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Jeffery, K. (2005). 'Hut ab', 'promenade with kamerade for shokolade', and the Flying Dutchman: British soldiers in the Rhineland, 1918-1929. *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 16(3), 455-473.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290500207735>

Published in:
Diplomacy and Statecraft

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
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On: 01 April 2014, At: 02:46

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Diplomacy & Statecraft

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fdps20>

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Published online: 07 Aug 2006.

To cite this article: Keith Jeffery (2005) "Hut ab," "Promenade with Kamerade for Schokolade," and the Flying Dutchman: British Soldiers in the Rhineland, 1918-1929, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 16:3, 455-473, DOI: [10.1080/09592290500207735](https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290500207735)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592290500207735>

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"HUT AB," "PROMENADE WITH KAMERADE FOR SCHOKOLADE," AND THE FLYING DUTCHMAN: BRITISH SOLDIERS IN THE RHINELAND, 1918–1929

Keith Jeffery

This essay explores the social history of the "British Army of the Rhine," especially their interactions with the German population, over the eleven-year period of occupation in Cologne and part of the Rhineland. It covers the initial, sometimes fraught establishment of the occupation and interactions with the civil population, especially the perennial problem of British soldiers' relations with German women. These were initially prohibited altogether, but the rule was quickly relaxed, and the British authorities even accepted and regulated the use of brothels, leading to criticisms back home. The essay also discusses the comparatively small number of serious violent crimes (including four murders) during the occupation, and concludes that the occupation was characterized on both sides by grudging acceptance and some degree of forbearance.

Between December 1, 1918 and December 12, 1929 over 300,000 British and British Empire troops served in the British Army of Occupation in Germany. Their experience has not much troubled historians. Sir James Edmonds' volume in the British "official history of the Great War" series was published in a limited edition in 1944.¹ Although Edmonds had particularly sought out "domestic details" of the Rhine Command, including, "intercourse with inhabitants, including the ladies (professional and otherwise), restaurants and beer halls,"² the volume only deals with such matters in general terms. The only modern extended study of the British occupation is David Williamson's *The British in Germany*, published in 1991.³ Williamson aimed "to show how the subaltern, private soldier, civilian officials and their dependants lived in what were at times virtually British colonies in Germany,"⁴ but the book has comparatively little about personal Germano-British relations. This study explores the social history of the "British Army of the Rhine" (BAOR), especially their interactions with the German population over the three main phases of the eleven-year occupation: from the beginning of December 1918 until early 1919 covering the immediate circumstances of the Allied march into Germany and the

beginning of the occupation; then to January 1920, when the possibility remained that the forces in Germany might have to be used to compel German acceptance of the Allied peace terms; and finally after 10 January 1920, when the Treaty of Versailles was ratified, the Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission inaugurated and civil control of Occupied Germany established.

On December 1, 1918 Allied troops began to cross the German frontier. The British made a particular effort to include any men—"they were not many"—who had arrived in France in 1914, and to ensure that Dominion troops—Canadian, Newfoundland, New Zealand, Australian, and South African—were among the first to cross the frontier.⁵ By December 9, British troops had reached the Rhine and by December 13, completed the occupation of an area of approximately a thousand square miles of German territory west of the Rhine, as well as the chief Rhineland city of Cologne and a "Cologne Bridgehead," extending some ten miles or so east of the city. The area contained about 1,400,000 inhabitants, of whom 600,000 lived in Cologne. To the north and west was the Belgian area of occupation, and to the south, the American and French areas.

How would Allied troops adapt to being a conquering army of occupation, and how would Germans respond? Edmonds described the Germans' attitude as "one of indifference tempered with curiosity; the officials were studiously polite." Billeting of Allied troops proved no problem—"the inhabitants, accustomed to billeting in peace time as well as in war, made few difficulties on that account."⁶ Captain Charles Dudley Ward of the Welsh Guards, recorded in his diary that his billet in the outskirts of Cologne was "not at all bad but frigid politeness from the people." Their "one desire," however, "seems to be friendly. They will do anything for you & give no trouble."⁷ Some Rhinelanders preferred British troops to the wartime German army. T. H. Howard spoke to an elderly female servant of a propertied German family: "'You don't find us as bad as you expected, then?' said the officer. 'All I know', she answered, 'is that the roads are safe for women now, there's no more stealing, and I don't have to sleep with a revolver under my pillow.'"⁸ Percy Creek, an artilleryman billeted with an English-speaking schoolmaster in a village to the south of the bridgehead zone, recalled "how at every chance he berated the German war lords" and at first suspected "that he was trying to curry favour with the British, but when I knew him better as a kind gentle man, a scholar, who hated war, lust and greed, I realised he was sincere."⁹

Nonetheless the British high command took no chances. After consulting Marshal Foch, the overall Allied commander, the Adjutant-General established the general policy for the Army of Occupation in a memorandum issued on November 27, 1918. This preserved the basic administrative structure of German local government, and "the life of the civilian population

shall so far as possible continue uninterrupted and with the minimum of interference,” though under the supervision of the British military authorities. These authorities could issue regulations controlling billeting, the movement of population and the sale of alcohol. Military “Summary Courts” were set up to consider “breaches of orders issued by the British military authorities, acts to the prejudice of the British Armies, or offences against the persons or property of British or Allied subjects.”¹⁰

On December 2, General Sir Herbert Plumer, the first commander of the British Army of Occupation issued nineteen regulations, the *Anordnungen*, which established the conditions for the initial occupation period. All civilians had to have identity cards, their movements beyond their immediate locality were severely restricted and with a curfew from 7.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. All methods of communication—telephone, wireless, carrier pigeon, post and telegraph—were strictly controlled and the “taking of photographs out of doors by civilians” was forbidden. The nineteenth regulation proved to be among the most irritating, for British and Germans: “All persons of the male sex will show proper respect for British officers [not, of course, the other ranks] and at the playing of the British National Anthem, in the case of civilians by raising their hats, in the case of persons in uniform by saluting.”¹¹ This required German civilians to doff their hats to British officers, even in passing. It was, reported one journalist, “a French notion,” but it was swiftly modified.¹² On January 5, 1919 an amended regulation required civilians to doff their hats only when addressing or being addressed by British officers.¹³ Germans in uniform—postmen, railway servants, and policemen—had to continue to salute British officers.¹⁴

Some British troops applied the regulation with particular vigor:

At least in the early days of 1919, male Germans were required to step into the roadway and uncover when passing a British officer or a party of marching troops. Failure to comply brought the sharp reminder ‘*Hut ab*’ (‘hat off’), an order which was joyfully rendered by exuberant ‘other ranks’ as ‘hoot up, Fritz!’¹⁵

Such high-spirited horse-play is unsurprising when large numbers of young men are licensed to lord it over a defeated enemy. Charles Dudley Ward recorded some drink-fuelled Christmas jollities. On Christmas Day he and some fellow officers:

went into town to see if we could get some fun. Jack said he would take us to a good place & introduced us to a low café where dancing was going on. For some unknown reason the youngsters immediately began to “rag” the place. They said it was because it annoyed them to

see Huns dancing. Anyhow we all joined in & raced round in a ring holding each others hands with the Hun dancers in the centre. As we all wear enormous pistols here they were quite alarmed & the women began to squeal. Then someone let go & Ball swung round & knocked over a table. Fearful crash of glasses. Old Vickery was there with some of his staff & they began to utter fox hunting yells. It was really funny. The civilians went out in one stream followed by us. In five minutes we had emptied the place & as Ball said once more established our superiority! We then had an excellent dinner with Rhine salmon & lager beer & got back by the last tram at nine. Everyone thought it a most successful Xmas [sic] day!!¹⁶

This escapade followed what Ferdinand Tuohy described as “the first untoward incident of the occupation.” On Christmas Eve rank and file soldiers “forcibly invaded cafés which had been set aside for warrant officers and N.C.O’s, free fights, and the striking of seniors resulting.” Frustration at the occupation regime’s restrictions contributed to the disorder. “Victory? Pooh!,” said the British Tommy, “Every second blinking place out of bounds.”¹⁷ Williamson describes it as “boisterous ‘undergraduate’ behaviour,” undoubtedly alcohol fuelled, citing the case of “two drunken officers [who] placed chamber-pots on the heads of the statues of Kaiser Wilhelm and Kaiserin Augusta” during the evening of January 4, 1919.¹⁸

Dudley Ward, whose diary is vividly revealing of British officer attitudes in early-occupied Germany, enforced the “hats off” regulation in January 1919 when the Welsh Guards’ regimental colours were paraded through Cologne. “A crowd of police,” he noted, “ordered the civilians to take their hats off—those who didn’t had them knocked off. Ball & I cut across the square & marched by the side of ours & had the greatest fun removing hats.”¹⁹ The *Anordnungen* requirement for Germans to “show proper respect” to the British was also capable of wide interpretation, as Ward further testifies:

[February 6] We still have the amusement of running in Germans for minor offences—much can be done with the charge of “behaving in an insolent manner to His Majesty’s Forces”! They get imprisonment up to two months with hard labour & fine to a thousand marks. They can get more but that is the most we have done up to now, the offender being an ex-officer who tried to push his way across our parade ground!²⁰

British responses to perceived German insult could have more serious consequences. In May 1919 an officer believed three boys cycling past

British troops insulted them. His warning shots fatally wounded one of the cyclists. The boy's family were offered derisory compensation though the officer was cashiered "despite his plea that he had often employed similar methods in the colonies."²¹

A much resented order, issued on December 17, warned troops against fraternization with the inhabitants. "Any man," it said, "seen walking with a German woman" would be arrested.²² A pious instruction added: "Intercourse with the inhabitants will be confined to what is essential and will be marked by courtesy and restraint."²³ This was a counsel of perfection and certainly difficult to enforce. The Americans attempted to enforce it even within the soldiers' billets, but the British Military Police only really clamped down on public behaviour. Percy Creek wrote that "the Military Police, officers and N.C.Os, who stamped on any show of fraternization in the streets, could not police every billet," and that "during the long winter evenings the Schoolmaster invited Nobby Clark and I into his parlour where his wife gave us a bowl of potatoe [*sic*] and bean soup." There were also eight females, employed in a government office in Bonn, some of whom joined Creek and the others in the evening. The Military Police later caught Creek walking with one of the girls, and he suffered the stiff penalty of fourteen days' Number One Field Punishment, roped to a gun-wheel.²⁴

In February 1919 the II Corps newspaper, *The Watch on the Rhine*, published some gently satirical verses on the "no fraternizing" order:

But stern and grim an order came
Which caused us much surprise –
The frauleins, from a distance love,
But you must not fraternise.

Now when a buxom fraulein says
"Sir, have you Cho-ko-lat?"
You have to scowl and utter "Nix"
And other words like that.
Of course, you still a sigh can heave,
Or love her with your eyes;
Don't put your arm around her waist
'cos then you fraternise.²⁵

Fraternization with local women was difficult to stop with the British garrison 290,000-strong in January 1919.²⁶ "In one respect," argued Ferdinand Tuohy in his lively 1931 account of the occupation, "it was not unlike the prohibition law since in America. Enforcement of the 'no frating' order lacked the moral sanction of officers and men alike, and so

came under constant discussion—and probably, as with prohibition, led, if the truth were only known, to more consorting with *Fräulein* than would have eventuated had no ban ever existed.”²⁷ The increasingly unenforceable rule was abolished in July 1919. T. H. Howard noted that some social tensions resulted from Rhineland girls seeking the company “of young men who possessed not only the excitement of novelty but also [he asserted] far better manners than the local youths and far more money in their pockets.” Crucially, the British soldiers had “supplies of chocolate from the canteen, a delicacy for which the German girls had long been obliged to sigh in vain. So ‘promenade with kamerad for schokolade?’ became a recognized form of invitation which was presumably seldom refused, and Fritz and Hans found themselves left at the post.”²⁸

Many of these meetings were, no doubt, honorable, and there were a number of marriages between British soldiers and German women during the occupation, despite active discouragement by the military authorities. Until March 1920 marriage to a German subject was prohibited. In March 1921, the Secretary for War told parliament that “approximately 112 officers and soldiers” had married German women.²⁹ By November 1923 the number had risen to 500 and by the end of 1925, it was 648.³⁰ In the summer of 1919 the *Cologne Post*, the BAOR’s own newspaper, warned “For five years or more the German nation has been nourished on hatred for Britain and it would be an unpleasant event for an English father if the first words his offspring spoke were ‘Gott strafe England.’”³¹

There were a number of “unofficial” marriages. In September 1919 a soldier on leave told *The Times* he had seen 23 British soldiers marrying German women in Cologne Cathedral; “a German to whom he had expressed surprise told him it was quite a common thing to see British soldiers marrying German girls.”³² General Sir William Robertson, who had succeeded Plumer as General-Officer Commanding (GOC) in April 1919 responded sharply: “Report absolutely untrue. No marriages between British soldiers and Germans have taken place in Cologne Cathedral, nor have any such marriages taken place in the occupied territories as far as can be ascertained after interrogation of the German authorities.”³³ The soldier reiterated his claim. “There were,” he said, “several thousands of our soldiers in German billets, and throughout the day they were allowed to go where and to do what they pleased.”³⁴

The male–female liaisons which most exercised the authorities were those involving prostitutes, principally in Cologne itself, a “cosmopolitan city,” which with the occupation “commenced to attract the worst elements of the scum of Europe.”³⁵ One Military Police officer remarked on the large number of prostitutes in Cologne since the Armistice, so many, indeed, “that that the rumour accounting for their presence seemed almost plausible. They were supposed to have been systematically collected and

left there by the Germans in 1918 on purpose to corrupt the incoming armies of occupation.” But “the truth was that they gathered quite naturally wherever money was being spent without any other stimulus.”³⁶ Prostitutes were registered in the Rhineland, and brothels operated openly, prompting criticism in Britain. In 1927 the Labor MP and temperance activist, Cecil Wilson, asked a parliamentary question about “licensed houses of prostitution” in the Allied occupation area. Commodore King, a junior War Office minister, ducked the question, replying that “there are, and have been, no licensed brothels” in the British area.³⁷

In fact the British authorities condoned the operation of brothels in Cologne. In April 1920 the Dean of Lincoln complained to the Convocation of Canterbury about the British tolerance of “disorderly houses for the exploitation of women.” There were, he asserted, “fifty of these houses in Cologne alone.”³⁸ While the “worst brothels” were closed,³⁹ others were not. Robert Coulson found that “one of the hardest and least pleasant duties” of the Police “Special Branch” was the monitoring of prostitutes. Anyone suspected of being one was arrested and brought to police headquarters where she was examined by a doctor: “The healthy ones were released, the diseased handed over to the German police who sent them to special reformatory hospitals.”⁴⁰ The incidence of venereal disease in the Rhine Army was a constant concern. In June 1920 the GOC, General Sir Thomas Morland (who succeeded Robertson in March 1920), observed that VD had increased by 350% “since the Germans took over control on signing the Peace.” “We are doing all we can to combat it,” he wrote, “but it is difficult in a large town of this nature where there are 30,000 women of loose character.”⁴¹ In March 1921 a Conservative MP, Captain Walter Elliot, raised the question of Rhine Army VD in parliament. The Secretary for War, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, admitted that the incidence of VD was “not satisfactory and has been the subject of much anxious consideration ever since the area was first occupied.” The incidence of the disease, however, had fallen slightly from 45.81 per 1,000 in the first quarter of 1920 to 37.80 per 1,000 a year later. Worthington-Evans assured “the House that every possible effort is unceasingly being made to reduce the amount of this disease among the troops of the British Army of the Rhine.” Among the efforts was “the spread of information regarding self-disinfection as followed in the United Kingdom,” where it had a marked beneficial effect.⁴²

Self-disinfection and the detaining (and also deporting) of diseased women were not the only means of combating VD. The latter policy recalled the nineteenth-century campaign in Britain against the Contagious Diseases Acts and raised criticisms among feminists and others as it fell exclusively and pejoratively on women.⁴³ Following what Sir James Edmonds privately described as “rather ill-informed agitation at home

about V.D. amongst our troops on the Rhine,”⁴⁴ in December 1922 a leading feminist, Mrs Margery Corbett Ashby, was allowed to visit Cologne to investigate. Mrs Ashby, who was Co-Honorary Secretary of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, London Branch, found nothing very surprising. Poverty, and unemployment, among women tended to lower moral standards. Germans from other parts, she remarked, “generally consider the population of the Rhineland more pleasure-loving than in other districts.” She thought the streets “seemed no worse than elsewhere, but being very narrow are crowded with very slow moving crowds, easy for new acquaintances to be formed.” Her impression of the soldiers in the cafés was that they “seemed very young and nearly all seemed to have had too much drink, flushed, sleepy or excitable faces, not really drunk. A large number in twos or threes without girls.” Corbett Ashby made three suggestions: that the British forces should be paid in sterling and not marks; that savings bank facilities be available in the pay rooms; and that “a corps of German Women Police should be formed,” some British Women Police being sent out to work alongside them. “The German women,” she argued, “could deal with the German girls, and the British women could deal with the British soldier.”⁴⁵

These recommendations were adopted,⁴⁶ but were not an unqualified success. Six British policewomen began duty in July 1923, alongside three German women. At the end of the year the GOC reported that the maintenance of the women police was “not important to welfare of Army,”⁴⁷ proposed to abandon the experiment. Corbett Ashby protested sharply in a letter to *The Times*. “Few people,” she wrote, “realize the quiet and wonderful work done by them.”⁴⁸ Katharine Tynan Hinkson, the Irish writer who had lived in the Rhineland for a year in 1922–23, added her support, expressing her “admiration of the spirit in which they [the women police] carried out their difficult and painful work.”⁴⁹ On the other hand, the women were ridiculed in the German press, as “*Halb Mann, Halb Frau*.” Arguing that “they were costing the British taxpayers £1200” per annum, “without any noticeable result,” the army withdrew them at the end of March 1925.⁵⁰ The experience of the 2nd Cameron Highlanders who arrived in Cologne in October 1923 suggests little could be done. After only a month in Germany the battalion adjutant, Captain Douglas Wimberley, wrote in his diary: “Venereal disease is a perfect curse here. We have had over ten cases already. Why the Jocks have not more sense I cannot imagine, as they have been told time and again of the dangers. We have tried everything we can to keep it down, loss of pay, punishments, precautions, etc., but it seems no use.”⁵¹ Corbett Ashby proposed a similar scheme during the Second World War, claiming the women police experiment as a success. The women police could “warn the soldiers.” She said that he had been told in 1922 that this duty “was an impossible

measure but,” she continued, “it was carried out, was not resented and worked. On several occasions young soldiers returning home on leave, even asked the women police to look after their girls for them.”⁵²

The condition of the civil population also drove some women to prostitution. “Black February” 1919 was a time of great privation for the Rhinelanders. Continuing food shortages following the wartime Allied blockade brought many of the malnourished population to starvation. This, accentuated by the presence of an adequately-fed occupation army, meant, according to Ferdinand Tuohy, some sold themselves for food and consequently “transformed many a father and brother and lover into a burning Spartacist.”⁵³ According to Robert Coulson, the hyperinflation of 1923 prompted desperate measures. An apparently decent man was charged with procuring his daughter to a soldier. “Soldiers had money and could get food from the canteen,” he said. After his daughter had refused to fall in with his plans, the man “went out himself, found a soldier in a beer-house, and brought him home.” Coulson’s response to the case, and that of his fellow policemen, throws interesting light on their own moral understanding: “We discussed the case in the office afterwards. We all came to the conclusion that conditions in Cologne being what they were, the girl had been wrong to refuse; the family had needed the food so urgently that to keep her personal chastity intact was a mere luxury.”⁵⁴

The composition of the Army of Occupation exacerbated discipline and behavioural problems. All the soldiers, and their families back home (not to mention the British Press), wanted demobilisation as quickly as possible. When no clear and demonstrably fair demobilisation scheme emerged, some soldiers began to “vote with their feet.” Men home on leave, refused to return to France or the Army of Occupation. Early in 1919 a wave of soldiers’ protests threatened the stability of the army as a whole.⁵⁵ Unrest appears to have spread to the troops in Germany, though the details are sketchy.⁵⁶ In 1943 Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, who had been Chief of Staff in the Army of Occupation in 1919, told Sir James Edmonds that there were “several very unpleasant mutinies in various units during Wully’s [Sir William Robertson’s] Command’. Massingberd said that Robertson had handled them “extremely well. . . . He went most carefully into each case usually on the spot to find out the cause of the outbreak. In most cases it was lack of good officers and ignorance & neglect on the part of temporary officers to look after their men & find out their small worries that led to the trouble.” Robertson sorted these situations out by putting “reliable officers in command of the units to get things right.” In a few other cases, however, “where it was clearly shewn that the men had no real cause for complaint & that the unrest was due to Bolshevism or pure devilment Wully came down very hard and he had little mercy.”⁵⁷ Unrest, moreover, was not confined to British soldiers.

On 4 January Sir Henry Rawlinson, commander of the British Fourth Army, noted that “the Canadians” had been “rather naughty” at Cologne.⁵⁸

Robertson’s memoirs mention little beyond that there was “some discontent amongst the men,”⁵⁹ but it is clear from his private correspondence that he was concerned. Five days after taking over the command from Sir Herbert Plumer, he wrote to Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War, that “generally, I find rather an easy-going spirit prevailing,” which he conceded was to be expected “after the tension of the last four or five years.”⁶⁰ A fortnight later he noted quite a lot of low-level unrest among his troops, which he mostly put down to the unsettled condition of the post-war army, and the men’s understandable impatience at the slowness of demobilization. As a contributory factor, however, he added that “it must also be remembered that the men are forbidden to ‘Fraternize’ with the inhabitants and therefore they are, at any rate in public, debarred from the supposed enjoyments attaching to female society.”⁶¹ In June he told the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that it was “difficult to imagine a more unorganised body or a greater lack of cohesion than I found on arrival here.” A clear difficulty was the absence of any clear policy defining the actual purpose of the occupation forces and it required “constant effort to keep people up to the mark, as one and all seem to have had enough of the war, and feel that there is no very definite object towards which they should strive.”⁶²

Many occupation army soldiers were very young. Churchill had accelerated the release of war service soldiers in response to the demobilization crisis and filled up the Rhine Army divisions with new recruits. In March 1920, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, found battalions of the Middlesex Regiment and the Black Watch “all very young, very raw, vary untrained.”⁶³ Such soldiers might be more liable than otherwise to cause problems. The British did not employ colonial troops in their occupation army, unlike the French who stirred deep, racially-fuelled antagonisms in Germany.⁶⁴ In a verse, “To a German complaining of the Occupation of the Rhineland after 1918,” the celebrated Irish poet, medical doctor and wit, Oliver St John Gogarty compared occupied Germany with the contemporaneous situation of “occupied” Ireland:

To have the black troops on the Rhine
Is bad enough; but Hans
If you were ruled by “English swine”
You’d have the Black and Tans.⁶⁵

The aims and role of the occupying forces were sometimes uncertain. One veteran recalled that “Army morale suffered in these early weeks in Germany through the difficulty of adjusting from the demands of active

warfare to the boring army duties of peace-time.”⁶⁶ There remained the possibility that the Army of Occupation might have to force terms on the Germans. Major Henry Harding (of the 1/2nd County of London Yeomanry) who had marched into Germany in December 1918 remembered that “life was interesting but really uneventful. It chiefly consisted of training young troops and keeping the men efficient. It was not until June 1919 that we had any excitement.”⁶⁷ Late in May the Rhine Army was instructed to prepare for an advance into Germany in order to put pressure on Germany to sign the peace treaty. Sir William Robertson describes in his memoirs the preparations made for this and asserts that the troops were “elated at the prospect of going forward,”⁶⁸ an opinion flatly contradicted by Henry Harding’s recollection:

We had orders to march on into Germany. No one knew what would happen. We were ready to move in our steel hats, full complement of ammunition and full rations, and we were to proceed at 6 p.m. The time came, and our orders were to delay another hour, and at 7 p.m. came the joyful news that Peace had at last been signed.

You can imagine our feelings during those brief hours of uncertainty. Was the war going to commence again?⁶⁹

The army might also have been required in March 1920 at the time of the Kapp Putsch; and in January 1923 when the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr occurred. How effective militarily would it have been?

The army’s traditional remedy for boredom was to step up training, encourage sport and promote “safe” recreational facilities. It created football and field hockey fields, though “cricket pitches were limited in number.” The army authorities issued 2,380 sets of boxing gloves, 37,000 pairs of “gym shoes,” 52,700 football boots, 530 hockey sticks and 90 hockey balls.⁷⁰ Many of the surviving accounts of the occupation emphasise leisure pursuits as much as any military activities. Writing in August 1919, Irene Laying, serving with Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Nursing Service Reserve, told her sister “We have had lots of social functions—dances, dinners etc & we often go into Cologne, we are always greatly stared at. All our journeys are free of charge & we travel like lords . . . our Med. Officers have built a tennis court, so we have always that to go to.”⁷¹ Returning to the Rhine Army in 1921, Percy Creek found that life in Cologne was now “jam for the British soldier, the strict fraternising rules had been eased. . . . The German mark was on the ground and an English shilling would enable one to have a meal at one of the better restaurants.” Creek spent “several very pleasant evenings at the Café Germania. We

had a seat in the balcony and after a meal we listened to a violinist playing the beautiful songs of Schubert, Strauss and Brahms.”⁷²

The opera appears in many accounts of Cologne life. Early in the occupation seats at every performance were reserved in the Cologne opera house for British troops. These were “allocated, in turn, to the various units stationed within easy reach of Cologne.”⁷³ One officer recorded in March 1919 he not only saw “a fine performance of the ‘Flying Dutchman,’” but also “enjoyed the comfort of a well-appointed hotel,” which cost him nothing as the Germans “had to pay for it themselves.”⁷⁴ He was lucky to have seen a Wagner opera. In April 1919, Colonel Edward Beddington took over as Plumer’s Intelligence chief in Cologne. This position made him not only “head of the Secret Service,” but, curiously, also responsible for approving the opera programme. Once a week, he recalled in his memoirs, the director of the opera would come and submit his programme: “All I did was to cut out too much Wagner if such, as it often was, was included and make him substitute something lighter.”⁷⁵

For the British, German hyperinflation brought astonishing local wealth. The extremely advantageous

rate of exchange enabled all ranks to make full use of what was to most of them a unique opportunity of hearing famous operas performed by first-class singers. . . . A striking example of the effect of exchange rates was that on one typical occasion a British officer drove to the Opera House in a taxi, viewed the performance from one of the best seats, partook of the substantial meal [served at the interval] and a half-bottle of wine, drove back to his hotel and found that his evening had cost him a total of elevenpence [i.e., less than five decimal pence].⁷⁶

Not all treated the performances with respect. Douglas Wimberley recalled in 1924 deliberately behaving badly at the opera to insult the Germans on the stage and in the audience. There were “about five of us,” he wrote, “sitting in one of the boxes and all putting our legs, in their light tartan trews, up on the front of the theatre box, and pretending to go to sleep, instead of listening to some over-fat German blonde singing lustily in some Wagner opera.”⁷⁷ By contrast, Sir Alexander Godley, GOC Rhine Command from March 1922 to June 1924, wrote that “I went to Cologne wondering if I should ever be able to sit out a Wagner opera,” but “came away a Wagner ‘fan.’”⁷⁸ His memoirs suggest recreation to have been more significant for Godley than military or political affairs. There were “delightful expeditions” to the surrounding countryside, where “the wooded and mountainous country . . . was ideal for picnics”; his period of command coincided with the decennial performance of the Oberammergau Passion play; the racing “was great fun”; there was excellent shooting

to be had; the “golf-links were only a mile from my back gate”; and “our annual horse show was a great event.”⁷⁹

Katharine Tynan observed that “the Opera is perhaps the only place in Cologne except the public conveyances where Germans and English sit side by side,”⁸⁰ evidence of the social self-sufficiency of the Rhine Army. There was pressure for fraternisation, but many soldiers tried to avoid Germans. As one ranker told Ferdinand Tuohy, “What’s the use of a place where you can’t understand a word of what’s going on? Only tarts to guttenacht and wieviel to? And ’aving to be’ave an’ look like mucking dolls all the time. Give me a good old Saturday night in Blighty!”⁸¹ The occupying army and civilian population became increasingly separate as the occupation became established, especially after Sir William Robertson permitted British army wives to join their spouses in Germany in mid-1919.

Robert Coulson arrived just after Christmas 1922. “Life in Cologne was much the same as in any other garrison abroad. I need not have been concerned with the problem of whether to avoid Germans or not; there was no question of any personal contact with them. The garrison, at least the officers and their wives—especially the wives—kept entirely to themselves.”⁸² Ferdinand Tuohy argued that following the arrival of the wives, the BAOR began “to assume that self-contained, almost segregated air which was to characterize it for the remainder of its life.” He also asserted that the British women “kept up the hatreds of the War more,”⁸³ a point echoed by Katharine Tynan, who asserted that “British wives,” especially those “whose minds are not cultivated,” are “apt to be the repositories of a crude patriotism.” She reported “a terrible meeting” with the wife of an NCO in a crowded tram. “Wot I says is, w’y didn’t we do wot the French wanted us to do—beat’em right back to Berlin? Let ’em ’ave it proper. These yere ’Uns they’re not ’alf-beaten yet.” Tynan’s embarrassment was compounded by her assumption that most of the Germans on the tram could understand English.⁸⁴

Despite all this there was surprisingly little serious or violent overt antagonism between British and German. In 1919 a German ex-serviceman, Sergeant Swaboda, murdered a New Zealander. He evaded prosecution for six years by staying out of the Occupied Area. On his return he was convicted and sentenced to death. The GOC commuted this to life imprisonment. He was released after the occupation ceased in 1929.⁸⁵ In February 1923 a British soldier shot dead a German civilian “during a brawl in a Cologne café.” He went unpunished.⁸⁶ Two other cases of murder came before the Summary Court while Sir John Du Cane was GOC (1924–7), but neither appears to have been political.⁸⁷ In October 1924, a Scottish soldier, Private George Halliday of the Cameron Highlanders, “in company with another soldier” met a woman (Du Cane says she was a prostitute) in a café at 10.30 p.m. An hour later the other soldier left the two together,

and at about midnight “screams were heard by several German witnesses who saw Louisa Fuchs stabbed repeatedly with a bayonet by a Scots soldier whom they could not identify.” Halliday returned to barracks, but his bayonet was later found to have “traces of fresh human blood on the blade and hilt.” He was found guilty and sentenced to death. Du Cane, having ascertained “that according to German law unpremeditated murder is not punishable by death,” had the man’s sentence commuted to fifteen years’ penal servitude.⁸⁸ In December 1924, a Private Wright of the West Yorkshire Regiment, shot dead Lance-Corporal Whitham of the Cameron Highlanders (an ill-starred regiment, it seems), and so badly wounded “a German girl name Marie Stasiak, who was with him,” that she later died. It was suggested in *The Times* “that jealousy was the motive of the crime.” At his court-martial Wright’s defense was “pathological drunken-ness.” He was sentenced to death, but also had his sentence commuted, this time to life. Du Cane believed it “very undesirable to have a soldier shot by a firing party in the circumstances.”⁸⁹

Both these “crimes of passion” might have occurred as easily in a British garrison town. A more ambiguous case occurred in 1928 when a German policeman, “*Landjäger* Haas,” died after an exchange with some British soldiers of the Manchester Regiment. The Britons had been walking in the countryside and were approached by Haas who “spoke to them in German, presumably intimating that they were trespassing.” The men did not understand, and an argument ensued, during which Haas was knocked to the ground. He “was suffering from an internal complaint and his fall was the cause of its aggravation with the result that he died.” The soldier concerned was acquitted of murder “on the ground that the blow was not the direct cause of death.” The affair stimulated critical comment in the German press, especially in the Berlin satirical journal, *Kladderadatsch*.⁹⁰

Sir John Du Cane stated that while he was GOC “there was no case of a murderous assault by a German on a British soldier.”⁹¹ *The Times* did report a number of German attacks in 1924 suggesting that the potential for violent, if non-lethal, confrontations remained. Some Germans assaulted Captain Shaw of the Royal Army Medical Corps. He was returning from a cricket match when he “found the road blocked by several carts” which would not move. He was not in uniform, and, after failing to ascertain the name of the most obstructive German, seized the name-plate from his cart. The German “struck him with his whip” and others joined the assault, even though Shaw “repeatedly shouted in English that he was a British officer.” He was rescued “by two other Germans.” Three men were prosecuted. All “denied knowing that the driver of the motor-car was a British officer.” One of the Germans, Wilhelm Muhr was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment.⁹²

Captain Codyre, of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI), was returning to his camp at about midnight on July 31, when a dog in the accused's garden "began barking furiously." Codyre "threw some small stones at the dog twice," but the dog escaped and bit Codyre. A man "accompanying the dog," struck Codyre on the head "with a long instrument." Codyre "shouted that he was a British officer and got away." At his trial, the accused, Herr Goethling, "said that there had been frequent thefts of fruit from his garden at night, and that when stones were thrown at his dog by a person who subsequently ran away he thought that it must be a thief, and pursued him with a pitchfork. It was," he added, "too dark to see that it was a British officer whom he had pursued in error." Goethling, as the prosecutor accepted, had not planned to attack Codyre, who must have appeared to him as a drunk or thief. The president of the court, however, in an ineffably supererogatory remark, "expressed the opinion that it was the duty of the inhabitants to make sure, by every means in their power, that they did not attack British soldiers."⁹³

Germans did burgle British quarters. A officer of the DCLI awoke to find a German "holding his own service revolver to his head, while three other men ransacked the room." As they left he "snatched an automatic pistol from beneath his pillow," shot one man dead "and severely wounded another." A band of robbers was arrested and much stolen property—"chiefly British"—recovered.⁹⁴ In another case a German received twelve years from a military court for the burglary of British officers' quarters in Cologne. A second man received four years "for striking a British policewoman," and the appropriately-named Heinrich Half, "a one-legged man," got six years' imprisonment "for a violent assault on a military policeman."⁹⁵

What are we to make of these cases? It is difficult to make any hard and fast judgment. Only in 1924 did *The Times* report such significant cases of violence, yet the BAOR was steadily reducing in number. Perhaps the burglaries reflect a normalisation of the relationship as much as anything else. As German national self-confidence recovered, so "ordinary decent crime" towards the British, as much as towards anyone else, began to re-establish itself.⁹⁶

For the most part, Germans and British treated each other with forbearance, if not also tolerance. British military ceremonies including on Armistice Day, were well attended by Germans and witnessed in respectful silence. Some sporadic hissing was reported when the British left Cologne to move to Wiesbaden for the last three years of the occupation, but that scarcely rates as a major political demonstration. Neither does the occasion, raised before the Summary Court in Wiesbaden, when a German "was charged with throwing a potato at a passing British officer at the wheel of his car."⁹⁷ Perhaps a comment from a young officer to Ferdinand

Tuohy best sums up the Germano-British relationship as demonstrated through the whole occupation experience: “The Bôche? Oh, he’s been all right on the whole. Minds his own business and doesn’t give any lip.”⁹⁸ *Mutatis mutandis*, the same might generally be said of the BAOR.

NOTES

1. Sir James Edmonds, *The Occupation of the Rhineland, 1918–1929* (London, 1944; facsimile edn 1987). For the history of the volume, see the introduction to the 1987 reprint by G. M. Bayliss.
2. Edmonds to Lieut.-Colonel F. M. A. Morris, Sept. 26, 1942 (United Kingdom National Archives (henceforward TNA), CAB 45/81, file (i) general correspondence).
3. David G. Williamson, *The British in Germany, 1918–1930: The Reluctant Occupiers* (Oxford and New York, 1991). See also J. Garston, “Armies of occupation: II The British in Germany 1918–1929,” *History Today*, 11 (1961), pp. 479–89. And also the research of Richard Robinson, who alerted me to many important aspects of the subject (Richard Robinson, “Britain and the occupation of the Rhineland, 1918–1929” (MA thesis, University of Ulster, 1990)).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 4. David Williamson, “Cologne and the British,” *History Today*, 27 (1977), pp. 695–702, is more focused on social aspects but is both short and unreferenced. British Army of the Rhine records were destroyed during the London blitz (see Note, Sept. 24, 1943, TNA, CAB 45/81, file (i) general correspondence).
5. Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, p. 86.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
7. Diary of C. H. Dudley Ward, Dec. 22, 1919 (Dudley Ward papers, Imperial War Museum (IWM)).
8. T. H. Howard, “Tales of E. O. T. A.: I—The British Army of the Rhine,” *Army Quarterly*, vol. 47 (1943–44), p. 93.
9. “One Man’s Story,” p. 58 (Percy Creek papers, IWM 87/31/1).
10. Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, pp. 62–6.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 76–9.
12. Ferdinand Touhy, *Occupied 1918–1930: A Postscript to the Western Front* (London, 1931), p. 42.
13. Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, p. 136.
14. Major E. E. Gawthorn, “The British Army of the Rhine; a retrospect,” *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, 74/496 (1929), p. 762.
15. Howard, “Tales of E.O.T.A.,” p. 94.
16. Dudley Ward diary, Dec. 25, 1918.
17. Tuohy, *Occupied*, p. 44.
18. Williamson, *British in Germany*, p. 57.
19. Dudley Ward diary, Jan. 6, 1919.
20. *Ibid.*, Feb. 6, 1919.
21. Williamson, *British in Germany*, p. 56.
22. Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, p. 83.

23. Touhy, *Occupied*, p. 110.
24. Creek, "One Man's Story," pp. 59–60. Field Punishment No. 1 was abolished in 1923.
25. *The Watch on the Rhine*, no. 10, Feb. 1, 1919 (IWM, Papers of Capt. W. G. Cook, 77/183/1).
26. Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, p. 147. 1919 saw a very rapid decline in troop numbers. Figures for British troops in Germany on 1 Jan. are as follows: 1920: 40,594; 1921: 12,421; 1922: 4,630; 1923: 8,730; 1924: 8,873; 1925: 8,118. (*ibid.*, p. 181). In 1921–22 troop numbers fluctuated. Some supervised a League of Nations plebiscite in Silesia, and others were recalled to Britain because of industrial unrest.
27. Tuohy, *Occupied*, p. 106.
28. Howard, "Tales of E.O.T.A.," p. 94.
29. Hansard, Mar. 1, 1921, 138 H.C. Deb. 5s, col. 1591.
30. Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, p. 120; Secretary for War in House of Commons, *Hansard*, July 29, 1926, 198 H.C. Deb. 5s, col. 2320.
31. *Colongne Post*, July 25, 1919 (quoted in Williamson, *The British in Germany*, p. 58).
32. *The Times*, Sep. 17, 1919.
33. *Ibid.*, Sep. 23, 1919.
34. *Ibid.*, Sep. 24, 1919.
35. Gawthorn, "British Army of the Rhine," p. 760.
36. "Apex" (Robert Gustavus Coulson), *The Uneasy Triangle: Four Years of the Occupation* (London, 1931), p. 33.
37. *Hansard*, Dec. 13, 1927, 211 H.C. Deb. 5s, col. 2111.
38. "Vice in the Army," *The Times*, Apr. 30, 1920.
39. Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, p. 120.
40. "Apex," *The Uneasy Triangle*, pp. 33–6.
41. Morland to Sir Henry Wilson, Jun. 25, 1920 (IWM Wilson papers, HHW 2/57/6).
42. *Hansard*, Mar. 15, 1921, 139 H.C. Deb. 5s, col. 1262.
43. See Lesley A. Hall, "Venereal diseases and society in Britain, from the Contagious Diseases Acts to the National Health Service," in Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall (eds.), *Sex, Sin and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society since 1870* (London, 2001), pp. 120–36.
44. General notes on the Occupation of the Rhineland (TNA CAB 45/81, file (ii)).
45. Mrs Corbett Ashby, Visit to Cologne, Dec. 7th–11th, 1922: Report and Recommendations (IWM, Papers of Capt. Arthur Brian Ashby, p. 63).
46. See copies of letters by Mrs Corbett Ashby, Nov. 25, and Dec. 3, 1942 (*ibid.*).
47. General notes on the Occupation of the Rhineland (TNA CAB 45/81, file (ii)).
48. *The Times*, Dec. 24, 1923.
49. *Ibid.*, Jan. 2, 1924. Katharine Tynan wrote a sadly anodyne account of her time in Germany: *Life in the Occupied Area* (London, n.d. [1925]).
50. Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, p. 209; General notes on the Occupation of the Rhineland (TNA CAB 45/81, file (ii)).
51. Diary entry for Nov. 4, 1923, quoted in Major-General Douglas Wimberley, "Scottish Soldier," (ts autobiography), p. 200 (IWM Wimberley papers, pp./MCR/182).
52. Copy of letter to *The Times*, Nov. 25, 1942 (IWM, Papers of Capt. Arthur Brian Ashby, p. 63).

53. Tuohy, *Occupied*, p. 48.
54. "Apex," *Uneasy Triangle*, pp. 49–50.
55. See Keith Jeffery, "The post-war army," in Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds.), *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985; London, corrected edn, 1990), pp. 212–15 and Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918–1922* (Manchester, 1984), chs 2 and 3.
56. None of the studies on post-war military unrest mention the BAOR: Andrew Rothstein, *The Soldiers' Strikes of 1919* (London, 1980); Gloden Dallas and Douglas Gill, *The Unknown Army: Mutinies in the British Army in World War I* (London, 1985); and Dave Lamb, *Mutinies: 1917–1920* (Oxford & London, n.d.).
57. Montgomery-Massingberd to Edmonds, Jan. 23, 1943 (TNA CAB 45/81(i)).
58. What precisely this refers to is not clear. In his study of post-war unrest in the Canadian Expeditionary Force Desmond Morton says nothing about Canadian soldiers in Cologne (Desmond Morton, "Kicking and complaining": demobilization riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918–19," *Canadian Historical Review*, 61(3) (1980), pp. 334–60).
59. Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal* (London, 1921), p. 364.
60. Robertson to Churchill, Apr. 27, 1919 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA), Robertson papers, 6/4/4).
61. Robertson to Secretary, War Office, May 11, 1919 (*ibid.*, 6/4/6).
62. Robertson to Sir Henry Wilson, Jun. 6, 1919 (IWM Wilson papers, HHW 2/1A/19b).
63. Wilson diary, Mar. 12, 1920 (IWM Wilson papers).
64. Edmonds says bluntly that the use of "coloured troops" was "a mistake" (*The Occupation of the Rhineland*, p. 203). See also Keith Nelson, "The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Race as a Factor in Post-World War One Diplomacy" *Journal of Modern History* 42 (1970), pp. 606–27.
65. A. Norman Jeffares, *The Poems and Plays of Oliver St John Gogarty* (Gerrard's Cross, 2001), p. 422. The "Black and Tans" were in effect a military gendarmerie reinforcing the civil police during the 1919–21 Irish war of independence, whose ill-disciplined activities did much to undermine the legitimacy of British rule in Ireland.
66. "Some reminiscences in 1977/80 on the First Great War Years 1916/19" (IWM A. J. Jamieson papers, 88/52/1).
67. "First World War memoirs" (1929) (IWM Papers of Maj. Henry Norman Harding, 77/154/1).
68. Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal*, p. 365.
68. "First World War memoirs" (1929). Harding's manuscript diary backs up this recollection: June 23, 1919 "Packed up ready to move. Rumours all day. At 7.7 the Brig. came & told us the Huns had decided to sign. Great jubilation in the camp. Rained heavily" (IWM Papers of Maj. Henry Norman Harding, 77/154/1).
70. Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, p. 118.
71. Irene Laying to Nellie Laying, Aug. 21, 1919 (IWM, Papers of Mrs Irene Edgar).
72. Creek, "One Man's Story," p. 66.

73. Diary entry, Feb. 26, 1919 (IWM, First World War papers of Lieut. C. Carter, pp./MCR/141).
74. *Ibid.*, Mar. 5, 1919.
75. Edward Beddington, "My Life" (ts memoirs), p. 178 (LHCMA, Beddington papers).
76. Howard, "Tales of E.O.T.A.," p. 97.
77. Wimberley, "Scottish Soldier," p. 212 (IWM Wimberley papers, pp./MCR/182).
78. Sir Alexander Godley, *Life of An Irish Soldier* (London, 1939), p. 290.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 281–2, 190–1. A note in the "Official History" files rather confirms the priority given to recreation. "I feel bound to say that," wrote F. B. Bourdillon of the Foreign Office, "if the provision of polo grounds was one of the charges imposed on Germany as part of the costs of the army of occupation, I should be disinclined to advertise the fact!" (Bourdillon to Sir James Edmonds, Sep. 15, 1943, TNA CAB 45/81, file (ix) Comments, Foreign Office).
80. Tynan, *Life in the Occupied Area*, p. 258.
81. Tuohy, *Occupied*, p. 287.
82. "Apex," *The Uneasy Triangle*, p. 7.
83. Tuohy, *Occupied*, pp. 220–1.
84. Tynan, *Life in the Occupied Area*, pp. 206–7.
85. Tuohy, *Occupied*, p. 147; General Sir John Du Cane (GOC, BAOR, 1924–7) says it was an Australian soldier (Du Cane to Sir James Edmonds, Aug. 28, 1944 (TNA, CAB 45/81, file (i): general correspondence)).
86. Or, at least, it was not reported in the papers (information from *The Times*, Feb. 10, 1923).
87. Du Cane to Edmonds, Aug. 28, 1944 (TNA, CAB 45/81). There are some records in the UK National Archives in the Home Office series HO144 concerning these crimes, but these are all under a one hundred-year closure.
88. *The Times*, Nov. 17, and Dec. 1, 1924; Du Cane to Edmonds, Aug. 28, 1944 (TNA, CAB 45/81).
89. *The Times*, 24, Dec. 27, 1924 and Mar. 4, 1925; Du Cane to Edmonds, Aug. 28, 1944 (TNA, CAB 45/81). Du Cane's opinion does raise the question of what circumstances would have to obtain for him to approve an execution.
90. Report on Rhineland Occupation from Apr. 30, 1927 to Dec. 12, 1929, by Lieut.-Gen. Sir William Thwaites, Mar. 26, 1930 (TNA CAB 45/81, file (ii)).
91. Du Cane to Edmonds, Aug. 28, 1944 (TNA, CAB 45/81).
92. *The Times*, Aug. 7, 1924.
93. *Ibid.*, Aug. 15, 1924. Goethling was found guilty, but *The Times* did not report what sentence he received.
94. *Ibid.*, Oct. 22, 1924.
95. *Ibid.*, Dec. 8, 1924.
96. "Ordinary decent crime" is a term used in contemporary Northern Ireland to distinguish activities such as burglary from politically-motivated crime.
97. Touhy, *Occupied*, p. 249.
98. *Ibid.*