksschullehrerinnen-Zeitung*, X (15 May 1916), 40; F. Brücker, 'Die Konzentration des Unterrichts im Weltkrieg', *Katholische Zeitschrift für Erziehung und Unterricht*, LXV (1916), 33–42; 'Ein Berliner Lehrer an seine Schüler', *Pädagogische Zeitung*, XLIII (29 October 1914), 768–9; and newspaper clippings in Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde, 8034 II, 6938, Bl. 132–33, and 6939, Bl. 20, 23 and 105.

<sup>17</sup>Emminger, *op. cit.*, 109, 111.

<sup>18</sup>P. Dudek, *Jugend als Objekt der Wissenschaft: Geschichte der Jugendforschung in Deutschland und Österreich 1890–1933* (Opladen, 1990), 114; and J. Weber, 'Wie stellt sich unsere Schularbeit zur gegenwärtigen Weltlage', *Hannoversche Schulzeitung*, I (24 November 1914), 745 (quotation).

<sup>19</sup>'Lehren des Krieges für Erziehung und Unterricht', *Katholische Zeitschrift für Erziehung und Unterricht*, LXV (1916), 344; H. Kölling, 'Die Aktualität des Unterrichts', *Pädagogische Zeitung*, XLIII (10 September 1914), 690–1; and B. Moiske, 'Formeln, Schüler, Krieg: Mathematisch-naturwissenschaftliche Fachpädagogik um die Zeit des Ersten Weltkrieges' in Arbeitsgruppe 'Lehrer und Krieg' (eds), *Lehrer helfen siegen: Kriegspädagogik im Kaiserreich* (Berlin, 1987).

everyone was filled with a glowing enthusiasm for the great holy task that their fathers, brothers, and relatives filled in such an incredible way on the battlefields in the East and West and South. . . . The young heroes clearly idolized Hindenburg! With a rumbling, the enthusiasm of the boys roared through the hall.<sup>20</sup>

War also enlivened the physical appearance of schools: reports attested that maps, posters, photographs and drawings of the war adorned the walls of schools – a contrast to observations from before 1914 about classrooms' bareness and cheerlessness.<sup>21</sup> In reading instruction teachers forewent the abstruse classic texts in the ubiquitous school readers and used popular war poems and stories instead. They even let pupils bring in this material themselves.<sup>22</sup> From August 1914 until the end of 1915, positive articles about the war dominated the pedagogical press. German teachers before 1914 had cultivated militarism and nationalism but not this brazen and enthusiastic kind.

Part of the reason for the abundance of pro-war sentiment in the press was censorship. Expressing anti-militarism was taboo under the *Burgfrieden* (the political party truce), and the pedagogical press published not a single direct criticism of war pedagogy until a set of prominent educational reformers issued a statement in December 1915 denouncing German teachers for inciting violence and hatred among male pupils. 'It is time to break the silence and consider the great responsibility that education has had', they charged, 'in the alarming spread of our own national arrogance and hate, thirst for revenge, scorn, and *schadenfreude* against nations'.<sup>23</sup> The petition created a sensation, but it was the only anti-war plea widely circulated in the pedagogical press during the war. In 1916, the army cracked down on Ludwig Quidde and his committee 'to work against the militarization of youth and support education in pacifism', and criticism against war pedagogy was remarkably muted for the duration of the war.<sup>24</sup>

The extent of militarism and nationalism in the school curricula during the war varied substantially. The director of Leipzig's elementary schools emphasized the great enthusiasm for war pedagogy among teachers, but admitted in his review of the 1914/15 academic year that some teachers refrained from bringing the war into the curriculum. Likewise, female elementary schoolteachers, while in general supportive of the mobilization and the cultivation of patriotism, were sometimes tepid about focusing the *entire* curriculum on the present war.<sup>25</sup> The number of articles in the pedagogical press exalting war pedagogy declined steadily after

<sup>20</sup>'Helden und Kinder', *Vossische Zeitung*, 9 September 1915.

<sup>21</sup>On the new colourfulness, see 'Das Kriegsbild in der Schule', *Der Volksschullehrer*, ix (8 July 1915), 319; 'Der Krieg in der Schule', *Schulblatt der Provinz Sachsen*, lxxx (21 October 1914), 553; and 'Museum "Schule und Krieg"', *Die Lehrerin*, xxxii (17 July 1915), 124. On the pre-war dreariness, see W. Learned, *An American Teacher's Year in a Prussian Gymnasium* (New York, 1911), 351; and T. Alexander and B. Parker, *The New Education in the German Republic* (New York, 1929), 3, 255–6.

<sup>22</sup>M. Engel, *Leipzigs Volksschulen im Zeichen des Weltkriegs* (Leipzig, 1915), 15; Graf, 'Wie ich in

diesen schweren Tagen meine Kinder unterrichte', *Badische Schulzeitung*, lxxx (3 April 1915), 105; and 'Maßhalten in der Einübung von Kriegsdichtungen und Kriegsliedern', *Preußische Volksschullehrerinnen-Zeitung*, x (15 May 1916), 40.

<sup>23</sup>The petition is reprinted in K. Saul, 'Jugend im Schatten des Krieges: Dokumentation', *Millitär-geschichtliche Mitteilung*, xxxiv (1983), 137–8.

<sup>24</sup>L. Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus während des Weltkrieges 1914–1918* (Boppard am Rhine, 1979), 90.

<sup>25</sup>Engel, *op. cit.*, 14; and M. Treuge, 'Ja – und nein', *Die Lehrerin*, xxxii (28 August 1915), 169–70.



1915. Instead, there were discussions of the crippling shortages of coal, paper, food and personnel that closed many schools for weeks at a time and forced most to resort to half-time instruction or less. Desperate and tired of war, a handful of teachers followed the example of the pacifist reformers from December 1915 and bravely attacked the singular focus on the war in schools. But such critics met the derision of the tens of thousands of teachers and school administrators who, after July 1917, abandoned the left-liberal parties for the radical nationalist Fatherland Party, which supported extensive annexations and opposed a negotiated peace.<sup>26</sup>

A curriculum centred on the war was a phenomenon in all the belligerent nations, but Russian pedagogical theorists warned teachers about the risks to the psychological development of youth posed by violent war images.<sup>27</sup> French schools reoriented lessons around the war, carrying out 'a veritable revolution in content and methods'. French textbooks, however, emphasized the benefits of peace, and far more teachers took part in the peace movement in France than in Germany. The war imagery in the French curricula depicted enemy German soldiers as fierce and aggressive and compared them to soldiers from the noble French Republic, the enlightened champion of progress and law.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, in German war pedagogy the soldiers most often depicted as fierce and aggressive on the western front were not French but German.

#### YOUTH WAR LITERATURE

In the decades preceding the war reading was in addition to schooling, the single most important source for transmitting politics and culture to youth on a national level. A popular literature for youth had blossomed in these years because Germany had achieved universal literacy and its economic expansion made books affordable for most of them. Consequently, German male youth living in diverse regions and neighbourhoods for the first time shared a national culture. Though the cinema gained importance during the war, books and magazines remained the cheapest and most readily available form of entertainment and source of news and, accordingly, provided male youth with key models of manhood. A survey of youth literature from 1914 to 1918 demonstrates that during the war books and magazines encouraged violent fantasies about soldiering and national greatness.

This tough manhood in youth literature during the war was, like nationalism and militarism in schools, not entirely new. Before the war, Pan-Germanists and other nationalists had encouraged the publication and distribution of stories about war. These books contained graphic and violent stories of battles in the colonies and constructed a concept of manhood based on the nationalist soldier. The literature reflected the esteem the middle class and lower middle class held for the military, and anecdotal accounts indicate this war literature was

<sup>26</sup>For a rare reproach of war pedagogy, see M. Romanowski, 'Die Kriegsschule', *Deutsches Lehrerblatt*, 7 June 1916, in BA-Li 8034 II 6939, Bl. 125. On the Fatherland Party and schools, see Donson, 'War Pedagogy', *op. cit.*, 205–9.

<sup>27</sup>A. Cohen, 'Flowers of evil: mass media, child psychology and the struggle for Russia's future during the First World War' in J. Marten (ed.), *Children and War* (New York, 2002).

<sup>28</sup>S. Audoin-Rouzeau, 'Children and the primary schools of France' in John Horne (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge, 1997), quotation on 42; S. Audoin-Rouzeau, *La guerre des enfants 1914–1918* (Paris, 1993), 24–37; and M. Siegel, *The Moral Disarmament of France: Education, Pacifism and Patriotism, 1914–1940* (New York, 2004), 18–50.

moderately popular among middle-class male youth. The soldier undoubtedly represented, for them, a dominant masculine ideal.<sup>29</sup>

War literature before 1914 did not however achieve the level of popularity it attained during the war. In peacetime it was far less sought after than traditional fairy tales, controversial cowboy and detective tales, or adventure stories by Karl May. Furthermore, the decade before 1914 produced middle-class movements that contested the value of imperialist war literature for youth. The military was held in enormous prestige in Wilhelmine Germany, but masculinity based on self-control and fatherhood was still dominant, and this ideal clashed with the aggressive masculinity of adolescent soldiers in war literature. Reformers condemned the exaggerated stories of male youth battling aboriginals in the colonies and suggested instead that a youth should read German classics like Goethe and Schiller. Few youth books before 1914 dealt directly with war, and much youth literature printed by the Social Democrats was even overtly anti-militarist.<sup>30</sup>

The immediate effect of the *Burgfrieden* at the outbreak of war was to silence middle-class critics of nationalist war literature and to shut down the socialist anti-war presses. Both large and small publishers realized that war books sold well. Consequently, while fairy tales and stories about cowboys and detectives continued to be borrowed and republished, few were written. Most of the new titles for male youth from 1914 to 1918 were about the war, and in magazines the war became the overwhelmingly dominant topic. In a 1916 survey of the reading preferences of fifty twelve-year-old boys in a public elementary school in Munich, 46 per cent reported that war books were their favourite. The author of the study pointed out that war books also occupied a commanding position in advertisements and shop windows. War books, according to one librarian, were 'always checked out – entirely to boys'. The popularity of war books declined substantially after 1915, but war dominated as a subject even in 1918 and beyond – during the Weimar Republic, the war remained a beloved genre.<sup>31</sup>

Though these works of fiction and non-fiction occasionally depicted chivalry and honour, they more frequently depicted German soldiers who, without specific provocation, became ruthless and bloodthirsty. Crack units of shock troops fought ferociously, and schoolboys turned soldiers felt 'holy fury' and 'bitter hate' in the midst of battle. One soldier strangled a reprobate prisoner to death. Another brutally beat a treasonous Frenchman and watched him gurgle his last words on the gallows.<sup>32</sup> Typical was this description that accompanied a picture of a bayonet attack:

Like wild devils our Styrians and Tyrolers cut and jabbed, a deafening cry filled the air, and we hit with rifle butts so madly that the Serbians' skulls shattered, and

<sup>29</sup>J. Eckhardt, 'Imperialismus und Kaiserreich' in R. Wild (ed.), *Geschichte der deutschen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* (Stuttgart, 2002), 182–202; M. Christadler, *Kriegserziehung im Jugendbuch* (Frankfurt, 1979), 21–40, 68–85, 106–77; and I. Dyhrenfurth, *Geschichte des deutschen Jugendbuches* (Zürich, 1967), 144–73.

<sup>30</sup>Christadler, *op. cit.*, 25–6, 306–16.

<sup>31</sup>M. Lobsien, *Unsere Zwölfjährigen und der Krieg* (Leipzig, 1916), 7–8; H. Schübler, 'Die Schuljugend und der Krieg', *Frankfurter Schulzeitung*, xxxiv (15 June 1917), 114; R. Dinse, *Das Freizeitleben der Großstadtjugend: 5000 Jungen und Mädchen berichten*

(Berlin, 1932), 47; O. Bobertag, 'Bericht über die Ausstellung "Schule und Krieg"' in W. Stern (ed.), *Jugendliches Seelenleben und Krieg* (Leipzig, 1915), quotation on 162; and Natter, *op. cit.*, 127–42, 174–86.

<sup>32</sup>O. Riebicke, 'Sturmnacht', *Jung-Siegfried*, xviii (1 September 1918), 194–5; 'Ein Angriff', *Der gute Kamerad*, xxix (1914/15), 278, quotations; E. Georgy, 'Unsere Drei von Rodenfels' in P. Burg (ed.), *Im Kriegsgewitter* (Reutlingen, 1915), 108; and H. Werdenfels, 'Warum Joachim Bernbach das Eiserne Kreuz erhielt' in *Unsere Feldgrauen in Feindesland* (Berlin, 1915), 16.

though some good comrades bit the dust, the enemy could not withstand the vehement attack.<sup>33</sup>

Told in such coarse and graphic language, youth literature tried to stimulate the basest violent imaginations of male youth.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, all the belligerent nations had a well-developed imperialist literature for youth before 1914, and all produced war literature for boys from 1914 to 1918. British publishers, though, tried to spare young children these most violent fantasies: in England's most popular youth weekly, *The Boy's Own Paper*, the war had a limited place. Youth war literature in France, like the school curricula, portrayed the Germans as the callous brutes, in contrast to the peace-loving French soldiers. In German youth war literature, the soldiers on the western front using extreme violence were usually German.<sup>35</sup>

### THE WAR PENNY DREADFULS

Journal and archival reports about the market for war penny dreadfuls (*Kriegsschundschriften*) constitute one set of evidence that boys *internalized* this aggressive masculinity. These cheap, thirty-page paperbacks had been popular among youth before 1914, but the war quickly changed their content. Quick to cater to the changed tastes and curiosities of male youth, about a dozen publishers issued a series of penny dreadfuls that celebrated the war. In April 1916 there were no fewer than eighteen series and seventy issues. Like mainstream youth war literature, their protagonists were fiercely patriotic, hyper-masculine and fully committed to the war.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike mainstream youth war literature, which the pedagogical press warmly approved, the penny dreadfuls met bitter criticism across the political spectrum. While reviewers approved of the fact that these stories instilled enthusiasm for the war, they charged that they used 'inordinate exaggeration' and provoked excessive 'stimulation of fantasy'.<sup>37</sup> The characters had super-hero traits, a quality that reformers felt militated against real heroism:

Usually a young hero appears, the more like a boy the better, who achieves the most astonishing heroic deeds, weathers the most unbelievable dangers, and is completely responsible that our army wins this or that battle or conquers this or that fortification.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup>'Ein Bajonettangriff, *Für die Kinderwelt*, XII (1915/16), 12–15.

<sup>34</sup>For more extensive citations, see Andrew Donson, 'Models for young nationalists and militarists: German youth literature in the First World War', *German Studies Review*, XXVII (2004), 586–9.

<sup>35</sup>Audoin-Rouzeau, *La guerre*, *op. cit.*, 46–58, 84–9, 105.

<sup>36</sup>'Kriegsschundliteratur', *Pädagogische Zeitung*, XLV (20 April 1916), 218; and H. Fischer, *Ein gefährlicher Patrouillenritt* (Berlin, 1915).

<sup>37</sup>'Die Bekämpfung der Kriegsschundliteratur', *Schulblatt der Provinz Sachsen*, LV (13 December 1916), 498; and 'Neue Schundliteratur', *Jugendschriften-Warte*, XXIII (June 1916), 20. See also the review of *Unsere Feldgrauen*, *Jugendschriften-Warte*, XXIII (April 1916), 12.

<sup>38</sup>'Was sollen unsere Kinder jetzt lesen?', *Hannoversche Schulzeitung*, L (15 December 1914), 791.

Another critic censured their sensationalism:

And the urge for adventure, which arises powerfully in all our young boys due to the events of the war, is skilfully exploited and kindled by glorifying hundreds and thousands of young volunteer soldiers. Most join the army against the will or without the knowledge of their parents or guardians; they wear civilian clothing or the uniform of their military youth company, hide themselves in artillery cannons, boxes of ammunition, or automobile seats; end up in the middle of the fiercest battle; show themselves to be infinitely superior not only to soldiers in bravery, prowess, and sharp shooting but also to military leaders in acuity, resourcefulness, and strategy; and against powers ten times greater, they turn a hopeless situation into success lightning fast and are presented before at least a General, but possibly Hindenburg or the Kaiser himself, with the Iron Cross, in a neat uniform, introduced as a model soldier.<sup>39</sup>

A critic in *Jugendschriften-Warte*, the influential review of youth literature edited by Heinrich Wolgast, the rector in Hamburg who signed the statement of December 1915 condemning war pedagogy, pointed out that the penny dreadfuls had the same content and language as many hard-cover war books.<sup>40</sup> But the hard-cover war literature of the big publishers had relationships too close to the army and were too much of a commercial success to ban. By seeking an easier target, adults across the political spectrum – Social Democrats, Liberals, Catholics and Conservatives – reached a consensus and successfully lobbied the deputy commanding generals in various districts to use their powers under the Law of Siege to ban war penny dreadfuls.<sup>41</sup> The parents of working-class youths often supported the bans; those youths arrested for possession of the penny dreadfuls had quarrelled with their parents over them.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these bans and the co-operation of most of the adult world, the penny dreadfuls remained enormously popular, and male youths circumvented the controls to get hold of them. They commanded such a price on the black market that a schoolboy who worked in a paper factory in Düsseldorf regularly sifted through piles of recycled paper and culled them for resale. In response to the exhortations of one teacher in a public elementary school in Magdeburg, a single class of boys collected a thousand issues from their friends and neighbours to be recycled. When the Essen school board instituted a policy in 1918 of granting a day off school for every public elementary class that turned in a hundred issues, the city managed to collect thousands of copies within a few weeks. Despite their confiscation, tens of thousands of war penny dreadfuls remained available years after the bans. Youths traded old editions on the black market, and publishers circumvented censors by issuing new titles.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>P. Samuleit, *Wie unsere Jugend den Krieg erlebt* (Berlin, 1917), 16–17.

<sup>40</sup>'Verkappter Schund', *Jugendschriften-Warte*, xxiv (June 1917), 22–4.

<sup>41</sup>'Einheitliche Regelung des Jugendschutzes', *Arbeiter-Jugend* (Berlin), 18 November 1916, in Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin (GStA) Rep. 77 CB S Reihe S Nr. 878 Bd. 3; 'Der Krieg und die Jugendfrage', *Zentralblatt der christlichen Gewerkschaften Deutschlands*, xvi (14 February 1916), 25–6; and the letters to Evangelisches Erziehungsamt der

Inneren Mission, Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes des evangelischen Kirchenbundes Deutschland, Berlin, EEA 23.

<sup>42</sup>'Beobachtungen an jugendlichen Sträflingen über Schundlesung', *Jugendführung*, iv (March 1917), 91–2; and unknown to the police, Munich [8 July 1917], copy, Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv (BKrA) Stv.Gen.Kdo.I.b.A.K. Nr. 1000.

<sup>43</sup>Papierfabrik Hermes & Co. to Stadtschulrat, Düsseldorf, 16 June 1916, and letter to Himburg, director, 17 June 1916, StdDüss III 1705, Bl. 26;

The demand for war penny dreadfuls demonstrated that a set of male youths went to great efforts to procure a masculine fantasy about the war that celebrated its violence. Furthermore, the attraction of war penny dreadfuls over other war literature was that they glorified and exaggerated the militarism and nationalism of young volunteers. Because most adults wanted them banned, their continued popularity indicates that the values of nationalist male youth in the First World War diverged from the general consensus in the adult world. The war in this way produced a male youth culture whose fascination with violence and masculine prowess differed from the home front population as a whole.

### THE WAR COMPOSITIONS OF SCHOOLBOYS

A second set of evidence – personal compositions of schoolchildren (*Schulaufsätze*) – suggests another process through which male youths internalized the aggressive masculinity and violent fantasies in war pedagogy and youth war literature. These compositions, all about the war, were written primarily in 1915, when war pedagogy was at its height. Most were published in various collections to demonstrate the creative ways in which teachers brought the war into the classroom and the positive effect that their innovations had on schoolchildren.<sup>44</sup>

Most of these compositions fulfilled the reform movement's criteria of being 'free' (*frei*) – in the jargon of the times, that meant the teacher allowed the pupil to choose the topic and structure the content on his own. This quality distinguished these compositions from the dominant type of school composition before the war – the 'fixed' (*gebundene*) composition, where the teacher selected the topic and outlined the structure and content. Reformers before the war felt that the 'fixed' composition suffocated pupils' creativity, self-expression and critical thinking, but more traditional teachers were afraid 'free' compositions would mitigate their authority. Sceptical of the cognitive powers of children, they also charged that free compositions were dull. Indeed, the topics of free compositions before 1914 drew primarily upon the mundane themes of everyday life – weather, animals, siblings, furniture, laundry, Santa Claus, dolls, gardens and friendships.<sup>45</sup> To my knowledge, no teachers had their pupils write 'freely' on political topics before 1914. Paragraph 17 of the Reich Law of Association prohibited exposing minors to political themes like colonialism, navalism or social democracy, and those who favoured 'free' compositions before the war – reformers on the left – did not place nationalism and militarism high on their agenda.

'Schundliteratur in Magdeburger Schulen', *Schulblatt der Provinz Sachsen*, LVI (21 February 1917), 74–5; and Walter Thielemann, 'Mittel und Wege zur Bekämpfung der Kriegsschundliteratur', *Katholische Zeitschrift für Erziehung und Unterricht*, LXVII (1918), 55; and Donson, 'German youth literature', *op. cit.*, 591–2.

<sup>44</sup>Collections of compositions whose editors were positive about the war included O. Karstädt (ed.), *Kinderaug und Kinderaufsatz im Weltkriege* (Osterwieck, 1916); A. Fröhlich (ed.), *Aus eiserner Zeit* (Leipzig, 1915); M. Reiniger (ed.), *150 Schülerkriegsaufsätze* (Langensalza, 1915); H. Floerke (ed.), *Die Kinder und der Krieg* (München, 1915); M. Schach (ed.), *Das Kind und der Krieg* (Berlin, 1916); H. Reich (ed.), *Das Buch Michael*, 2nd edn (Berlin,

1918); and various articles in the *Schulzeitungen* (1915–18). The Breslau social scientists who excerpted schoolchildren's compositions in W. Stern (ed.), *Jugendliches Seelenleben und Krieg* (Leipzig, 1915), were sceptical of war pedagogy.

<sup>45</sup>A. Jensen and W. Lamszus, *Unser Schulaufsatz, ein verkappter Schundliterat* (Hamburg, 1910), 13; K. Fahn, *Der Wandel des Aufsatzbegriffes der deutschen Volksschule von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart* (München, 1971), 54–5; G. Gramberg, 'Berliner Aufsatzunterricht', *Pädagogische Zeitung*, XLI (18 January 1912), 35–6; and K. Linke, *Der freie Aufsatz auf der Unterstufe, Mittelstufe, und Oberstufe* (Braunschweig, 1916), 5–9, 168–210.

During the war, however, school inspectors and authors in the pedagogical press exhorted teachers to have their pupils write 'free' compositions about the war. They argued that schoolchildren's experiences and fantasies now had value because the war exposed them to more lofty concepts like heroism, sacrifice, discipline and national loyalty. Writing 'freely' about the war would also leave a positive impression on pupils' memories. The content of 'free' compositions after 1914 accordingly became political for three reasons. First, many conservative teachers and administrators awakened to the possibility of using reform methods like 'free' compositions to cultivate nationalism and militarism. Second, progressive teachers defended against the charge that 'free' compositions were dull by pointing to the creative and positive ways in which they helped psychologically mobilize schoolchildren for the war. Third, because teachers and administrators generally believed that the war had eliminated conflict and unified Germany, they did not consider war compositions to be political. Indeed, under the *Burgfrieden*, the war compositions generated almost no acrimony from the political left.<sup>46</sup>

The 'free' compositions of schoolchildren published during the war covered a great variety of themes, including some that we might today read as subtly anti-war. However, a majority of the 327 compositions written by males that I have located reproduced the patriotic myths of the 'Spirit of 1914' and asserted a firm commitment to the war. These compositions were also a stage on which boys fantasized graphically about combat, and their framing in the first person suggests that teachers under war pedagogy encouraged or tacitly approved of their pupils' identification with the destruction of enemy property and life. Of the compositions my research located, over one-fifth indulged in violent fantasies like this one:

If I were 18 years old, I would join the infantry. . . I would most like assault attacks. You can call out firm hurrahs during attacks. I would plunge into everything that came in my way with my bayonet.<sup>47</sup>

Pupils did not spare gruesome details of killing:

I only wish that I could be a soldier. Then I would like to stand across from the English, whose skulls I would smash with my rifle butt so that they would lose their hearing and sight.<sup>48</sup>

One pupil fantasized in fiction about encountering an enemy patrol:

Two French came near to me; with my sword I split the skull of the first. The other, who was already wounded, begged me for mercy.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Verfügung der Schulabteilung der Regierung Stettin', 23 February 1915, as reprinted in Saul, 'Schatten des Krieges', *op. cit.*, 127–8; W. Dackweiler, 'Der große Weltkrieg im Dienst unseres Aufsatzes', *Naussische Schulzeitung*, XIII (15 April 1915), 58–9; 'Aus dem Kriegsschuljahre 1914/1915 der Volksschule Lörrach', *Badische Schulzeitung*, LIII (5 June 1915), 179; Blanckenhorn, 'Lehrplan und

Krieg', *Der Volksschullehrer*, IX (26 August 1915), 405; and Engel, *op. cit.*, 27–8.

<sup>47</sup>Müller, 'Ich stieße alles nieder!' in Karstädt (ed.), *op. cit.*, 53.

<sup>48</sup>Untitled, in Stern (ed.), *op. cit.*, 91.

<sup>49</sup>'Ein Feldbrief aus dem Jahre 1813' in Fröhlich (ed.), *op. cit.*, 116–19.

Like the war penny dreadfuls, these youths' fantasies involved prowess, superhuman strength, fearlessness and wanton violence. After reading them, Alfred Mann, the critical social scientist who collected compositions with Professor William Stern in Breslau, believed the war had caused in male youth 'an emotional infection'. A teacher who read the same compositions agreed they were 'excessive in their rage'.<sup>50</sup>

### MALE YOUTHS' DEVIANT IMITATION OF SOLDIERS

The last set of evidence suggesting an internalization of the war's violence – a series of anecdotes in the press, police reports and school disciplinary protocols – indicates that male youths pined to achieve the heroism and status of the soldier and reproduced it in their play and independent activity. This evidence illuminates how nationalist male youth identified strongly with the soldier and expressed the violence of the war in street behaviour that often alarmed the adult world.

According to reports in newspapers and the pedagogical press, German boys regularly took a cue from characters in youth war fiction and absconded to the front to see the war first hand. Early Nazis described having this experience in their autobiographies.<sup>51</sup> Many boys wore the coloured insignia of their *Gymnasien* caps on the buttonholes of their collars, imitating the symbols of military rank. At other times they wore the real medals and epaulettes of officers that they had acquired on the black market, a practice in violation of the criminal code. Seeing nothing wrong with the practice, the Prussian school authorities rejected proposals to ban it.<sup>52</sup>

An extraordinary example of a boy's masculine fantasy was the escapade of a 'bright and talented' secondary schoolboy (*Gymnasiast*), alias Klaus. When the war broke out Klaus, a member of the Navy School League, tried to enlist but was rejected because he was just fifteen. Nevertheless, he told his friends at school that he had been accepted as a telegraphist in the navy and was undertaking training. Later, he also told them he had been wounded and received the Iron Cross in the battle of Helgoland. Klaus lied that his heroics in the battle had earned him a promotion to non-commissioned officer, documenting the promotion with a forged police confirmation, a telegram falsified on his own machine and a photograph stamped with his toy seal. Further establishing his identity as a sailor, Klaus wore a real uniform with the epaulettes and insignia of his contrived rank. He also forged a service book, in which he fabricated his casualties, battles, promotions and permission to remain on the home front for twenty-five weeks – this was why, he told his friends, he remained at school. His school disciplined him after he tried to go to the front, and a postal employee noticed he had falsified a stamp.<sup>53</sup>

More violent than these imitations of soldiers were the war games acted out on the street. In the first ten months of the war, teachers and the press generally lauded this informal war play. The compositions of schoolboys, for example, described an elaborate assortment of props, roles and regalia: patrols, massive graves for the dead, paper helmets with feathers, uniforms, cavalry

<sup>50</sup>Stern (ed.), *op. cit.*, 91; and E. Hylla, 'Krieg und jugendliches Seelenleben', *Pädagogische Zeitung*, XLIV (26 August 1915), 407.

<sup>51</sup>F. von Liszt, 'Der Krieg und die Kriminalität der Jugendlichen', *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Strafrechtswissenschaft*, XXXVII (1916), 500–5; and No. 408, box 6, TAC-HIA.

<sup>52</sup>Letters from teachers to the police dated 5 June 1915 and 11 June 1916, and internal memo, police, 27 June 1916, in Landesarchiv Brandenburg (LABr) Rep. 34 Berlin I Nr. 921.

<sup>53</sup>Report dated 8 September 1915, GStA Rep. 76 VI Sec. XIV Berlin z: 63, Bl. 70ff.

with lances, tents, epaulettes, swords, iron crosses, pails for cannons, barbed wire, battery walls, trenches, sketches of battlefields, paper arrows emblazoned with black crosses for German airplanes, and sometimes over 150 boy soldiers and girl Red Cross nurses, who carried bandages and administered cherry juice for medicine.<sup>54</sup> 'Our militarism', one author wrote approvingly, 'is now being transmitted unnoticed to our youths'.<sup>55</sup>

But the roughness and excessiveness of the war games after the first months of the war disconcerted the public. A woman in Munich was shocked, for example, to see flocks of boys, armed with guns, marching down the street. Criminologists confirmed that guns were, in fact, frequent objects of theft and caused injury during the war games.<sup>56</sup> A youth worker (*Jugendpfleger*) outlined the public's concerns:

All the horrible depictions of the war and pictures from battles awakened a desire for adventure and led to a reckless use of weapons in soldier play and fostered a tendency toward cruelty.<sup>57</sup>

Newspaper reporters, state bureaucrats and individual citizens made known their considerable anxiety that the war games on the street sometimes lapsed into battles over neighbourhood territories and resulted in serious injuries.<sup>58</sup>

The spirit of these war games obviously differed from the more serious engagement in political violence in paramilitary groups after 1918. Furthermore, boys have played war across time and place without becoming fascists. But, according to the press, adults felt the war play of these boys was reaching alarming proportions. Amplifying their concerns was the observation that the conscription of close to two-thirds of men aged 18–45 left the home front bereft of male authority. In particular, the absence of the youngest and most vigorous male teachers, policemen and social workers diminished control over rough war play. According to the remaining teachers, the police and social workers, teenage boys in families with a father in the army resisted the authority of their mothers and asserted an aggressive and precocious masculinity (*Großmannssucht*).<sup>59</sup> This evidence suggests that, like the procurement of war penny dreadfuls, war play created a male youth culture, independent of adults, that nourished violent male fantasies about war and soldiering. In disregarding the public's concern for order, these boys grew accustomed to expressing their male fantasies to the point of challenging existing authority. As the autobiographies collected by Theodore Abel demonstrate, this rejection of existing authority characterized the early Nazis born from 1900 to 1908 and stood

<sup>54</sup>Stern (ed.), *op. cit.*, 61, 64, 68 and 120.

<sup>55</sup>Samuleit, *op. cit.*, 34–5.

<sup>56</sup>Letter to School Deputation, 15 December 1914, Stadtarchiv München Schulamt Nr. 2782; 'Die Kinder und der Krieg', *Düsseldorfer Volkszeitung*, 6 July 1917, in StdDüss III 1708, Bl. 111; and Köhne, 'Die Jugendlichen und der Krieg', *Deutscher Strafrechts-Zeitung*, III (1916), 14.

<sup>57</sup>H. Wilke, 'Welche besondere Aufgabe erwachsen der Jugendpflegearbeit in der Kriegszeit' in H. Wilke and H. Dieckmann (eds), *Über Jugendpflege, Familien- und Volksabende in der Kriegszeit* (Cöthen-Anhalt, 1917), 6.

<sup>58</sup>Major Keim, 31 May 1915, StdDüss III 1702, Bl. 188–9; report of the district youth worker in Dillkreis, 29 December 1918, Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv 405 Nr. 3839, Bl. 241–42; and 'Schülerschlachten als Nachspiel vor dem Jugendgericht', *Vorwärts*, 17 March 1915.

<sup>59</sup>Bremer, 'Einfluß des Krieges auf die Lebensführung der Jugendlichen', *Jugendführung*, IV (January 1917), 3; and 'Die näheren Ursachen für die Kriminalität der Jugendlichen in Hannover', *Hannoverscher Courier*, 26 July 1916, NHAH Hann. 180 Hannover Nr. 657, Bl. 92.



in contrast to a cohort just a few years older that had served in the army and internalized its discipline. Numerous early Nazis traced their route to the party from being an enthusiastic participant in these war games during the war to joining paramilitary groups after 1918.<sup>60</sup>

### MILITARY YOUTH COMPANIES

Further strengthening identity with the soldier was the great expansion during the war of voluntary programmes of pre-military training. Militarist youth organizations existed before the war, but historians have somewhat overstated their popularity and influence. The Young Germany League (*Jungdeutschlandbund*), for example, was founded in 1911 and figured centrally in the interpretation that the Wilhelmine state was militarist, authoritarian and nationalist. Indeed, the army administered it with the goal of raising youths to be 'citizens loyal to the king and proud of the Fatherland'. But the League, the single largest youth organization in the world at the time, had to amalgamate independent organizations to reach its total membership of 750,000 youth. Some of these organizations were shooting and pre-military training clubs, and many like the Boy Scouts (*Pfadfinder*) were imperialist and wore uniforms. Most, though, were middle-class sport and recreational associations, and the Prussian minister of education, August von Trott zu Solz, rejected demands that these organizations offered pre-military training. While most of the organizations in the Young Germany League before the war were patriotic, just a handful could be described as militarist.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, during the war, almost all middle-class recreation and sports associations for male youth offered pre-military training. By the end of August 1914, youth workers (*Jugendpfleger*) in nationalist hotbeds like the towns, villages and small cities in the province of Hanover quickly organized half or more of all male sixteen and seventeen year olds (the ages eligible) into military youth companies (*Jugendwehren*, *Jugendkompagnien*, *militärische Jugendvorbereitung*, etc.). Even in Prussian Catholic cities, participation was high in the first months of the war.<sup>62</sup>

Though limited to four hours weekly, the military drills and manoeuvres gave the young male participants the opportunity to socialize with other militarists and nationalists. Because the liberal and conservative press took a heightened interest in the reliability of these male youth – these boys were the nation's future defenders – it praised the participants effusively.<sup>63</sup> In small cities, their mock battles – elaborate war games of strategy and endurance (*Geländespiele*) – attracted crowds of onlookers and placed the participants at the centre of a public spectacle. According to one newspaper, for example, thousands in Hanover, including municipal and Prussian dignitaries, watched a parade in September 1915 of about twenty youth companies. The march ended with the companies attacking each other, firing toy guns and

<sup>60</sup>Merkel, *op. cit.*, 150–2; and no. 296, box 5, and no. 534, box 7, TAC-HIA.

<sup>61</sup>H. Muth, 'Jugendpflege und Politik: Zur Jugend- und Innenpolitik des Kaiserreichs', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, xii (1961), 597–619, quotation on 597; and K. Saul, 'Der Kampf um die Jugend zwischen Volksschule und Kaserne: Ein Beitrag zur "Jugendpflege" im Wilhelmschen Reich 1890–1914', *Militärhistorische Mitteilung*, ix (1971), 97–160.

<sup>62</sup>'Die militärische Vorbereitung für den Heeresdienst', Düsseldorf, 30 September 1914, StdDüss III 2177, Bl. 226–28; and report of the deputy commanding general (DCG), Hannover, 16 August 1915, NHAH Hann. 122a Nr. 4490, Bl. 274.

<sup>63</sup>See, for example, 'Die Schlacht der Pfadfinder', *Vossische Zeitung*, 25 January 1915.

storming trenches. The spectacles of these mock battles were impressive enough that a non-military specialist in Berlin filmed them.<sup>64</sup>

In simulating a sanitized war of movement, the companies reinforced the idea that war was a sociable activity and that aggressiveness and a willingness to sacrifice life for the nation were positive traits. The songs of the companies, such as 'German Army, You Fountain of Youth', likewise invoked language of domination and superiority:

The German army's powerful brawn,  
 England's hoards of false mercenaries  
 And all the foreign people!  
 All have to bow to German strength and German courage  
 And out of the blood of troops  
 You will bring us good freedom.<sup>65</sup>

Boys reproduced these themes in their school compositions: one claimed, for example, that the war games of 'swarming' hills and attacking the 'enemy' cultivated in him 'patriotic spirit'. 'If our Kaiser needs us and should call us to the flag', he wrote, 'then we want to rush joyously to arms and risk our lives for him and our Fatherland'.<sup>66</sup> Pre-military training produced a sense of community and identity by distributing armbands and marching flags, individualized for each company. Though the vast majority of these youth companies disbanded in 1918, militarist youth could find symbolic continuity in the similar insignia used by post-war paramilitary organizations.<sup>67</sup>

Historians have somewhat exaggerated the significance of military youth companies in cultivating nationalism and militarism. Though fifteen year olds eager to demonstrate their manhood and eighteen year olds not yet conscripted sometimes practised with the companies, pre-military training was, with some exceptions, officially voluntary and open to sixteen and seventeen year olds only. Membership in the companies steadily declined after the winter of 1914 because of the intensification of youth wage work, the conscription of companies' charismatic leaders and the growing rejection of the war. Some joined not because they were nationalist and militarist but because the companies served hot lunches or, in certain districts, guaranteed that the participants would be the last in their birth cohort to be conscripted or would have a choice of regiments when they were conscripted. Despite these benefits, most working-class participation in industrial cities like Berlin ended altogether by early 1915.<sup>68</sup>

Still, the primary motivation for joining was to play soldier and demonstrate a commitment to the war and the nation. When the companies became more militarist, their popularity

<sup>64</sup>'Die Parade der Jugendlichen', *Hannoversches Tageblatt*, 13 September 1915, in Stadtarchiv Hannover (StHan) HR 16 Nr. 550; 'Militärische Jugendvorbereitung', *Vossische Zeitung*, 16 November 1914. For descriptions of tactics in the mock battles, see A. Huth, *Vom Kriegsspiel der Jugend* (Leipzig, 1916).

<sup>65</sup>*Lieder für die Frankfurter Jungmannschaften* (Frankfurt a.M., 1915), 7.

<sup>66</sup>H. W., 'Unsere Jugendkompagnie' in Reich (ed.), *op. cit.*, 257.

<sup>67</sup>See the hundreds of contracts for armbands in LABr, Pr. Br. Rep. 2a Regierung Potsdam II Gen. Nr., 1588–90, 1592–95.

<sup>68</sup>Saul, 'Schatten des Krieges', *op. cit.*; 'Die Münsterfahr unserer Jugendkompagnie' [*Hannoversches Tageblatt*], 27 April 1915, in StHan HR 16 Nr. 550; report of the DCG, Hannover, 14 July 1915, NHAH Hann. 122a Nr. 4490, Bl. 271; and Magistrate, Berlin, 3 March 1915, GStA Rep. 120 E I Spez. Fach I Nr. 42 Bd. 4.

increased. Membership increased, for example, in the few areas that overrode the objections of the socialists and the progressives to letting youths use real guns. Military authorities supervising the programmes felt that participation would have increased everywhere if all companies had permitted guns.<sup>69</sup> Despite the general decline, the military youth companies remained popular throughout the war among the secondary schoolboys of the urban middle class and in small towns or rural areas that lacked well-organized socialist or Catholic youth associations. In December 1916, at the height of the Turnip Winter, the vast majority of eligible secondary schoolboys in the province Hanover and the duchies of Oldenburg and Braunschweig were practising regularly with companies, for example. As late as February 1917, one newspaper estimated that the district of the 9th Army Corps (Hamburg) had 20,000 members in youth companies and 600 leaders. Despite the extreme deprivation during the Turnip Winter – when even many urban middle-class youth lacked adequate food and footwear – a dedicated group of male youths volunteered to march for four hours per week. In the province of Hanover during the summer of 1918, a core of participants – as many as one-fifth of the eligible sixteen and seventeen year olds – were marching and drilling in the companies.<sup>70</sup>

For these male youth, the companies reinforced an identity with the soldier and isolated them in their militarism and nationalism from the working class. Furthermore, whatever the motivation for joining a military youth company, the consequences of joining were real. Pre-military training confirmed the patriotism of the rural, small-town and middle-class participants and accentuated the lack of it in working youths. Not surprisingly, one early Nazi who participated in the complicated war games (*Geländespiele*) of pre-military training recalled his anger at a republican policeman who he claimed betrayed the army during the 1918/19 revolution by confiscating his toy guns and swords at the age of fourteen. When the youth turned sixteen, he began marching with the swastika and singing the fight song of the paramilitary Erhardt Brigade.<sup>71</sup>

### VOLUNTARY PATRIOTIC LABOUR

Participation in large programmes later in the war involving patriotic voluntary labour was another way that nationalist middle-class male youth learned that the working class were betraying the nation. In the first year of the war, this voluntary labour was one of the great achievements of mobilization. Teachers in many cities organized as many as half of all schoolchildren to sell war bonds, collect recyclables, and work in agriculture and offices. Going door to door asking for money or material for the war was a reminder to Germans, young and old, rich and poor, that schoolchildren were working in the defence of their nation and were enthusiastic to contribute to the production of war. The praise for these

<sup>69</sup>'Pfälzische Jungmannschaftspost Nr. 2. Zielen und Schießen!', *Der Rheinpfälzer*, 2 January 1915, in GStA Rep. 77 Tit. 924 Nr. 8 Bd. 2; 'Ausbildung der Jugend-Kompagnien mit der Schusswaffe', 25 June 1915, StHan HR. 16 Nr. 550; and War Ministry, Berlin, 15 June 1915, copy, NHAH Hann. 122a Nr. 4490, Bl. 263.

<sup>70</sup>'Militärische Vorbereitung der Jugend', *Hamburger Nachrichten*, 8 February 1917, in StHam. 111-12 Senat – Kriegsakten, A II q 6; and reports of the DCG, Hannover, 24 March 1916, 22 December 1916, 12 June 1917 and 10 May 1918, NHAH Hann. 122a Nr. 4490, Bl. 299, 345, 401, 445.

<sup>71</sup>No. 29, box 1, TAC-HIA.

schoolchildren was effusive in the pedagogical, liberal and conservative presses for the duration of the war. Volunteering meant choosing to work for and advertise Germany's belligerent policy, and it became a mark of fulfilling national civic duty. Photographic evidence and reports by bureaucrats and the press attested that teachers chalked up on the blackboard for display amounts collected, offering an image to the public that the money collected by individual pupils and school classes was symbolic of their commitment to the nation and its war.<sup>72</sup>

While most teachers continued until the end of the war to mobilize their pupils to collect recyclables and sell and advertise war bonds, the number of schoolchildren who participated in the drives steadily decreased. Money to buy war bonds was lacking in poorer districts, and the domestic labour demands of households – the hours needed to stand in line, forage for food and make do with substandard consumer items – increased. Consequently, the patriotic distinctions of the war bond and recycling drives became more and more limited to secondary schoolchildren in the urban middle class and elementary schoolchildren from families who did not need income from their children's labour. This situation – the middle class volunteering for the war and the urban working class putatively doing nothing for it – introduced conditions that, like pre-military training, linked social class to patriotism. Reinforcing this perception, the liberal and conservative presses charged that working youths in the war industries spent their high wages on tobacco and the cinema and increasingly participated in anti-war strikes.<sup>73</sup>

The programmes that organized youths in large agricultural work projects linked social class and patriotism as well. After the Auxiliary Service Law in December 1916 required all unemployed males aged seventeen and older to provide their labour to the War Office, the state ministries of education began to organize agricultural and industrial commandos called *Jungmänner* (young men). In practice, the *Jungmänner* were patriotic voluntary labourers: almost exclusively secondary schoolboys, they had the option of leaving school and earning wages instead of offering their labour gratuitously. Not surprisingly, in the last years of the war, these boys were still receiving a strong dose of war pedagogy, in contrast to elementary schoolchildren in cities. Altogether, the War Office put uniforms on the 75,000 mostly middle-class *Jungmänner* and dispersed them into the countryside to work for weeks or months at a time.<sup>74</sup> Instead of being hailed as heroes solving the food crisis, these middle-class boys were derided by farmers, who found them arrogant and physically weak and turned many of them away, despite the severe shortage of labour in agriculture. Problems of provisioning plagued the *Jungmänner*. Many went without adequate food and slept on straw in cramped, makeshift barracks. In the spring and summer of 1917, low morale and poor leadership led individuals and some entire commandos to defect, and the whole programme was thrown into grave doubt.<sup>75</sup> But despite the problems plaguing the organizations of *Jungmänner*, teenage

<sup>72</sup>F. Führen, *Lehrer im Krieg* (Leipzig, 1936), fig. 13. For more citations, see Donson, 'War Pedagogy', *op. cit.*, 197–8.

<sup>73</sup>See n. 4.

<sup>74</sup>Graff, *Der Kriegsemdienst des Freiwilligen Regiments Düsseldorf in der Provinz Schleswig-Holstein im Sommer 1915* and the report, 'Aus dem Regierungsbezirke Düsseldorf für die Kriegsernte

1916 entsandten Erntekommandos', both in GStA Rep. 76 VI Sec. I Gen. z: 242a Bd. I; and the summary of reports by principals of secondary schools in Bavaria, 'Jungmänner in der Landwirtschaft', 2 February 1918, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Mk Nr. 20585.

<sup>75</sup>See the reports dated 3 July 1917, 2 April 1917, 20 April 1917 and 14 May 1917 in GStA

boys later recalled their pride at having contributed to the nation and its war. They resented the farmers who had rejected them.<sup>76</sup>

### THE SEARCH FOR ENEMIES IN THE HUMILIATION OF DEFEAT

Because of their participation in military training and patriotic voluntary labour, many middle-class male youth saw a contrast between their families, whom the war disproportionately impoverished, and those of young urban workers who earned high wages and threatened to stop the war through strikes. The polarization paralleled the sharply opposing political factions among adults more generally: the Peace Resolution of July 1917 – signed by a fragmenting Progressive Party losing its constituency, with the Centre and Social Democratic Parties representing the urban working classes – provoked hundreds of thousands in the middle classes to back the newly founded Fatherland Party, whose reckless demands for territory at any cost laid the foundation for German fascism. In November 1918, nationalist male youth believed that Germany had lost the war because the working class selfishly shirked its patriotic duties and sought a negotiated peace. After years of war pedagogy, heroic war literature, pre-military training and patriotic voluntary labour, these youth could not comprehend defeat. They had studied and eagerly absorbed the string of victories on the eastern front that resulted in the favourable treaty at Brest-Litovsk in January 1918. In the spring of 1918, the army seemed to have broken the stalemate as it advanced on Paris. These events confirmed their commitment to the total military victory that their schooling had nurtured: of the ten school compositions mentioning peace that I located, only one called for a negotiated peace; the other nine authors mentioning peace wanted an end to the war by complete annihilation of the enemy's forces (*Siegfrieden*).<sup>77</sup> This faith in the ultimate victory made the collapse of the western front in the summer of 1918 unreal to these boys. They had believed that their patriotism and ferocity, like those of their imagined heroic soldiers, guaranteed Germany's victory in the war. The events of November 1918 consequently stoked their hatred of the socialists, who they believed had robbed Germany of the victory by seeking a cowardly negotiated peace. Working-class opposition to the war legitimated for them the stab-in-the-back legend. To them, the workers and socialists were the same internationalists who before 1914 had never recognized or supported the Fatherland. Research on the middle-class youth movements in particular confirms these developments.<sup>78</sup>

The political transformation of middle-class secondary schoolboys at the end of the war illustrates this point as well. With the front collapsing, five boys in the Helmholtz *Realgymnasium* in Berlin-Schöneberg approached their principal with a leaflet they had written by hand and asked for permission to publish and distribute it in school. Ashamed of the

Rep. 76 VI Sec. I Gen. z: 242a Bd. I; and the report of the War Office, 26 September 1917, and 'Getäuschte Hoffnungen', *Tägliche Rundschau*, 14 October 1917, both in LABr Pr. Br. Rep. 34 Berlin I Nr. 1296.

<sup>76</sup>R. Pörtner (ed.), *Kindheit im Kaiserreich* (Düsseldorf, 1987), 196–7.

<sup>77</sup>See, for example, 'Wie wir Lembergs Eroberung in der Klasse feierten' in Stern (ed.), *op. cit.*,

177–8. On the doctrine of the *Siegfrieden*, see I. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, 2005), 160–1, 291.

<sup>78</sup>W. Laquer, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (London, 1962), 101–9; and G. Fiedler, *Jugend im Krieg: Bürgerliche Jugendbewegung, Erster Weltkrieg und sozialer Wandel 1914–1923* (Köln, 1989), 116–26.

impending defeat and threatening chaos, they called for all Germans born in 1901 and 1902 to heed the 'Spirit of 1914' and volunteer to bleed and die for the Fatherland: 'We want to remain free like our fathers; better death than to live in slavery'.<sup>79</sup> A similar desperation in November 1918 overcame fifteen-year-old Werner Best, later the chief legal advisor to the *Gestapo*. In his memoirs he claimed he was politicized by diligently following the events of the war, practising regularly in a military youth company and giving a lecture in school about war guilt. When the front collapsed, he felt responsible for the moral and political rebirth of Germany. Though engagement with politicians was illegal for minors, he acquired brochures of the Pan-Germanists and met their chief propagandist, Heinrich Claß. His memoirs claimed that his friends and classmates shared his views.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, in his diary the sixteen-year-old Heinrich Himmler denounced rural southern Bavarians for wanting peace and expressed a burning desire to join the war. At age eighteen he was mortified at the unexpected defeat.<sup>81</sup> Martin Matthiessen, born in 1901 and later an SS general, also recalled the joy he took in patriotic voluntary labour and his military youth company during the war. He remembered his teacher who followed the principles of war pedagogy and discarded 'the usual distance between teacher and pupils'.<sup>82</sup> Ernst von Salomon's autobiographically inspired account of a youth born in 1901 who joined the *Freikorps* after 1918 resonated with the same themes:

Every appeal to patriotism found an echo in him. Naturally he regretted he was too young to take part in the events which were described to him as the 'Great Experience'. The sight of wounded soldiers, of black-veiled widows, the casualty lists in the newspapers, the reports from the front, the accounts of gains and losses – all these things exercised a stronger influence on him than the watery soup dished up each day, and even made him wish that the war would last long enough for him to take part in it himself. . . . [He] had a rabidly patriotic teacher and immediately on being appealed to by him reported for duty [for the *Freikorps*].<sup>83</sup>

Von Salomon himself 'had only one wish: that the war would last long enough for us to take part in it'.<sup>84</sup>

My survey of the autobiographies in the Abel collection of early Nazis born 1900 to 1908 suggests that, for almost all of these male youths, defeat and revolution in November 1918 thwarted their nationalist and militarist dreams and inflamed their hatred of socialist 'traitors'. Even the 40 per cent of the autobiographers who were themselves working class upheld this belief in betrayal. Though these working youths mostly accepted progressive social policy,

<sup>79</sup>Director, Helmholtz-Realgymnasium, Berlin-Schöneberg, 1 November 1918, LABr Pr. Br. Rep. 34 Berlin I Nr. 921.

<sup>80</sup>U. Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903–1989* (Bonn, 1996), 45–8.

<sup>81</sup>W. Angress and B. Smith, 'Diaries of Heinrich Himmler's early years', *Journal of Modern History*, xxxi (1959), 207; R. Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York, 1991), 12; and P. Padfield, *Himmler: Reichsführer-SS* (London, 1990), 27–31.

<sup>82</sup>M. Matthiessen, *Erinnerungen* (Meldorf, 1980), 37.

<sup>83</sup>E. von Salomon, *The Captive Widow*, trans. J. Kirkump (London, 1961), 10, 17. On the desire to volunteer before the war ended, see also the memoirs of T. Sonnemann (b. 1900) and F. Thedieck (b. 1900) in Pörtner (ed.), *op. cit.*, 128–30, 147.

<sup>84</sup>M. J. Klein, *Ernst von Salomon: Eine politische Biographie* (Limburg a.d. Lahn, 1994), 38.

they fulminated against the pacifism among their socialist-influenced working-class peers who had scorned them during the war for training in military youth companies.<sup>85</sup> A key cause of their anger was their dashed hope of volunteering in the army: most of those born later than 1900 saw limited action in combat, if any. Denied this opportunity to demonstrate their manhood on the front, they sought a continuation of the war at home in paramilitary organizations. For example, an eighteen-year-old Berliner who pursued an apprenticeship in sales remembered being enthusiastic about the war and entering a military youth company in 1915. In September 1918 he arrived in Serreville, France, and in November, before he saw any real action on the front, was shocked by the revolution. Returning to Berlin, he joined a paramilitary group and fought the Spartacists. Another early Nazi remembered playing games before 1918 that resulted in 'bloody heads' and police intervention; a civilian the entire war, he volunteered during the revolution at age eighteen in a militia and fought the communists.<sup>86</sup> In November 1918, a sixteen-and-a-half-year-old Berliner who made shells on a lathe suggested to the chair of the local patriotic society that citizens be armed to suppress the socialist revolt. When they held a meeting and no one showed up, he claimed, he 'first learned to hate the spirit of the November betrayal'. Another seventeen year old remembered 'victories' and saw 'how our honest soldiers with valour held out against despair and an entire world of enemies'. He then cursed the 'Marxists' who 'exploited the deprivation at home for criminal goals' and ended the war before the decisive military victory.<sup>87</sup>

The experience of male youth during the First World War can by no means *alone* explain the rise of German fascism. Men born 1900 to 1908 often became fascists for the same reasons as those born earlier or later – anger at the republic for neglecting their economic woes, signing of the Versailles Treaty, and failing to maintain law and order are some of many possible examples. Furthermore, many early Nazis born 1900 to 1908 blamed Jews as well as socialists for the lost war, but there is little evidence that these men had *age-specific war experiences* that turned them into anti-Semites; their anti-Semitism originated most probably in frustrations they shared with Germans regardless of age. There are, however, a set of age-specific explanations for why so many youth were attracted to nationalist and militarist groups and had a political awakening in November 1918: during the war they had experienced war pedagogy, fantasized about soldiers described in war literature, made sacrifices in patriotic voluntary labour and military youth companies, believed that the working class shirked patriotic duties, and then were denied their great wish to fight for Germany's glory on the front. Fervid nationalists during the war, they saw their unwavering belief in the German army's superiority crushed by defeat and revolution. Their reaction was to cry, rage and seek blame. Historians need to consider that their entry into nationalist paramilitary groups and the Nazi Party after 1918 developed out of frustration with having sacrificed and trained to defend Germany without having a chance to demonstrate their patriotism and manhood on the front.

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<sup>85</sup>No. 120, box 2, TAC-HIA. See also nos 183, 197, box 3.

<sup>86</sup>Nos 103 and 62, box 2, TAC-HIA.

<sup>87</sup>No. 101, box 2; no. 211, box 3; and no. 48 (quotation), box 1, TAC-HIA.

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