

1

THE MISSING YEARS

German workers, German soldiers

Omer Bartov

More research has been devoted to the working class than to almost any other social group in the Third Reich. Yet historians have generally failed to follow workers from the shopfloor to the frontline, even though millions of young, male workers were conscripted for military service in "Hitler's Army." Despite the claims of German generals after 1945 that the army was innocent of Hitler's crimes, many ordinary soldiers participated in the barbarities of racial war in the Soviet Union. The fact that large numbers of German workers were also soldiers must clearly influence the way that we think about the role of German workers in Nazi society.

In the following article, Omer Bartov argues that after over a decade of Nazi indoctrination many young workers came to their military service prepared to embrace the racist goals of the Nazi regime. Their admiration for the Führer, their pride in Germany's military power and their own racial prejudices turned these young recruits into the "tenacious, increasingly brutalized and fanaticized soldiers" (p. 46) who made possible the implementation of Hitler's murderous policies in the east.

Bartov's article demonstrates the value of paying much closer attention to the war years than most social historians have been prepared to do until now. Readers may, however, want to ask whether Bartov's broad generalizations about the mentalities of millions of German*

* See also, more recently, Alf Lüdtke, "The appeal of exterminating 'others': German workers and the limits of resistance," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 64, December 1992, pp. 46–67.

soldiers in "Hitler's Army" can be adequately sustained by the limited range of individual memoirs and autobiographies which he cites.†

* * *

I

Though conveniently well-defined chronologically, the Third Reich has never ceased to present scholars and laymen alike with disturbing questions of definition. Indeed, it has proved excessively difficult to fit the "Hitler State" into an historical context. While the search for the roots of National Socialism has encumbered German (and to some extent European) historiography as a whole with the burden of hindsight, on the one hand, the attempt to "come to terms with the past" in the post-Nazi era has left deep marks of disconcerting amnesia and empty rhetoric, on the other hand. Just as many of the "ideas" enthusiastically propagated and ruthlessly put into practice by the Nazis predate Hitler's "seizure of power" and even the founding of the NSDAP, so too Germany's *Stunde Null* has failed to erase the past and allow the two new republics which had emerged out of the debris of the Reich to set off on their diametrically opposed *Neubeginnen* as if nothing had happened. Too many people who had experienced Hitler's twelve-year rule were still alive, too many minds were still filled to the brim with terrible (though for some also pleasant) memories, for that era of great hopes and deep disillusion, vast conquests and bitter defeats simply to vanish. A glimpse at the dust-jacket biographies of books published in the Federal Republic, for instance, will easily demonstrate the glaring absence of the years 1933–45 from the lives of Germany's literati.¹

The question of continuity and discontinuity has thus remained at the core of German history ever since the "catastrophe" of 1945, with the Third Reich, its actual brief tenure notwithstanding, stubbornly casting a long shadow over periods

† Bartov presents a more sustained and fully documented argument in his recent book, *Hitler's Army. Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York/Oxford, 1992). See also the collection of captured letters home from the front in Soviet archives edited by Anatoly Golovchansky, Valentin Osipov, Anatoly Prokopenko, Ute Daniel and Jürgen Reulecke, "*Ich will raus aus diesen Wahnsinn*": *Deutsche Briefe von der Ostfront 1941–1945. Aus Sowjetischen Archiven* (Wuppertal, 1991).

both preceding its conception and stretching far beyond its demise. The view of Nazism as an aberration, a society inexplicably gone mad, or taken over by a "criminal clique" against its will, has not been corroborated by the historical evidence.² Moreover, rather like the claim regarding the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust, it has always suffered from being entirely ahistorical, in that it attempted to lift a significant chunk of history out of the general stream of events and to discard it as not belonging to the "real" Germany, a monstrous Mr Hyde who has fortunately been forced back into the test-tube whence he had sprung. A characteristic example of what such artificial detachment from recent events can lead to is to be found in the East Berlin Museum for German History where, for instance, the caption under the photograph of a *Wehrmacht* officer, killed in front of the Reichstag building in May 1945, describes him as a "dead fascist soldier." Apparently, whereas those (communist workers) who opposed Hitler were German, those (other classes) who fought for him were merely "fascists," though once they changed into *Volksheer* uniforms (or joined the *Bundeswehr* in the case of the FRG), they inevitably regained their national identity.

Conversely, it has generally been acknowledged that excavating the roots of Nazism far into the Dark Ages has had a major distorting effect on historiography, often obscuring other social, political, religious, and cultural currents which had contributed to making European civilization what it is today, for better or worse. Consequently, some scholars have recently proposed to "normalize" the historical position of the Third Reich by locating it within a wider context, and at the same time to "historicize" the writing of its history by doing away with the hitherto almost obligatory rhetoric and examining its various aspects with the proper mixture of objectivity and empathy. Indeed, it has been said that instead of concentrating mainly on the criminality of the rulers, the suffering of the victims, and the heroism of the resisters, more attention should be given to contemporary social phenomena relatively unrelated to the regime, as well as for instance to legislative and organizational initiatives which, though carried out at the time, have since made an impact on post-Nazi society, not all of it necessarily negative.³

Attempts to point out that in its foreign relations the Third Reich behaved quite "normally," both in comparison with other powers and as far as its own predecessors and successors were

concerned, have, however, proved far from uncontroversial.⁴ Similarly, on the domestic front too, it has been aptly pointed out that what may have seemed to many good German citizens a “normalization” of their society under Nazism, following a period of political and economic crisis, was actually achieved by ruthlessly “uprooting” the representatives of “abnormality.” With the disappearance of the insane, beggars, handicapped, Gypsies, Jews, and so forth, and the enforcement of strict order and discipline, many an average “Aryan” must have felt that the situation had indeed been pleasantly “normalized,” at least as far as her or his own, often self-willed narrow view was concerned.⁵ Moreover, once Nazi rule was over, its memory too had to be “normalized.” Thus we should not simply speak of “missing years,” but rather of a period in the lives of people in whose memory much was repressed, and much else given a “normalizing” interpretation, enabling them to live with its recollection and even cherish some of its more enjoyable moments, particularly as it had all happened when they were young, healthy, and for a while also relatively well-off and members of a great power ruling over vast territories. Only in this manner can both individual and national history follow their uninterrupted course, so necessary if one is to make some sense out of the chaos of events.⁶ This, it will be argued below, applies not only to those small-town, white-collar, Protestant Germans who are said to have constituted Hitler’s strongest supporters,⁷ but also, though not precisely in the same sense, to the working class, generally considered to have remained least susceptible to Nazism.

II

In recent years it has been convincingly shown that far from conforming to the totalitarian image it strove to project, the “Hitler State” was in fact made up of a chaotic conglomeration of competing, overlapping, and often superfluous institutions, with only the Führer, himself described by some historians as a “weak dictator” with limited powers, to divide and rule over it.⁸ Moreover, the Nazi ideal of establishing a so-called “*Volksgemeinschaft*” is also said to have failed miserably, with German society, though submitting to a terroristic police state,

remaining riven by conflicting class interests.⁹ Similarly, while the “Hitler Myth” retained its hold as a unifying concept for a growing proportion of the German population until very late in the war, the NSDAP, which in any case had never achieved even a simple majority, lost much of its popularity in the early years following the “seizure of power.”¹⁰

The German working class is probably the most significant case in point as regards the Nazi regime’s failure – or unwillingness – to break down those very class barriers against which the party had allegedly fought and whose disappearance in an idyllic *Volksgemeinschaft* should have legitimized the replacement of the Weimar Republic by a ruthless dictatorship. Extensive research into this issue has indeed demonstrated that quite apart from outright resistance to the regime, mostly by former socialist and communist activists, workers had shown a surprising degree of opposition to attempts by the employers and the state to limit their gains, made following the rapid shift in the 1930s from unemployment to manpower shortage as a result of massive rearmament. The workers’ struggle, involving an array of industrial actions such as strikes, go-slows, frequent changes of work-places, and lowered productivity, has been presented as a clear sign of the regime’s failure to create a totalitarian “people’s community,” based not just on fear and suppression, but also on acceptance of the new political system and creed. Social structures inherited from pre-Nazi times are thus said to have persisted under Hitler’s rule and to have evolved gradually only after the fall of the Third Reich, owing both to the terrible destruction of the war and the political upheavals which followed it.¹¹ Nevertheless, while on the one hand it may astonish us that there actually was such interest-group pressure from the working class under the Nazi dictatorship, on the other hand there is also room to inquire why this domestic tension rarely transformed itself into political resistance, and why the regime, though making a few temporary concessions to the workers (as it also did to the churches), does not seem to have been seriously threatened by the working class at any time, and could by and large pursue expansionist policies with no hindrance from within, indeed, with a great measure of support.¹²

Findings regarding industrial unrest in Germany in the late 1930s have significantly influenced views on some major issues of the period, such as the debate over the origins of the Second

World War, the inquiry into the deeper causes and wider implications of the *Blitzkrieg* strategy, as well as the historical value of earlier theories of fascism and totalitarianism.¹³ At the same time, it has also become necessary to define more precisely the meaning and applicability of such terms as “resistance” and “opposition,” both as regards the working class, and in the case of other groups hovering between collaboration and resistance, such as the churches, the military, and the traditional liberal-conservative elites.¹⁴

Yet precisely because of the centrality of this issue and the wide range of its implications, it may be of some interest to stress one of its aspects which does not seem to have received appropriate attention hitherto. The point is that in September 1939 Germany launched what turned out to be a world war, and although initially its people marched to battle without much enthusiasm, and its resources were not totally mobilized, as of winter 1941 Hitler’s Reich found itself up to its neck in a vast military confrontation, fielding millions of soldiers, and straining both its physical and its mental capacities to the limit. Ultimately, the mass of Germany’s population became involved in one way or another in the war, and a growing proportion of its men, young, middle-aged, and old, workers, bourgeois, and aristocrats, Nazis and former socialists and communists, were recruited and sent to the front, turning miraculously into Europe’s toughest and most determined troops, mostly fighting with extraordinary cohesion almost until the bitter end. For throughout the war, combat morale in the *Wehrmacht* generally remained extremely high, mutinies were almost unknown, and an excellent system of manpower organization, draconian punishment, and extensive indoctrination combined to hold combat units tightly together, while a series of astonishing victories made it easier to withstand even greater defeats in the hope of fortune’s wheel turning once more in Germany’s favour.¹⁵

The question to be asked is thus, how did it come about that men who had been recruited from the mines and factories, who had demonstrated their capacity to oppose at least the social and economic policies of the regime, and some of whom may well have still remembered their former trade-union, SPD, or KPD affiliations, could within a matter of months be transformed into Hitler’s tenacious, increasingly brutalized and fanaticized soldiers, spearheading his expanding Reich and executing or

making possible the execution of his murderous policies? Indeed, what light does this shed on the greater or lesser susceptibility of various social strata to Nazism, on the extent, aims, and nature of opposition, on the degree to which it actually threatened the regime, and on the Third Reich's capacity to mobilize the mass of German society, "*Volksgemeinschaft*" or not?

Put differently, it seems that we should clearly distinguish between the Nazi regime's evident failure to realize its proclaimed aim of establishing a "*Volksgemeinschaft*" free of intersocial tensions, on the one hand, and the willingness of large sectors of the population to accept that same regime as the embodiment of the nation, and to sacrifice themselves for it at a time of war and crisis, on the other hand. The great patriotic surge of August 1914, when German, British, and French workers went off to slaughter each other in defence of their respective class-ridden societies, had already demonstrated that a just, classless society is not a necessary precondition for total mobilization. Furthermore, we now know that even in Wilhelmine Germany, for instance, the renowned workers' "sub-culture" was anything but free from a widespread penetration of bourgeois values and norms, tastes, manners, and ambitions.¹⁶ It took four years of unprecedented blood-letting and suffering, almost culminating in victory over materially stronger foes, for the nightmare of the *Kaiserreich's* ruling elites, namely that its working-class recruits would refuse to die for king and country, but rather would ferment a social revolution, to become reality.¹⁷ Meanwhile, and this is the crucial point, the trenches of the Great War turned out to have been the breeding ground of the myth of the "*Kampfgemeinschaft*," that community of warriors in which all social and material distinctions had allegedly disappeared under the impact of a shared *Fronterlebnis*. Thus the prewar dream of replacing existing society, riven as it was by class struggles and competing interest groups, by a harmonious community, was realized, at least in some men's minds, in the bloody fields of Flanders. And as Hitler's idyllic "*Volksgemeinschaft*" was in fact a warring community, eternally engaged in a struggle for survival, it was only natural that it should strive to return to those very battlefields where it had achieved such perfection.¹⁸ Indeed, the spell seems to have worked once more, and men who only yesterday had confronted each other in that imperfect "people's community," suddenly joined together and, in the name of that

Nazi regime so many of them were supposed to oppose, fought shoulder to shoulder against those they had been persuaded to believe were their common enemies.

Is this merely the Nazi regime's propagandistic description of the "*Kampfgemeinschaft*" in action? Did those workers who as civilians had demonstrated their dissatisfaction with at least some aspects of Hitler's regime, in fact show less enthusiasm also as soldiers, fight with less resilience, tend more towards indiscipline and subversion? And, if not, was this simply because they had been cut off from their familiar social and economic context and plunged into a radically different environment, where old interests and loyalties were no longer relevant, while new ones assumed the utmost existential importance? Or does this phenomenon actually indicate that their own civilian environment had also been increasingly permeated with Nazi ideas and organizations? That such questions have not been posed in this manner hitherto, is due not least to the wide gap which seems to have appeared between the social and military history of the Third Reich. For, while social historians have probed into civilian society, military historians have concerned themselves mainly with tactics, strategy and generals. Although it has of course long been recognized that in modern conscript armies the borderline between civilians and soldiers is extremely blurred, the army was treated as a separate institution, maintaining its own particular relationship with the state. If the social background of soldiers was considered at all, it was mainly that of the older, senior ranks, or of that tiny group of resisters, likewise quite highly placed in the military hierarchy.¹⁹ Consequently, once conscripted, the social historians' protagonists were passed over to the military historians who, as far as the rank-and-file and junior officers were concerned, treated them as part of a vast, faceless mass of field-grey uniforms devoid of any civilian past. Conversely, once the war was over, those soldiers who had survived it were, so to speak, delivered back into the hands of the social historians, only to continue their civilian existence with very little reference to the fact that for years they had served as soldiers – just as in dust-jacket biographies, or in that recent film saga, *Heimat*, the workers too went off somewhere for a few years, and then some of them returned. What happened in between was a matter for soldiers' stories.

III

Yet what happened in between is precisely what one would like to know in order to put the experience of German workers into the context not only of the failed *Volksgemeinschaft*, but also of Hitler's devoted army. Now in order to do this, a number of fundamental questions have to be raised. First, we would like to know how many soldiers actually came from a working-class background; secondly, we should ask to what extent the *Wehrmacht's* soldiers were supportive of the regime, its ideology, and its war aims; thirdly, it would be crucial to find out how much the men's attitudes were in fact influenced by their social stratum, and how much they had to do with other, though not entirely unrelated, categories, such as age, family, and educational background, as well as membership of premilitary or paramilitary organizations. The experience of the war itself would also presumably have played a significant role in moulding the soldiers' attitudes.

Whereas regarding civilians it is relatively simply to determine their class affiliation, once they become soldiers we are faced with a serious problem of identifying their social background. Straightforward documentary evidence on this question is almost impossible to come by, and consequently there are also hardly any secondary works on this issue, particularly as far as the rank-and-file are concerned, whereas, its egalitarian rhetoric notwithstanding, most of the *Wehrmacht's* officers came from the middle, upper-middle, and upper classes.²⁰ Nevertheless, I would like to suggest here a few ways of tackling this problem, albeit mostly indirectly, so as to enhance our knowledge regarding worker-soldiers' attitudes in the Third Reich.

First, it may be useful to point out that although during the initial stages of the war the regime had in fact exempted vast numbers of able-bodied workers from service, both because of economic needs, and because of its fears that by mass recruitment from the working class it might hasten another "1918 crisis," by autumn 1941 the tremendous casualties already inflicted upon the *Wehrmacht* by the Red Army made it unavoidable to conscript a growing number of industrial workers, eventually replacing them with millions of forced-labourers from the Reich's expanding empire. Thus as of the winter crisis of 1941–2 an ever larger

proportion of Germany's troops came from the working class.²¹ This means that when we speak of the *Wehrmacht*, and especially of the rank-and-file, we have to take it for granted that a significant proportion of its men were workers. Although we normally cannot say how these workers were distributed among the units (except in individual cases to be noted below), this point has to be taken into account when we speak in more general terms of the soldiers' attitudes and conduct.

Secondly, a number of negative and positive inferences have to be made regarding the behaviour of the *Wehrmacht's* rank-and-file in the war. Negatively it can be said that no convincing evidence could be found to show that workers performed less well in battle, were proportionately more involved in breaches of discipline, or indeed demonstrated any opposition to the army's criminal activities in the East. In fact, there is very little evidence to show that there was opposition from any lower-ranking soldiers, workers or not. Thus, such opposition as there was came mostly from higher-ranking officers, and had initially to do mainly with the possible effects of the "criminal orders" on soldiers' morale and the enemy's resistance, and later on with hopes for a political arrangement with the Allies in the face of an approaching catastrophe. Moreover, the revision of the "Barbarossa" directives in spring 1942, due mostly to the growing need for foreign labour in the Reich (following the conscription of the workers), actually failed to impress the troops at the front who kept up with the old habit of indiscriminate shootings.²²

More positive evidence regarding soldiers' attitudes towards the war is in fact quite abundant, coming from a variety of sources and indicating that by and large, at least until the last few months of the war, the *Wehrmacht's* troops were among the regime's strongest supporters, no matter where they had come from and what their opinions had been before the war. This is not to say, of course, that they were all Nazis in the strict sense of the word (which is in any case extremely difficult to define); rather, it indicates that they supported Hitler's rule, agreed with his policies as far as they concerned them, and were mostly willing to fight, die, and commit an array of criminal acts in his service, accepting the regime's view of Germany's mission in the world and its perception of the Reich's enemies as consisting mostly of inferior beings unworthy of life.

Thus, for instance, two major studies of morale in the Third Reich have pointed out that the front-line troops remained in much higher spirits than the population in the rear until very late in the war. Indeed, it is claimed that "periods of buoyancy [in the rear] were triggered mostly by the confidence and attitude of the front-line soldiers," who were "the staunchest supporters of Hitler and the regime," to the extent that by spring 1943 "Mobilization of officers and soldiers to raise the public mood . . . had long since been introduced."²³ Similarly, SD reports in June 1943 led another historian to conclude that "The 'Führer myth' remained relatively strong . . . [among] ordinary Front soldiers."²⁴ Moreover, following the attempted assassination of Hitler in July 1944, once more various reports showed that a vast majority of the troops "believed" in the Führer.²⁵ The bomb plot also justified viewing military setbacks as merely the result of a conspiracy. As another report pointed out, "today [people] think that for some time the traitors have sabotaged the Führer's objectives and orders. This opinion is primarily due to an increase in the written and oral reports by soldiers from the Eastern Front who declare that they are now discovering the reasons for the absence of reinforcements and the often senseless shifting of units and exposure of the front."²⁶ Hitler's popularity among German POWs captured by the Americans stood at 69 per cent in August 1944, 42 per cent in mid October, and 64 per cent again in late November.²⁷ A military report dated 15 December 1944 maintained that there was little defeatist talk among the troops, and "There is a firm conviction that the tremendous military efforts of our people will lead us to victory."²⁸ Indeed, strong signs of disintegration were noted only towards March 1945.²⁹ Yet even then a large proportion of the soldiers were said to have retained their courage and willingness to fight, especially the old fighters and the "marvellous youth," though by this stage there were also many tired and apathetic soldiers, as well as some cowards and deserters.³⁰

Other sources give the same impression of widespread support for the regime, as embodied by Hitler, among the soldiers, and of the manner in which "his" war was being conducted. Thus on 4 July 1941 Goebbels could write in his diary that "our soldiers at the [Eastern] front are now completely convinced of the necessity of this war,"³¹ and repeated four days later that "Morale of our men at the front [is] very good. The

soldiers now realize that this campaign was necessary."³² Even as late as March 1945 Goebbels quoted Allied sources as maintaining that "our men have been fighting like savage fanatics."³³ Indeed, he wrote that "The effect of the Führer's visit [to I Corps on the Eastern Front] both on officers and men was enormous,"³⁴ adding later that "The general officers put on a good show and the soldiers cheered the Führer."³⁵ Although morale among the troops was evidently sinking at this last, desperate stage of the war,³⁶ Goebbels insisted that the men were "resisting at all costs – to the extent that the situation and their equipment permit."³⁷ Depending on the commanders, some units still retained a good fighting spirit. Summarizing his visit to Colonel-General Schörner's troops, Goebbels wrote that "there is not the smallest sign of defeatism here,"³⁸ but, quite to the contrary, he had observed "that faith in victory and in the Führer is prevalent among these men."³⁹ Thus, although he admitted that "German fighting morale has reached its nadir," Goebbels was encouraged by enemy reports, according to which "our prisoners still maintain the view that Germany must definitely win the war," and that they "have an almost mystical faith in Hitler. This is the reason," he concluded, "why we are still on our feet and fighting."⁴⁰ Goebbels also realized that "the present level of morale must not be confused with definite defeatism. The people will continue to do their duty and the front-soldier will defend himself as far as he has a possibility of doing so." The problem was that "These possibilities are becoming increasingly limited."⁴¹ Thus the sinking morale "is evidenced not by any revolutionary symptoms" (that is, by opposition to the regime as such) "but by the general attitude of lethargy now prevalent among both officers and men."⁴²

The Minister of Propaganda of course had his own reasons for describing the *Wehrmacht's* troops as fanatically supportive of the regime, even when confiding these remarks to the privacy of his diary. The Generals had other reasons for saying the same. Yet it cannot be ignored that in their memoirs they repeatedly point out the fact that the army, and particularly the rank-and-file and junior officer corps, were National Socialist through and through, especially as at the same time they tried to present the *Wehrmacht* as a professional organization quite indifferent to ideology. Von Manstein, for example, wrote that "The preconditions for a *coup d'état* would have been . . . the following

of the whole *Wehrmacht* and the agreement of the majority of the population. Both did not exist during the years of peace in the Third Reich as well as during the war (with the exception perhaps of the very last months).⁴³ Heinz Guderian too had no doubts as to his soldiers' faith in the Führer. As he wrote in his memoirs, following Hitler's "seizure of power," "as one year succeeded the next, the opposition within the Army was continually weakened, since the new age groups that were now called to the colours had already served in the Hitler Youth, and in the National Labour Service or the Party, and had thus already sworn allegiance to Hitler. The Corps of Officers, too, became year by year more impregnated with young National Socialists"⁴⁴ – including, of course, Guderian himself. Indeed, as he adds elsewhere, "When National-Socialism, with its new, nationalistic slogans, appeared upon the scene the younger elements of the Officer Corps were soon inflamed by the patriotic theories propounded by Hitler and his followers."⁴⁵

The conspirators against Hitler knew well enough that the majority of the soldiers and civilians would see the assassination as an act of treason – as indeed they did following its failure.⁴⁶ Simply finding a single military unit whose men could be depended upon proved impossible, as Johnnie von Herwarth wrote, the reason being, as he says elsewhere in his book, that "the soldiers . . . were naturally under the influence of Nazi propaganda,"⁴⁷ where this had to do with their attitudes towards the Russians and Jews, or with their support of Hitler. "It would have been difficult in any circumstances to identify among the tens of thousands of troops those upon whom we could count," he writes. "The task of locating them became more vexatious as we realized that few, if any, were likely to fit that category. . . . We never had any troops upon which we could rely one hundred per cent."⁴⁸ Planning the *Putsch*, the conspirators realized that almost everyone was against them, not against Hitler. In fact, the very reasoning behind the decision to kill the Führer was "the general conviction that German troops would never be willing to accept a different command as long as Hitler lived, but that news of his death would instantly bring about the collapse of the myth that surrounded his name. Hence there was no way of gaining the support of large numbers of German troops without eliminating Hitler."⁴⁹ This was clearly correct, as was shown less than a year later, following Hitler's suicide.

Coming closer to the soldiers themselves, there is little doubt that their letters home may be quite instructive regarding what they thought about the regime, the enemy, and the war. Here too we are hampered by the fact that it is usually impossible to tell the social background of these men. Nevertheless, just as in the cases quoted above, considering the fact that a growing proportion of the troops were recruited from the working class, one may be allowed to assume that a fair number of the letters were written by former workers, especially in the case of non-commissioned ranks. Now from the available evidence, and it is admittedly only a minute sample of the vast wartime correspondence,⁵⁰ there does seem to have existed a great deal of agreement among the soldiers as regards the regime's views of its enemies and the sort of treatment they deserved, as well as a widespread admiration of the Führer. Indeed, it is quite striking to find the troops describing Russians, communists, and Jews in terms obviously lifted directly from propaganda sheets, orders of the day, newspapers and radio broadcasts, betraying the effects of years of ideological training as civilians and soldiers alike by their distorted perception of reality.⁵¹ This impression is confirmed both by the demands made by the front-line units to be supplied with even greater amounts of propaganda material, particularly at times of crisis,⁵² as well as by the above-quoted surveys conducted among German POWs during the war, indicating that almost until the very end a majority of the men went on "believing" in Hitler and, by implication, consciously or not, in much of what he stood for.⁵³

A few representative quotes from soldiers' letters must suffice to illustrate this point. In November 1940 one soldier belonging to the 16 Army wrote that "We are all burning to be allowed to present those who are guilty of this great war with the last reckoning" (referring to Britain and its "Jewish plutocrats"), and added that as regards occupied France,

we have had more than enough of the moral, ethical decay, which appears to us here again and again. . . . Here one can see for the first time how beautiful Germany is, and how proud we should be of being German, and thankful to our Führer, who has spared our people the misery which we now see daily.⁵⁴

Drawing on the Buchbender and Stertz collection, we find that

less than two weeks after the invasion of the Soviet Union, Lance-Corporal F. of the 125th Infantry Division wrote from the East that "Here one sees evidence of Jewish, Bolshevik atrocities, the likes of which I have hardly believed possible. . . . You can well imagine that this cries out for revenge, which we certainly also take."⁵⁵ Another NCO exclaimed on 19 July 1941: "The German people owes a great debt to our Führer, for had these beasts, who are our enemies here, come to Germany, such murders would have taken place, which the world has never seen before. . . . And when one reads the *Stürmer* and looks at the pictures, that is only a tiny fraction of what we see here and the crimes committed here by the Jews."⁵⁶ One private wrote on 1 August that the Russians are "a people which needs long and good training in order to become human,"⁵⁷ and another expressed the same view on the 20th, rejoicing that "these uncultivated, multi-raced men . . . have been thwarted from plundering and pillaging our homeland."⁵⁸ While the NCO H.B. of the 125th Infantry Division stressed that "for us the Führer's words are gospel," and went on to describe the Soviet prisoners as "animal-like,"⁵⁹ an NCO of the 183rd Infantry Division maintained that the Russians "are no longer human beings, but wild hordes and beasts, who have been bred by Bolshevism during the last 20 years," and thus "one may not allow oneself to feel any compassion for these people, because they are all very cowardly and perfidious."⁶⁰ Similarly, an NCO of the 251st Infantry Division wrote in mid November 1941 that "Had these cannibalized heaps of soldiers fallen upon Germany, everything which is German would have been done with."⁶¹ And yet, one should keep in mind that there was no need for men writing private letters home to express themselves in this manner, as censorship concerned itself with negative, rather than with the absence of positive, remarks.⁶²

Another means of gauging the attitudes of the *Wehrmacht's* troops brings us to the third question posed at the beginning of this section, namely, how important class affiliation actually was in determining the men's opinions and conduct, and how much it had to do with other categories. Memoirs of former soldiers, rather than high ranking generals, may help us to understand the psychology of the Third Reich's youth and soldiers. Alfons Heck's autobiography begins in 1933, when he was 6 years old. Raised in a small Catholic Rhineland town, he soon became a devout *HJ* leader and a self-proclaimed fanatical supporter of Hitler, though

his family showed no strong inclination towards Nazism. His book is a detached, apparently accurate description of the manner in which young boys in the Third Reich were made into Nazis, first and foremost by the Hitler Youth, while both school and family retreated well into the background. Heck had been to a Nuremberg rally, and hearing Hitler's speech left an everlasting impression on him. Like many others of his generation, he was eager to fight for Führer and *Volk*, and prepared to denounce anyone who expressed other views (though, again like many others, he apparently relented from denouncing a close friend). However, his "Nazism" vanished very quickly following the capitulation.⁶³

Rolf Schörken has analysed a number of memoirs of this kind. His first case, Dieter Borkowski, grew up in Berlin. His father dead, his mother wielding little influence on him, his character was moulded mainly by the *HJ*, films such as *Jud Süß*, and the National Socialist *Wochenschaun*. On 2 May 1945, this 16-year-old boy was on the great anti-aircraft tower of the capital, when he heard of Hitler's suicide. "These words make me feel sick, as if I would have to vomit. I think that my life has no sense any more. What was this battle for, what were the deaths of so many people for? Life has apparently become worthless, for if Hitler has shot himself, the Russians will have finally won. . . . Has the Führer not betrayed his *Volk* then after all?"⁶⁴ It is interesting to note that Hans Ulrich Rudel, the ace Stuka pilot, son of a Silesian village pastor, who was 29 when he heard of Hitler's death, wrote that "The shock of the news . . . has a stunning effect upon the troops. But . . . we must fight on. We shall only lay down our arms when our leaders give the order."⁶⁵ Indeed, the need to go on believing in something so as not to admit the senselessness of the struggle was also reflected in soldiers' letters from Stalingrad. As one man wrote shortly before the surrender: "The Führer has promised to get us out of here. . . . I still believe it today, because I simply must believe in something. If it isn't true, what is there left for me to believe in? . . . If what we were promised is not true, then Germany will be lost, for no other promises can be kept after that."⁶⁶

Schörken's second case, Karl Hillenbrand, tells in his memoirs of his idyllic childhood in a Siegerland village, where he had hardly known anything of the Nazis or the war almost until the very end, and even when war came to his doorstep, by which

time he was 16 years old, he experienced it mainly from the technical point of view through his fascination with weapons. Yet when his father beats him, his instinctive reaction is to denounce him for listening to a foreign radio broadcast. Though he ultimately relents, this boy too, much as he had seemed untouched by events, in fact comes to realize the destructive potential the regime had put into his hands.⁶⁷

Even the 12-year-old Jochen Ziem, Schörken's third example, almost denounces his parents, though in this case, considering both his age and the approaching end of the war, the mutual fear awakened in both sides draws him finally closer to his family.⁶⁸ The fourth case, Eugen Oker, on the other hand, raised in a Bavarian village, becomes an ardent HJ follower in 1933 at the age of 14. Thus, Schörken rightly remarks, these autobiographies demonstrate that the "social stratum" of such boys had little to do with their development. The parents were all "little people", some mildly opposed to the regime, others quite indifferent or filled with a sense of helplessness. This did not have a consistent effect on the boys, but especially those who were about 14 years old in 1933-4 – that is, the Third Reich's future soldiers – were highly likely to come under the influence of the regime and to react against their parents' opinions. Moreover, whenever neither the home nor the peer group exercised a political influence on the boys, the Nazi propaganda picture tended to take over, mainly via the HJ.⁶⁹ As Heinrich Böll's autobiography demonstrates, however, if the family united in strong, articulate opposition to the regime, it could have a major impact on the boy, whatever social class he belonged to.⁷⁰

Hannsferdinand Döbler, Schörken's last example, is a particularly interesting case, for this young man, 26 years old in 1945, though describing himself as a "150 per cent idealistic-believing officer" who kept fighting even after the capitulation, was not a Nazi in the strict sense of the word. Rather, he conformed to the ideal type of the *Wehrmacht* officer, totally internalizing the regime's value system without considering himself ideologically a party member. Indeed, in contradiction to the recent theories concerning the manifestations of resistance in a daily life of nonconformity and passivity, here we have the daily manifestations of collaboration expressed in a will to conform and act, so characteristic of the Third Reich's youth, whatever their social background. Raised by his mother in a

petit-bourgeois family, Döbler's main wish was "to belong" and "to be there." The pastor who tried to divert him from this course was perceived by him as pathetic, his friendship with a half-Jewish girl had no impact on his anti-Semitic views, and his ideal model, as for so many others of his generation, was a tough, exemplary company commander, quite reminiscent, for instance, of Guy Sajer's own company commander, whose idealistic-nihilistic speech to his men he quotes at length in his autobiography. "His obvious and passionate sincerity affected even the most hesitant," Sajer concludes, "we loved him and felt we had a true leader, as well as a friend on whom we could count."⁷¹ Döbler too was moulded in a constantly military environment, where there was neither need nor time for questions. He was driven by a sense of responsibility for "his men" and by a burning desire to be at the front, notwithstanding numerous injuries (which paradoxically, was also the case of Böll, in spite of his very different upbringing).⁷² In Döbler we have an outstanding example of the type manufactured by that powerful combination of the Nazi regime's ideology, the *Wehrmacht's* system of values, and the reality of the war, enhanced by the youthfulness of the soldiers, the manifest weakness of family and school in the face of totalitarian rule, and the tremendous impact of a highly appealing youth movement, which deliberately mobilized the rebellious spirits of the young against their parents and teachers, providing them instead with military trappings, power over their elders, and an opportunity to sacrifice themselves for a "good cause."⁷³ Indeed, all one can ask is, how could anyone have turned out differently under such circumstances?

Finally, we can consider a few examples of workers who served as soldiers during the war. Some oral testimonies given after the war by men of working-class origin have already been analysed and published,⁷⁴ while a significant amount of such collected evidence is still awaiting examination.⁷⁵ Drawing conclusions from interviews conducted long after the event of course presents numerous difficulties, particularly as regards the experience of the Third Reich, much of which will have been either repressed or reinterpreted in people's minds under the influence of all that has been said and written about it since 1945.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, properly treated, it may tell us a great deal about what individuals felt, thought, and did at the time, questions which more conventional

historical evidence can rarely answer, especially regarding the lower strata of society. Furthermore, in this manner we can also learn something of the impact such experiences may have had on these men once the regime had collapsed and they returned to their old workplaces or found new employment. Four such interviews, as analysed by Lutz Niethammer, are of particular interest for this article.

Fritz Harenberg, a zinc miner, considered his army service as the most important junction in his life. "At the time," he said, "one didn't have the guts to go against it all. Today one sees it all differently, because those were all years lost for nothing, which one misses today." And yet, he added, "as far as the barracks were concerned, not what came afterwards – I liked them better than the time in the Labour Service. . . . We got very good food." Indeed, as an occupation soldier in France too, "we lived well. . . . Near Nancy. And in the evenings . . . one went to a pub . . . and there were the soldiers' cinemas and soldiers' homes," while "inside the city . . . they had meanwhile set up brothels." Whilst in Sarajevo, Harenberg remembered buying himself chocolate and a watch, as well as presents for his wife, and claimed to have "got along well, very well with the population." Simultaneously he recalled that "there was there . . . a Jewish cemetery. . . . And then the Gestapo were told that in the Jewish cemetery so much had been buried, good money and good things. Yes, the Gestapo rounded up the Jews, had to dig them up."¹⁷⁷

Josef Paul, who had lost his leg in the war and whose father and grandfather had both been SPD members, remembered his father saying to him in 1945 that "because of the party I had almost lost my work. And if you join a party here, then I'll box your ears right and left. Because a party is a filthy affair."¹⁷⁸ Gustav Köppke, however, though both his father and stepfather had been miners and communists before 1933, became an ardent member of the *HJ*. He could clearly remember watching *Kristallnacht* as a 9-year-old: "It was terribly impressive, when the SA marched. . . . I was on the side of the strong guys; the Jews, they were the others." Indeed, he reported, "Our workers' suburb and the *HJ* were in no way contradictory . . . this idea of the *HJ* versus the people, you shouldn't see it as if we young lads had to decide for something or against something; there was nothing else . . . and whoever wanted to become something belonged to it. . . . The *HJ*

uniform was something positive in our childhood." For Köppke the partisans were *Untermenschen*, and he too came close to denouncing his parents. In 1944, aged 16, he volunteered for the SS *HJ*-Division, and was filled with bitterness following the capitulation: "I was raised then, in the National Socialist time and had seen the world just as they had shown it to us. . . . And suddenly nothing made sense any more." But, tending towards extremes, he soon joined the communist party.⁷⁹

The locksmith Gisberg Pohl, after the war a trade-union and SPD official, already held a senior position in the *HJ* when he volunteered in 1943 for the *Waffen-SS* at the age of 18. He did basic training in Buchenwald. Observing those scenes, he said, "For me a whole world came apart then," particularly, as he explained, because "I was then . . . quite earnest," and "Although they naturally tried to explain to us . . . that these were *Untermenschen*, Russian POWs, Jews, I don't know who they rounded up there." Yet, he hastened to add, "I naturally made too much of it then, right, and one has made too much of it later." Pohl also participated in the suppression of the Warsaw rising: "I had . . . a strong conviction, not this way, I mean: 'Does the Führer know this then?' or rather, if you like, well, this is after all not right, I thought." But again he qualified himself, explaining that "being a young man one easily made too much of it. We had after all gone to Russia, we wanted [to go] there, [to destroy?] subhumanity – I was, that is, strongly convinced of my task, that I was right. And once it goes that far, then you don't think about it much, then only one thing remains, then you know very well, either him or me." Only while in a POW camp after the war, Pohl found "that I actually knew nothing of the world," and some time later he joined the SPD.⁸⁰

IV

It would thus seem that by stressing the close connection between the Third Reich's civilian population and its soldiers, and by realizing that, though of course biased in favour of certain social and age (let alone gender and "racial") categories, the *Wehrmacht* increasingly reflected the society from which its troops were recruited, our understanding of the soldiers' conduct, and more generally of conformity and opposition in

Nazi Germany on the whole, can be substantially enhanced. From the point of view of the military, it appears that the army succeeded beyond all expectations in turning its millions of recruits into well-disciplined and highly motivated soldiers, whatever their social origins and political traditions. Quite apart from its policy of harsh punishments,⁸¹ the *Wehrmacht* managed to persuade a high proportion of its men that, headed by "the greatest *Feldherr* of all time," they were fighting for the right "cause" against an infernal host of political and biological enemies. Yet this could not have succeeded without first penetrating wide-ranging sectors of civilian society and indoctrinating soldiers-to-be into believing the central tenets of National Socialism. This process is of particular significance in the case of the working class, that social stratum said to have been most resistant to Nazi propaganda. For, examining what worker-soldiers thought, wrote, and carried out, one may well find it worthwhile to reconsider the nature and reasoning behind their opposition to the regime, and ask whether it actually stemmed from political/ideological, or rather from economic/interest-group motivation.

The limited evidence presented here seems to suggest that Nazi ideas had indeed had an impact upon the German working class, and particularly upon the younger generation, as they had on German youth on the whole. This in no way means that those same workers did not hope to improve their economic condition, or protect those gains they had already made. But it does indicate that there was a large pool of nationalist phobias and racial prejudices among the working class on which the regime could draw, just as there is evidence of quite a powerful admiration for the Führer, whatever may have been thought of the party.⁸² It is also quite likely that especially some of the younger men were attracted to the prospect of exchanging their dreary work-places for what seemed to be an invincible army, in which, moreover, owing mostly to the tremendous casualties, one could hope for relatively rapid promotion with diminishing consideration of social and educational qualifications, even if in reality this was not often the case.⁸³ The *Volkgemeinschaft* may well have turned out to be an illusion, but perhaps precisely because of that the longing for a real *Kampfgemeinschaft* actually increased, especially when facing, and initially smashing, enemies allegedly determined to destroy the Reich. Finally, it is

also possible that particularly men stemming from the lower strata of German society felt a certain attraction to the idea of ruling over other peoples as the proud representatives of the Aryan “*Herrenvolk*.”

How would the experience of fighting an exceedingly brutal war for many years have influenced the views of the average worker? Could these men simply return to their work-places as if nothing had happened, while their minds were still fresh with the memories of treating whole populations as so many insignificant “*Untermenschen*”? Some may have reacted like Paul, concluding that all parties were “filthy” and refraining from all political activity, while others may have decided like Köppke to join precisely the other political extreme. But can one really speak of continuity in the history of the working class in Germany once we realize where they spent those “missing years” and what they did there? For although there are certainly no simple answers to these questions, it is perhaps by constantly posing them that we may see a little more clearly what it was that supplied the Third Reich with such tremendous destructive energy, and to what extent the experience of participating in “Hitler’s war” has retained its influence upon post-war German society.

NOTES

Reprinted from *German History*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1990, pp. 46–65.

- 1 There is another interesting trend. See, e.g., the biographical note in S. Lenz, *Deutschstunde*, 13th edn (Hamburg, 1968), which does not mention his military service at all, though significantly, just like his main protagonist’s brother, he too had deserted from the navy. In his *Meistererzählungen* (Hamburg, n.d.), on the other hand, we are simply told that “Als Abiturient trat er kurz vor Kriegsende noch in die Marine ein.”
- 2 See, e.g., K. D. Bracher, *The German Dictatorship* (New York, 1970).
- 3 See particularly M. Broszat, “Plädoyer für eine Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus,” *Merkur*, Vol. 39, 1985, pp. 373–85.
- 4 See, e.g., the debate over A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1963), in E. M. Robertson (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War*, 5th edn (London, 1979).
- 5 D. J. K. Peukert, “Alltag and Barbarei. Zur Normalität des Dritten Reiches” in D. Diner (ed.), *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?* (Frankfurt/M., 1987), pp. 51–61.

- 6 This is, of course, one of the main bones of contention in the current *Historikerstreit*. See, e.g., numerous articles in Diner, *Nationalsozialismus*; and *Historikerstreit*, 3rd edn (Piper: Munich, 1987). Also contrast E. Nolte, *Das Vergehen der Vergangenheit* (Berlin, 1987); H.-U. Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit?* (Munich, 1988); and C. S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past* (Cambridge, Mass./London, 1988).
- 7 See mainly T. Childers, *The Nazi Voter* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1983); R. F. Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton, N.J., 1982); M. H. Kater, *The Nazi Party* (Oxford, 1983).
- 8 H. Mommsen, "National Socialism: continuity and change," in W. Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism, A Reader's Guide* (Harmondsworth, 1979), pp. 151–92; E. N. Peterson, *The Limits of Hitler's Power* (Princeton, N.J., 1969).
- 9 T. Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Opladen, 1977); S. Salter, "Class harmony or class conflict?" in J. Noakes (ed.), *Government, Party and People in Nazi Germany* (Exeter, 1980), pp. 76–97.
- 10 I. Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth"* (Oxford, 1987); and id., *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1983).
- 11 T. Mason, "The workers' opposition in Nazi Germany," *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 11, 1981, 120–37; I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship* (London, 1985), p. 143. The opposite view in R. Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (London, 1968); D. Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution* (London, 1966).
- 12 This question is in fact posed by Mason himself in his "Workers' opposition."
- 13 T. Mason, "The primacy of politics," in H. A. Turner (ed.), *Nazism and the Third Reich* (New York, 1972), pp. 175–200; and id., "Some origins of the Second World War", in Robertson, *The Origins*, pp. 105–35; A. Milward, "Fascism and the economy," in Laqueur, *Fascism*, pp. 409–53; a different view in R. J. Overy, "Hitler's war and the German economy," *Economic History Review*, Vol. 35, 1982, pp. 272–91. Also see, Institut für Zeitgeschichte (ed.), *Totalitarismus und Faschismus* (Munich, 1980).
- 14 Mason, "Workers' opposition"; Kershaw, *Dictatorship*, pp. 14 (n. 38 for further literature), 34. See also, e.g., H. Graml et al., *The German Resistance to Hitler* (London, 1970); K.-J. Müller, *Armee, Politik und Gesellschaft in Deutschland, 1933–45* (Paderborn, 1979); J. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933–1945* (London, 1968); K. Kwiet and H. Eschwege, *Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand* (Hamburg, 1984).
- 15 Emphasis on indoctrination in O. Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45* (London, 1985); and M. Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat* (Hamburg, 1969). Outline of disciplinary measures in M. Messerschmidt, "German military law in the Second World War", in W. Deist (ed.), *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (Leamington Spa and New Hampshire, 1985), pp. 323–35. Emphasis on organization in M. van Creveld, *Fighting Power* (Westport, 1982); E. A. Shils and M. Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the

- Wehrmacht in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 12 (1948), pp. 280–315.
- 16 See, e.g., P. Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party as a political model," *Past and Present*, Vol. 30 (1965), pp. 65–95; G. Roth, *The Social Democrats of Imperial Germany* (Totowa, 1961); V. R. Berghahn, *Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 25–6.
- 17 V. R. Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914*, 4th edn (London, 1979), pp. 5–24.
- 18 See, e.g., E. J. Leed, *No Man's Land* (Cambridge, 1979); B. Hüppauf, "Langemarck, Verdun and the myth of a new man in Germany after the First World War," *War and Society*, Vol. 6, 1988, pp. 70–103; R. Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 42–84.
- 19 See, e.g., on the army as an institution, K.-J. Müller, *Das Heer und Hitler* (Stuttgart, 1969); R. J. O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933–39* (London, 1966). On senior ranks and resisters, K.-J. Müller, *General Ludwig Beck* (Boppard am Rhein, 1980); J. Kramarz, *Stauffenberg* (Frankfurt/M., 1965). Some initial work on junior officers in Bartov, *Eastern Front*, pp. 40–67; I. Welcker *et al.*, *Qualifikation zum Offizier?* (Frankfurt/M., 1982); D. Bald, *Der deutsche Offizier* (Munich, 1982).
- 20 Bartov, *Eastern Front*, pp. 43–7.
- 21 B. Kroener, "Die Personelle Ressourcen des Dritten Reiches im Spannungsfeld zwischen, Wehrmacht, Bürokratie und Kriegswirtschaft 1939–1942", in *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt* (ed.), *Das deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. VI (Stuttgart, 1988), pp. 871–989. R. Absolon, "Die personelle Ergänzung der Wehrmacht im Frieden und im Kriege," typescript of an article issued by the Bundesarchiv-Zentralnachweisstelle (Kornelimünster, 1972); U. Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter*, 2nd edn (Berlin, 1986).
- 22 C. Streit, *Keine Kameraden* (Stuttgart, 1978); Bartov, *Eastern Front*, pp. 107–19.
- 23 M. G. Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans* (Athens, Ohio, 1977), p. 196. See also V. R. Berghahn, "Meinungsforschung im 'Dritten Reich'," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, Vol. 1, 1967, pp. 82–119.
- 24 Kershaw, "Hitler Myth," p. 209.
- 25 Steinert, *Hitler's War*, pp. 264–73; Kershaw, "Hitler Myth," pp. 217–18.
- 26 Steinert, *Hitler's War*, p. 272.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 282–3.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 289.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 298–300.
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 301–2, where reports of the Reich propaganda office from late February 1945 are also cited, contrasting the "profound lethargy" of the "so-called middle classes" with "the working class in large factories, which continues to fulfil its responsibilities in an exemplary manner."
- 31 *The Goebbels Diaries 1939–1941*, trans. and ed. by F. Taylor, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 446.

- 32 Ibid., pp. 452–3.
- 33 *The Goebbels Diaries: The Last Days*, ed. by H. Trevor-Roper, 2nd edn (London and Sydney, 1979), p. 21.
- 34 Ibid., p. 34.
- 35 Ibid., p. 40.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 72–3, 78, 94, 265, 276, 304. Here the claim is constantly made that the poor morale of disintegrating *Wehrmacht* units is badly affecting the civilian population.
- 37 Ibid., p. 75.
- 38 *The Goebbels Diaries: The Last Days*, ed. by Trevor-Roper, 2nd edn (London and Sydney, 1979), p. 80.
- 39 Ibid., p. 82.
- 40 Ibid., pp. 89, 95.
- 41 Ibid., p. 113.
- 42 Ibid., p. 143.
- 43 E. von Manstein, *Aus einem Soldatenleben* (Bonn, 1958), pp. 353–4.
- 44 H. Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 4th edn (London, 1977), p. 436.
- 45 Ibid., p. 462.
- 46 Graml, *German Resistance*, pp. 195–7, 232–3; Steinert, *Hitler's War*, p. 267.
- 47 J. von Herwarth, *Against Two Evils* (London, 1981), pp. 203ff. Even the diary entries and letters collected in H. Meier-Welcker, *Aufzeichnungen eines Generalstabsoffiziers 1939–42* (Freiburg, 1982), pp. 128–9, 148, 150, etc., betray his and his troops' astonishment at gradually discovering that the Russian *Untermenschen* were actually human beings.
- 48 Herwarth, *Two Evils*, p. 255.
- 49 Ibid., p. 254.
- 50 Some 40 milliard letters were exchanged between the German front and rear during the Second World War. See O. Buchbender and R. Sterz (eds), *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges* (Munich, 1982), p. 9.
- 51 See further on this in my article, "Daily life and motivation in war," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 12, 1989, pp. 200–14; and in my book, *Hitler's Army. Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- 52 Bartov, *Eastern Front*, pp. 92–100; V. R. Berghahn, "NSDAP und 'Geistige Führung' der Wehrmacht 1939–45," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 17, 1969, pp. 17–71.
- 53 Further in M. I. Gurfein and M. Janowitz, "Trends in Wehrmacht Morale" in D. Lerner (ed.), *Propaganda in War and Crisis* (New York, 1951), pp. 200–8; Shils/Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration," p. 304.
- 54 Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg; RH26-12/238, 26.11.40, p. 7.
- 55 Buchbender/Sterz, *Gesicht*, pp. 72–3. letter 101.
- 56 Ibid., p. 74, letter 104.
- 57 Ibid., p. 76, letter 108.
- 58 Ibid., p. 78, letter 116.
- 59 Ibid., p. 84, letter 134.
- 60 Ibid., p. 85, letter 139.

- 61 Ibid., pp. 86–7, letter 143.
- 62 Ibid., pp. 13–25.
- 63 A. Heck, *A Child of Hitler*, 3rd edn (Toronto, New York, and London, 1986).
- 64 R. Schörken, "Jugendalltag im Dritten Reich", in K. Bergmann and R. Schörken (eds), *Geschichte im Alltag – Alltag in der Geschichte* (Düsseldorf, 1982), pp. 238–9.
- 65 H.-U. Rudel, *Stuka Pilot*, 3rd edn (Maidstone, 1973), pp. 1, 189.
- 66 *Last Letters from Stalingrad* (London, 1956), pp. 27–8.
- 67 Schörken, "Jugendalltag," pp. 239–40.
- 68 Ibid., p. 240.
- 69 Ibid., pp. 240–1.
- 70 H. Böll, *Was soll aus dem Jungen bloss werden?* (Bornheim, 1981).
- 71 G. Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier*, 2nd edn (London, 1977), pp. 263–7.
- 72 Schörken, "Jugendalltag," pp. 242–4. See also H. Böll, *Der Zug war pünktlich*, 12th edn (Munich, 1980).
- 73 See, e.g., H. Scholtz, *Erziehung und Unterricht unterm Hakenkreuz* (Göttingen, 1985); G. Platner (ed.), *Schule im Dritten Reich*, 2nd edn (Munich, 1984); N. A. Huebsch, "The 'wolf cubs' of the new order: The indoctrination and training of the Hitler Youth," in O. C. Mitchell, *Nazism and the Common Man* (Washington D.C., 1981), pp. 93–114; D. J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany* (London, 1987), pp. 145–74.
- 74 L. Niethammer, "Heimat und Front. Versuch, zehn Kriegserinnerungen aus der Arbeiterklasse des Ruhrgebietes zu verstehen," in L. Niethammer (ed.), *Die Jahre weiss man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll* (Berlin, 1983), pp. 163–232.
- 75 I would like to thank Dr Ulrich Herbert for bringing this collection to my attention and for his instructive remarks on this issue as an active participant in the Ruhr industrial area oral history project.
- 76 See, e.g., L. Niethammer, "Fragen – Antworten – Fragen. Methodische Erfahrungen und Erwägungen zur Oral History," paper delivered at the Wiener Library Seminar, Tel-Aviv University, 1987.
- 77 Niethammer, "Heimat und Front," pp. 167–75.
- 78 Ibid., pp. 195–9.
- 79 Ibid., pp. 209–13.
- 80 Ibid., pp. 213–18.
- 81 See n. 15 above. A good example in Goebbels, *The Last Days*, p. 80.
- 82 Kershaw, "*Hitler Myth*," pp. 65–6, 71, 86–7, 90–3, 126–8, 132, 215.
- 83 On changes in promotion policy, see G. Papke, "Offizierkorps und Anciennität," in H. Meier-Welcker (ed.), *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Offizierkorps* (Stuttgart, 1962), pp. 177–206.