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978-0-521-88101-2 - Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918

Alexander Watson

Excerpt

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## Introduction

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Victory will go to him who has the best nerves.

*Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg, 1916<sup>1</sup>*

Although usually remembered as a conflict of attrition or material, the First World War was, above all, a contest of endurance. Nowhere was this truer than on the Western Front where, for the four years following August 1914, the French, Belgian and British armies, later joined by the Americans, fought the German army in some of the most costly battles in history. The conflict's long duration, unprecedented bloodiness and particularly horrendous and indecisive 'trench warfare' placed extreme strain on individuals, armies and nations. Yet it was only in the second half of 1918, after enduring months of inconclusive static combat followed by a dramatic offensive which almost broke through Entente lines, that the overstrained German war effort finally collapsed. The rapid decline in combat motivation at the front and the outbreak of revolution at home indicated clearly that Hindenburg's soldiers, army and nation had reached the end of their mental resources.

Historians have adopted a number of approaches to account for the longevity and outcome of the war. Some, such as Gerald Feldman and Avner Offer, have focused on the Central Powers' material shortages and inefficiencies in order to explain the eventual collapse of their armies and economies.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars, most notably Paddy Griffith, Tim Travers, Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, have examined the Allied success in breaking the German line at the end of the war, producing detailed studies of the development of strategy, tactics and technology

<sup>1</sup> Hindenburg, quoted in M. Hirschfeld, *Deutsche Kriegsschriften*. Part 20: *Kriegspsychologisches* (Bonn: A. Marcus & E. Webers Verlag, 1916), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> G.D. Feldman, *Army, Industry, and Labor in Germany 1914–1918* (Princeton University Press, 1966) and A. Offer, *The First World War. An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

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on the Western Front.<sup>3</sup> Both of these approaches will be addressed only in so far as they relate to a third line of investigation: the examination of soldiers' and armies' morale. This is the main focus of this monograph.

Considerable effort has been invested by historians into understanding whence the formidable resilience of First World War armies originated and why the Allies apparently possessed 'better nerves' than their opponents. Particular attention has been focused on the British and German armies, two of the most resilient forces which fought through the conflict. Many explanations emphasise the role of military institutional factors. John Baynes has argued in his pioneering study of the 2/Scottish Rifles at Neuve Chapelle in March 1915 that the unique British regimental system was 'the quintessence of the morale of the pre-1914 Army'.<sup>4</sup> James Brent Wilson has evaluated the success with which the high command tracked and maintained morale in the BEF during the war, while Timothy Bowman has focused on how Irish regiments supported their men.<sup>5</sup> Anglo-American historians studying the German army have emphasised the role played by superior combat preparation in enabling the force to endure the prolonged hostilities. Trevor Dupuy argues that the personnel, doctrine and methods of the General Staff 'institutionalized military excellence' in the army, while Hew Strachan has emphasised the superiority of the force's training over that of its opponents.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps for cultural reasons, explanations by German historians tend to be much darker, focusing on the ability of the Kaiser's army to coerce and manipulate men into remaining obedient. Benjamin Ziemann argues that successful military socialisation ensured cooperation: temporary reliefs, such as leave or rest behind the lines, made active service bearable, while 'the disciplinary corset, in which the men moved,

<sup>3</sup> P. Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front. The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), T. Travers, *How the War Was Won. Command and Technology in the British Army on the Western Front, 1917-1918* (London: Routledge, 1992) and R. Prior and T. Wilson, *Command on the Western Front. The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson, 1914-18* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> J. Baynes, *Morale. A Study of Men and Courage. The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle 1915* (London: Leo Cooper, 1967, 1987), p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> J.B. Wilson, 'Morale and Discipline in the British Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918' unpublished MA thesis, University of New Brunswick (1978) and T. Bowman, *The Irish Regiments in the Great War. Discipline and Morale* (Manchester University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> T.N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War. The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1977), p. 302 and H. Strachan, 'Ausbildung, Kampfgeist und die zwei Weltkriege', in B. Thoß and H.-E. Volkmann (eds.), *Erster Weltkrieg Zweiter Weltkrieg. Ein Vergleich* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), pp. 265-78. For a comparative but highly contested study of training and doctrine in the British and German armies, see M. Samuels, *Command or Control? Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

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offered them in practice no freedom and, in cooperation with the in actuality ineffective right of complaint, effectually suppressed for a long time the first manifestations of serious insubordination'.<sup>7</sup> For Anne Lipp, it was skilful propaganda, combined with ordinary soldiers' position as 'subordinates of no prestige at the bottom end of the hierarchy' which ensured continued compliance.<sup>8</sup> The most influential theory on the German army's collapse, put forward by Wilhelm Deist, also presents coercion as the principal force holding troops together by 1918. Only when soldiers discovered how to circumvent military discipline by means of a mass 'covert strike' in the second half of that year did units disintegrate and further fighting cease to be possible.<sup>9</sup>

Military factors alone have not been considered fully sufficient to explain armies' resilience, however. The improvised nature of the war-time BEF, the self-consciously civilian identity of its soldiers and the antagonism generated by official morale-raisers such as strict Regular Army discipline, 'bull' and raiding have resulted in societal explanations of this force's resilience remaining dominant. As Peter Simkins has observed, most historians 'are in broad agreement that the nature of British society in 1914-18 provided a bedrock of social cohesion which prevented the BEF from total collapse'.<sup>10</sup> J.G. Fuller, one of the earliest and most influential exponents of this view, has argued that civilian, working-class leisure activities, particularly football and music hall, helped British citizen-soldiers relax when out of the line and encouraged an attitude of 'humour and sceptical stoicism' to danger and hardship.<sup>11</sup> John Bourne similarly suggests that the working-class culture of

<sup>7</sup> B. Ziemann, *Front und Heimat. Ländliche Kriegserfahrung im südlichen Bayern 1914-1923* (Essen: Klartext, 1997), pp. 120 and 462-72.

<sup>8</sup> A. Lipp, *Meinungslenkung im Krieg. Kriegserfahrungen deutscher Soldaten und ihre Deutung 1914-1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), pp. 113 and 307-20.

<sup>9</sup> W. Deist, 'The Military Collapse of the German Empire. The Reality Behind the Stab-in-the-Back Myth', *War in History* 3, 2 (April 1996), 204-7. See also the original German version of this article, 'Der militärische Zusammenbruch des Kaiserreichs. Zur Realität der "Dolchstoßlegende"', in U. Büttner (ed.), *Das Unrechtsregime. Internationale Forschung über den Nationalsozialismus*. Vol. I: *Ideologie-Herrschaftssystem-Wirkung in Europa* (Hamburg: Christians, 1986), pp. 101-29 and Deist's similar piece, entitled, 'Verdeckter Militärstreik im Kriegsjahr 1918?', in W. Wette (ed.), *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes. Eine Militärgeschichte von unten* (Munich: Piper, 1992, 1995), pp. 146-67.

<sup>10</sup> P. Simkins, 'Everyman at War. Recent Interpretations of the Front Line Experience', in B. Bond (ed.), *The First World War and British Military History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 301.

<sup>11</sup> J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), particularly pp. 175-80.

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impassivity and mutual solidarity developed in response to the boredom, discomfort and subordination of peacetime industrial life paid dividends in the trenches.<sup>12</sup> For Jay Winter, the fact that Britain possessed ‘probably the most highly disciplined industrial labor force in the world’ accounts for the BEF’s obedience and robustness.<sup>13</sup> Gary Sheffield also considers peacetime industrial relations to hold the key to British military resilience in the First World War. He demonstrates convincingly that the paternalism–deference exchange which regulated pre-war class interaction was transferred to the officer–man relationship in the army, creating good inter-rank relations and strong cohesion.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to the resilience which their pre-war upbringing and culture provided to British troops, peacetime societal influences have generally been seen to have disadvantaged German soldiers. Bernd Hüppauf and Bernd Ulrich have condemned the exaggerated militarism of the *Kaiserreich*, arguing that ‘war-enthused’ volunteers inculcated with naive, glorified images of war quickly became disillusioned or suffered mental collapse when they experienced real combat.<sup>15</sup> Christoph Jahr, noting that desertion rates remained far more stable in the British army than in its German opponent, has suggested that the BEF’s strength derived from the fact that it was ‘a “citizen army” constituted by amateurs’. Drawing on Fuller’s work, he contends that ‘the adoption of civilian thought and behaviour in the army bestowed it with a flexible steadfastness, so that it came through the war without fundamental shock’.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, unlike in the British army, where peacetime class relations provided the basis of an excellent officer–man relationship, the reproduction of peacetime social divisions within the German military hierarchy is thought to have been highly damaging. Wolfgang Kruse argues that the resentment caused by the privileges and insensitivity of

<sup>12</sup> J. Bourne, ‘The British Working Man in Arms’, in H. Cecil and P.H. Liddle (eds.), *Facing Armageddon. The First World War Experienced* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), pp. 342–50.

<sup>13</sup> J. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (London: Greenwich Editions, 1988, 2000), p. 159.

<sup>14</sup> G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches. Officer–Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), particularly pp. 72–3.

<sup>15</sup> B. Hüppauf, ‘“Der Tod ist verschlungen in den Sieg”. Todesbilder aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg und Nachkriegszeit’, in B. Hüppauf (ed.), *Ansichten vom Krieg. Vergleichende Studien zum Ersten Weltkrieg in Literatur und Gesellschaft* (Königsten: Forum Academicum, 1984), pp. 68–71 and B. Ulrich, ‘Kriegsfreiwillige. Motivationen – Erfahrungen – Wirkungen’, in Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt (ed.), *August 1914. Ein Volk zieht in den Krieg* (Berlin: Dirk Nishen, 1989), pp. 235–41.

<sup>16</sup> C. Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten. Desertion und Deserteure im deutschen und britischen Heer 1914–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), p. 176.

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upper-class officers led inevitably to bitterness and ultimately the radicalisation of the common soldiery. Revolution and collapse thus derived ultimately from the undemocratic nature of Germany's society and military.<sup>17</sup>

Other historians have studied the dynamics of the battlefield to explain why soldiers were prepared to fight. John Keegan was the first to develop this approach, when he analysed the factors which propelled British Kitchener soldiers towards German lines on 1 July 1916.<sup>18</sup> Tony Ashworth's sociological view of trench warfare has shed light on the 'live and let live' truces which prevailed in some front sectors and eased the lives of the soldiers. He contends that the primary conflict in the trenches lay not between the combatants themselves but rather between the infantry at the front, which sought to avoid danger, and staff officers in the rear, who by a variety of methods broke up informal truces and successfully compelled troops to fight.<sup>19</sup> More recently, Leonard V. Smith's study of the French Fifth Infantry Division has addressed similar questions to those posed by Ashworth but utilises a more complex theoretical framework of Foucaultian proportionality to explain men's behaviour at the front. Correcting Ashworth's misapprehension that belligerent soldiers were 'warlike deviants', he demonstrates that not only the will of the high command but also often the dynamics of the battlefield and combatants' own value systems made fighting the most attractive or only possible course of action.<sup>20</sup>

Curiously, although questions of human resilience are at root psychological rather than sociological or military institutional, there has been little interest in examining individual coping strategies in the trenches. Those historians who have addressed the experience of the First World War from a psychological standpoint have tended to stress the difficulty faced by individuals in coping with battle. Eric Leed has portrayed soldiers as incapable of processing the monstrous machine warfare raging about them, while Modris Eksteins has argued that 'men stopped

<sup>17</sup> W. Kruse, 'Krieg und Klassenheer. Zur Revolutionierung der deutschen Armee im Ersten Weltkrieg', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft* 22, 4 (1996), 533-4 and 539-49.

<sup>18</sup> J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle. A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, 1983), pp. 207-89.

<sup>19</sup> T. Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918. The Live and Let Live System* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> L.V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience. The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton University Press, 1994), particularly pp. 11-17.

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asking questions, deliberately. They ceased to interpret'. Peter Knoch similarly asserts that combatants typically experienced 'paralysis before the all-powerfulness of war' in the trenches.<sup>21</sup> Rather than focusing on the majority of men who successfully coped with conditions at the front, disproportionate attention has been paid by historians to the minority who developed psychiatric disorders. The confusing impression given is that while societies and armies proved to be very resilient during the war, the individuals who comprised them were victims of their situation and susceptible to mental collapse.<sup>22</sup>

Recently, historians have begun to question whether soldiers were quite so helpless and vulnerable as hitherto portrayed. Niall Ferguson has argued that fighting went on for so long and armies were so obedient because many men 'simply took pleasure in killing'. Joanna Bourke has arrived at a similar conclusion from her study of combatants in the First and Second World Wars and the Vietnam conflict. Declaring that 'the characteristic act of men at war is not dying, it is killing', she contends that soldiers actually 'insisted upon emotional relationships and responsibility' with and for their victims.<sup>23</sup> As will be demonstrated, the emphasis on 'face-to-face killing' found in the work of these authors in fact represents a misunderstanding of the overwhelmingly anonymous and impersonal warfare conducted on the Western Front in the First World War. Nonetheless, their suggestion that soldiers were by no means as fragile as usually argued is convincing. Modern psychological research has consistently demonstrated that humans in fact possess a considerable level of innate resilience. The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study, examining the modern psychiatric disease Post-traumatic

<sup>21</sup> E.J. Leed, *No Man's Land. Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge University Press, 1979, 1981), pp. 130–3, M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring. The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London: Bantam Press, 1989), p. 174 and P. Knoch, 'Erleben und Nacherleben. Das Kriegserlebnis im Augenzeugenbericht und im Geschichtsunterricht', in G. Hirschfeld, G. Krumeich and I. Renz (eds.), *Keiner fühlt sich hier mehr als Mensch ... Erlebnis und Wirkung des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Essen: Klartext, 1993), pp. 211–12.

<sup>22</sup> See, particularly, P. Leese, *Shell Shock. Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves. Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914–1994* (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 1–168. For Germany, see P. Lerner, *Hysterical Men. War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane. The Penguin Press, 1998), p. 363 and J. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999), pp. 1 and 6. The idea has also been adopted in S. Audoin-Rouzeau and A. Becker, *1914–1918. Understanding the Great War* (London: Profile Books, 2002), p. 37.



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Stress Disorder, found, for example, that ‘the majority of Vietnam theater veterans have made a successful reentry into civilian life’.<sup>24</sup> After reviewing literature studying the reactions of mid- and late twentieth-century civilians and soldiers under fire, the psychologist S.J. Rachman concluded that ‘the large majority coped extraordinarily well’.<sup>25</sup> There seems no reason why this should not have also been true of men fighting in the First World War. Indeed, the testimonies of contemporary psychiatrists indicate that this was the case. As T.W. Salmon, one of the founding fathers of American military psychiatry, observed of British combatants, ‘neurosis provides a means of escape so convenient that the real source of wonder is not that it should play such an important part in military life but that so many men should find a satisfactory adjustment without its intervention’.<sup>26</sup>

The purpose of this book is, therefore, to provide a new understanding of the impressive resilience demonstrated by the British and German armies during the First World War by focusing on individual soldiers’ psychology. Knowledge of combatants’ fears, motivations, mental defence mechanisms and coping strategies will not only explain why they were able and willing to fight so hard for so long but should also shed light on why certain military institutions were effective in providing support while others failed. A comparative approach has been chosen in order to avoid the cultural biases which may have crept into some of the existing almost exclusively national historiography. Allegedly society-specific qualities identified by historians as beneficial to resilience were often, it will be argued, common human responses to stress. By focusing on individuals’ strategies for coping with risk and death, it will thus become possible to explain the resilience of soldiers and armies, analyse whether the British did indeed have ‘better nerves’ than their opponents and clarify how and why German soldiers eventually stopped fighting.

Attitudes to risk and death in the trenches involved transitory calculations and emotions liable to be distorted by the passage of time. In order to construct an accurate picture of contemporary perspectives on trench warfare and battle, the letters and diaries of more than one

<sup>24</sup> R.A. Kulka, W.E. Schlenger, J.A. Fairbank, R.L. Hough, B.K. Jordan, L.R. Marmar and D.S. Weiss, *Trauma and the Vietnam War Generation. Report of Findings from the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study* (New York: Brunner / Mazel, 1990), p. xxvii.

<sup>25</sup> S.J. Rachman, *Fear and Courage* (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1978, 1990), pp. 35–6.

<sup>26</sup> T.W. Salmon, ‘The Care and Treatment of Mental Diseases and War Neuroses (“Shell Shock”) in the British Army’, *Mental Hygiene* 1, 4 (October 1917), 516.

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hundred British and German combatants have been studied. Written directly after or sometimes even during the events they describe, these sources offer the best possibility for the historian to see trench warfare as soldiers did at the time. They are, however, not without their problems. Letters were often tailored for their audiences; predictably, soldiers were most likely to be frank about their feelings and experiences when the recipient was male and least likely when writing to a child. Female addressees stood in between, although the amount of information depended on their relationship with the soldier. Mothers, sisters or girlfriends might become confidantes and receive unvarnished accounts of the front. More often, disturbing events might be excluded or a cheerful tone adopted in order to spare loved ones from worry. Censorship, either through company officers or, later in the war, an official censor, also may have influenced letters' style and content.<sup>27</sup> Diaries were less vulnerable to these problems; usually soldiers seem to have written them for personal consumption and comfort, as a way of releasing tension, although sometimes they were consciously kept for posterity. In the case of both sources, often little is known about the background of the author, other than what can be inferred from the text. In some ways, however, this is not so important. As will be seen, although class origin, education and religion might influence style or vocabulary, the similarities in soldiers' correspondence generally outweigh the differences, suggesting that psychological coping strategies were only coloured, not shaped, by social influences. Finally, the individual nature of such sources is necessary but problematic. Each letter collection or diary sheds light on the attitudes and perspectives of only one soldier. As 20 million men passed through the German and British armies between 1914 and 1918, generalisations can hardly be made solely from a sample of 100 combatants' writings.

In order to overcome these difficulties, other contemporary sources have also been consulted. A number of excellent German wartime psychological studies of troops in the field exist. By far the most sophisticated is that undertaken by the psychologist and front officer Walter Ludwig, who set 200 officer cadets and wounded soldiers an essay entitled, 'Observations from the field regarding what the soldier thinks in the moment of greatest danger in order to overcome the fear of death'. He analysed their writings and later published his results in what

<sup>27</sup> For the pitfalls of using letters as historical sources, see P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 183 and B. Ulrich, *Die Augenzeugen. Deutsche Feldpostbriefe in Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit 1914–1933* (Essen: Klartext, 1997), pp. 16–18.



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remains one of the earliest and most valuable articles on combat motivation in the twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> Other, more subjective but nonetheless useful research also survives. Paul Plaut published two studies on war psychology based partly on his own experience of service at the front and partly on soldiers' answers to questionnaires disseminated at the outbreak of war by the Institut für angewandte Psychologie in Klein Glienicke, near Potsdam.<sup>29</sup> During the war, the neurologist Ludwig Scholz drew on his own service on the Eastern Front to write his observations of soldiers' behaviour, as did the psychologist Erich Everth.<sup>30</sup> A study of British troops, based on published sources, was produced by the American psychologist Charles Bird in 1917.<sup>31</sup> Wartime research conducted by military psychiatrists on both sides of the lines provides valuable information on the factors exposing men to nervous disorders and the process of adaptation at the front, much of which can be cross-referenced with the results of modern studies.<sup>32</sup> The post-war Southborough Committee's enquiry into 'shellshock' also yields useful material, despite its undoubted political agenda.<sup>33</sup> Finally, in order to provide the results of the research with breadth as well as depth, documentation pertaining to the armies' morale has been consulted. The studies of German and British soldiers' songs produced by

<sup>28</sup> The original German title was 'Beobachtung aus dem Feld, an was der Soldat im Augenblick der höchsten Gefahr denkt, um die Furcht vor dem Tod zu überwinden'. W. Ludwig, 'Beiträge zur Psychologie der Furcht im Kriege', in W. Stern and O. Lipmann (eds.), *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie. 21. Beiträge zur Psychologie des Krieges* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1920), p. 130. See Appendix 1 for more details.

<sup>29</sup> P. Plaut, 'Psychographie des Kriegers', in W. Stern and O. Lipmann (eds.), *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie. 21. Beiträge zur Psychologie des Krieges* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1920), pp. 1–123 and P. Plaut, 'Prinzipien und Methoden der Kriegpsychologie', in E. Abderhalden (ed.), *Handbuch der biologischen Arbeitsmethoden. Part VI: Methoden der experimentellen Psychologie. Part C/I* (Berlin: Urban & Schwarzenberg, 1928), pp. 621–87.

<sup>30</sup> L. Scholz, *Seelenleben des Soldaten an der Front. Hinterlassene Aufzeichnungen des im Kriege gefallenen Nervenarztes* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1920) and E. Everth, *Tat-Flugschriften 10. Von der Seele des Soldaten im Felde. Bemerkungen eines Kriegsteilnehmers* (Jena: Eugen Diederich, 1915).

<sup>31</sup> C. Bird, 'From Home to the Charge. A Psychological Study of the Soldier', *American Journal of Psychology* 28, 3 (July 1917), 315–48.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, C. Stanford Read, *Military Psychiatry in Peace and War* (London: H.K. Lewis, 1920) and K. Bonhoeffer (ed.), *Geistes- und Nervenkrankheiten. Part I* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1922).

<sup>33</sup> War Office (ed.), *Report of the War Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'* (London: HMSO, 1922). As Peter Barham argues, a primary concern of this report was to counter more progressive views towards psychiatric disorder and reinstate a pre-war moral vision distinguishing between neuroses and insanity and condemning nervous breakdown. See Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 233–7.

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veterans after the war provide a useful window into contemporary motives for fighting and, most especially, sources of grievance.<sup>34</sup> Among surviving official military sources, the most valuable are the letter-censorship reports produced in the British army from the end of 1916 and in the Kaiser's force from mid-1917, which were compiled from the correspondence of tens of thousands of combatants. Prisoner-interrogation reports and, in the German army, the reports of the *Eisenbahnreisende* (railway police) also provide information on the morale and coping strategies of large numbers of soldiers.

Armed with this material, the book will examine human resilience in the First World War trenches. In doing so, it will address three broad questions: why did soldiers and armies fight for such a long time? How were they able to cope psychologically with conditions at the front? And, finally, why did they eventually stop fighting?

<sup>34</sup> Studies of particular note are W. Schuhmacher, *Leben und Seele unseres Soldatenlieds im Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Moritz Diesterweg, 1928) and J. Brophy and E. Partridge, *The Long Trail. Soldiers' Songs and Slang 1914–18*, revised edn (London: Sphere Books, 1965, 1969).