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PROLEGOMENA

We can never know how many people in August 1914 really believed that the war would be over by Christmas. What we do know is that the First World War witnessed the introduction of massive mechanised killing to the battlefield and to home fronts. Many soldiers, and their supplies, travelled to the edge of the front line by railway or petrol-powered vehicles; they dug shelters from which to fight and in which to rest, protected by rolls of mass-produced barbed wire; towards the end of the war some of them began to cross battlefields in armoured, petrol-driven war machines that could rip through the wire and cross over trenches. At sea, men fought from massive armoured warships, as well as from smaller boats that could travel beneath the waves. Soldiers and sailors blasted each other from the ground, from mines under the ground and from the air with mass-produced explosives. The millions involved on the battlefields had to be armed, fed, watered, clothed and treated with medicines, bandages and beds for all forms of battle injury and disease contracted while in uniform. Enforcing order on both the home and battle fronts, and the need to ensure that soldiers and sailors were available to fight and that their supply requirements were met, were tasks for various police organisations, yet in spite of the recent growth of research into the history of gendarmerie and police forces, this area has been sadly under-researched. The essays contained in this collection seek to begin redressing the situation and to encourage further research.

A high percentage of the men serving in police institutions have always been relatively young and they have often been recruited from former

soldiers. This had serious consequences when the nations and empires of Europe went to war in 1914. In Prussia, for example, the *Kriminalpolizei* lost more than half of its senior men when they were called back to the army as reservist officers; and by the end of the war one third of the posts in the Berlin *Schutzmannschaft* were unfilled.¹ Such was even the case in Great Britain which boasted of having a non-military, unarmed, essentially civilian police. The problem was that former soldiers, or sailors, serving in police forces were often reservists and in consequence, the moment that war was declared, these men were recalled to the colours. Similarly, given the patriotic fervour of 1914, where young policemen had not served in the armed forces, very many were determined to volunteer; and when conscription was introduced it became impossible for a young man of military age to join the police. The consequence was that police forces on different home fronts were rapidly reduced in numbers leaving the older men to shoulder the increased burdens occasioned by the war on the home fronts. Indeed, because of the need for men, some police were refused permission to leave after the date arrived for their retirement. At the same time in Britain “Special Constables” were appointed from volunteers to serve for the duration of the war.²

War did not mean an end or suspension of usual peacetime police duties. It was still necessary to investigate crime and to maintain order in the very broadest sense, but there were shifts in both crime and order as a direct result of the conflict.³ From the early months of the war there appeared to be an increase in offending by juveniles which many attributed to the absence of fathers, elder brothers, school teachers and others who might keep young people, especially young males, in check. In Austria and Germany some schools were at least partially requisitioned by the military which added further to the problem by reducing the hours that children and young people spent in the closed, supervised environment of the classroom. At the same time, it was feared that large camps full of young men in uniform would act as a magnet for young girls with the accompanying concerns about an increase in prostitution and the undermining of morality. Whether or not juvenile crime did increase, it became an issue for the depleted ranks of the police. Similarly, the worries about morality extended by the young women in the vicinity of army camps, garrison towns and naval dockyards led to more pressure on the police.⁴ In Britain some of this pressure was met with the recruitment of women police who were given a major role to play in the supervision of women moving into, and around, military districts.

The women police in Britain were also required to police young women who entered paid work, with opportunities to work greatly expanding for women during the war, most notably in burgeoning munitions factories. Women police had to search female munitions workers before they entered workshops in the morning to ensure that they carried nothing flammable, incendiary or likely to cause a spark and hence an explosion. At the end of the day they made similar searches to check that nothing was being smuggled out of the factory that could be used or sold-on for profit. Occasionally they had to deal with strikes and disorders among women workers. But in the same way that women workers sometimes felt that management was taking advantage or introducing silly, pettifogging rules and regulations, so many of the women police felt that they were patronised by their male colleagues, not least because they were not sworn in as official police officers. In order to make an arrest a women police constable had to call on a sworn male constable; moreover, since women police officers were not sworn in as officers of the law, any physical assault received was only the equivalent of an assault on an ordinary civilian. The maximum penalty for assaulting a male police officer was up to six months hard labour. The act of assaulting a women police officer, being no more than the equivalent of a Common Law assault on a civilian, carried the maximum penalty of a month in prison.⁵

War led to new legislation and new regulations for the home fronts that had to be enforced by the depleted, aging police institutions. Supervising blackout regulations when air raids threatened and watching for spies were just two of the most obvious wartime tasks; in the British experience the instances of the former far outnumbered finding any of the latter, but it did not stop men trying. The shortage of food and other necessities, together with the opportunity for profiting from the appropriation of different kinds of military supplies, such as clothing, footwear, medical supplies, soap, razor blades and bed-linen, led to an increase in the illicit economy. Across the combatant countries this expansion of illicit buying and selling became popularly known as the black market, *le marché noir*, *der schwarzer Markt*. Moreover, when supplies both legal and illicit gave out, the police found themselves having to deal with angry and frustrated crowds and at times this could mean persuading the owners of shops and market stalls to sell every marketable foodstuff they had.⁶ It also meant that the police might act with discretion, turning a blind eye to the activities of black marketeers, or to an angry population that mistreated fraudsters who appeared to be profiting unfairly.

Such was the case in the Habsburg Empire with the supposedly dependable Austrian gendarmes; and German military commanders in occupied Belgium were known to reject the appeals of smugglers for assistance when they were violently assaulted by Belgian crowds, even though the beneficiary of such activity was Germany.⁷

Once rationing was introduced, as it was across combatant countries, the police had to keep a watch for food hoarders. They were also expected to prevent hungry city dwellers invading farmers' fields in search of food stuffs—something that appears to have been a particular problem in wartime Germany. Rioting and disorder were always issues for the police to deal with, but war added a new dimension. In Britain there were riots directed at German shops and tradesmen; it was enough that an individual, a shop or restaurant had a German name for mischief makers to assemble, with hangers-on, and attack people or property. Pacifists and conscientious objectors were also the objects of popular hostility, and so too were workers that went on strike and sometimes even men who were returned from the front because their skills were needed at home; amongst the ultra-patriots the latter were indistinguishable from shirkers. Reluctantly, the police were required to check that the wives of serving soldiers or sailors were not spending the whole of their separation allowance on drink, and that war widows were not co-habiting with other men, thus making them ineligible for a widow's pension. The expansion of the tasks of the aging, depleted police workforce in England, together with the loss of their weekly rest day, fostered discontent and the growth of a police union; in August 1918 the police in London went on strike. The government caved in immediately with a succession of concessions and promises, but it was also resolved to break the police union. It did so, successfully, a year later when the police struck work for a second time.⁸

There were some policing duties directly related to the war effort, most notably the pursuit of deserters and draft dodgers. In such instances the police on the home front were commonly assisted by, or worked closely with, police specifically attached to the armed forces. Some police institutions spanned the army and the civilian world, such as the various forms of gendarmerie corps. In Britain there was no such force, but the civilian police worked alongside the Military Police. This was particularly necessary since the Military Police had no jurisdiction over civilians and could only arrest men on the home front who were wearing military uniforms or who were clearly identifiable as military offenders.

The various forms of military police were also present in military camps and in front line areas. They undertook the duties of police on the home front, seeking out those suspected of committing conventional crimes, although the ordinary soldiers, and sometimes their officers too, preferred to deal with theft themselves. The military police had to supervise the movement of prisoners and also ensure the free flow of military transport to and from the front, a task that became particularly burdensome when a major offensive was due. Major E. A. McKechnie, appointed assistant Provost Marshal in Arras in February 1918, outlined his duties as being in charge of police traffic control and the fire brigade, issuing the necessary orders to them “The control of the civil population, issuing passes, visiting estaminets, looking after the troops in respects of all sorts of disease, seeing that all women were looked after, keeping the roads clear of all standing traffic, and guarding and protecting all civilian property—in fact to mother all, and be ready to answer any questions that might be raised”.

The military police were often disliked by troops for controlling drinking and investigating prostitution and their sexual behaviour. McKechnie reported four days of mayhem when one particularly notorious division arrived in Arras; it shot at and bombed both McKechnie and his police, and “hand to hand fighting” occurred everywhere.⁹ The presence of police close to the front, fulfilling their myriad of tasks as well as checking for absentees and deserters from the trenches did not endear them to the ordinary soldier. There were cynical jokes that the front line ended where you met the first gendarme or military policeman.¹⁰ In Italy the *Carabinieri* were particularly disliked, even hated, since they administered the ferocious disciplinary regime of Marshal Luigi Cadorna who ordered, most notoriously during the disaster at Caporetto, that deserters and men leaving the front should be summarily shot. *Carabinieri* units suffered enormous casualties as front line troops during the early stages of Italian participation in the war, but their increasing role and identification as police behind the front led the ordinary Italian soldiers to characterise them as *imboscanti*—men who avoided the front line, and as such they were sometimes stoned or shot at.¹¹

Wars may end with an armistice or the clear defeat of one side, but this does not mean an automatic end to the wartime duties of the police. Demobilisation requires management and hence the orderly supervision of getting men out of military uniforms and back to their homes. Demobilisation at the end of the First World War did not proceed as

well as it might have done. The German Army on the Western Front just turned their back on their positions and walked home. Since many of them walked home with their weapons, to a country starving as a result of blockades by enemies and tumbling into serious unrest and revolution, there were major problems for the police who stayed at their posts. Among the allies there were military personnel who believed that demobilisation was not progressing fast enough. Many men believed that they were unfairly being kept in uniform while others, who had served for a shorter period or through some form of favouritism, were being released ahead of them. Much of this trouble was considered too serious to be left to the police and in several instances, troops were deployed. In Germany the police disappeared from the streets for a short period, overawed by the Workers and Soldiers Council and unsure who was responsible for public security. At first, and with more success in the countryside than towns, citizen militias were organised and then the new government recruited and deployed tough military auxiliaries—the first *Freikorps* units.¹²

Further police duties related to war can also be required when a conflict is over and the victors decide to occupy what had been enemy territory. French police institutions, notably the *Gendarmerie Nationale* moved into the contested territories of Alsace and Lorraine that had been seized by Prussia in 1871 and retaken in 1918. Equally important were those areas of German territory occupied by the victorious allies for several years following the war. A small group of the more radical women police, now redundant in Britain because of their uncompromising attitudes, were sent to Cologne in July 1923. Here they trained a local cadre of German women police recruits, sought to enforce more moral behaviour on German women found loitering near British Army installations and investigated any woman intending to marry a British soldier. The British military authorities believed that they did a good job, but they were often unpopular with both the German population and ordinary British soldiers.¹³

The soldiers that occupied the Rhineland brought their own police with them. Captain Ferdinand Tuohy, a former newspaper man and intelligence expert, recalled the British arrival in Cologne: “In the public thoroughfares red-capped military police might have been seen, from the first hour, directing traffic beside German police”. The main role of the Military Police appears to have been, according to Tuohy, “entering cafés in civilian clothes and ordering drinks they had no right to ask

for. A duty which made them none too popular".¹⁴ There were other things that made the Royal Military Police unpopular with the local population, such as enforcing regulations on local railways, which reserved some compartments for British Army officers, their ability to demand proof of identity from individual Germans and their enforcing of black market regulations. For the starving Germans, allied food and the chocolate, cigarettes, soap and so forth that could be purchased or otherwise acquired from their occupiers were like manna from heaven.¹⁵ The traditional hostility of the ordinary soldier in khaki to the military policeman remained undiminished with the policeman's ability to demand to see identity, a leave pass, to enforce regulations about drinking, to charge a man for dirty boots and equipment or for buttons being undone and for any breach of a myriad of other minor regulations.

The conclusion that "we need more research" can seem rather threadbare, yet in the case of police and war it is unquestionably relevant. Too often, even with reference to those police institutions closely linked to the military, the issues have been largely ignored. In some respects, this might be because of the notion that war is somehow an interruption to the usual, and that the history of war is the concern of military historians. The latter perspective is changing. The increasing interest in studying home fronts during wars, and the clear recognition that the end of a war does not lead overnight to a return to "normal" social, cultural and economic development are of vital importance to our understanding of the past. The recognition of what war meant for policing is a key element to these issues, one that has been too commonly and perhaps too easily ignored. The chapters in this book do not provide any definitive conclusions, rather they open up a range of issues that might be explored both in distinct, separate national examples and also in comparative experiences.

Clive Emsley

NOTES

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2. Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History*, Harlow: Longman, 1996, pp. 121–125, 130–132.

3. Some of the patrol books kept by police officers in the Hertfordshire Constabulary north of London have been made available online at <http://www.hertspastpolicing.org.uk> (19 February 2019). These demonstrate clearly how the ordinary police officers in a relatively rural county maintained their usual tasks (e.g., searching for missing persons, dealing with animal cruelty, petty theft, drunkenness) and administered new tasks (such as the billeting of soldiers, distributing regulations under the Defence of the Realm Act—particularly regarding drunkenness and licensing hours—arresting and giving evidence against deserters and looking for escaped prisoners of war).
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