

**Officers Not Gentlemen: Officers Commissioned from the Ranks
of the Pre-First World War British Regular Army, 1903-1918**

by

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Abstract

The British army officer commissioned from the ranks had become a rare and politically contested phenomenon in the years leading up to the First World War. This research addresses a previously unexamined event and the consequences; how the conflict saw almost 10,000 commissions awarded to soldiers from the ranks of the pre-war British Army, with over 7,000 of these classed as ‘permanent’, constituting 42 per cent of regular army commissions. This was deeply threatening to the identity of gentlemen-officers that had embedded a culture of gentlemanliness parsed into the rules and behaviours that governed army life and the homo-social space of the officers’ mess. This investigation shows the emergence of the identity of the ranker officer, progressively defined during the war through a process of Othering, emphasising and exaggerating socio-cultural differences, particularly presentation and speech. The post-war officer class resumed its pre-war social and cultural character, maintaining its exclusivity and ethos, and the ranker officer was increasingly caricatured in the discourse surrounding regimental officering and Englishness. The ranker officer is fully examined for the first time in this thesis, crucially informing our understanding of the persistence of an elite through the continuing gentlemanly appropriation of British army officer identity.

Dedication

Amanda Deeks

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Glossary

Some abbreviations used in the text and footnotes:

Officer Army Ranks and Roles

AG	Adjutant Generals.
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff.
CO	Commanding Officer.
DAAG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant General.
Lieutenant-Colonel	Lieutenant Colonel.

Senior NCOs

BQMS	Senior Non-Commissioned Officer.
BSM	Battery Quarter-master Sergeant.
C Sgt	Battery Sergeant-major.
CQMS	Colour Sergeant.
CSM	Company Quarter-master Sergeant.
RQMS	Company Sergeant-major.
RSM	Regimental Quarter-master Sergeant.
SM	Regimental Sergeant-major.
WO	Sergeant-major.
	Warrant Officer (Grades WO I and WO II).

Junior NCOs

Bdr	Junior Non-Commissioned Officers
Cpl	Bombardier.
L Cpl	Corporal.
	Lance Corporal.

Other Ranks and Functions

IoG	Instructor of Gunnery.
IoM	Instructor of Musketry.

Forces, Corps, Divisions, Regiments and Units

BEF	British Expeditionary Force.
CEF	Canadian Expeditionary Force.
EEF	Egypt Expeditionary Force.
MEF	Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.
RAF	Royal Air Force.
WAFF	West African Frontier Force.
AOC	Army Ordnance Corps.
ASC	Army Service Corps.
MGC	Machine Gun Corps.
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps.
RFC	Royal Flying Corps.
Buffs	Royal West Kent Regiment.
KAR	Kings African Rifles.
RRRC	Kings Royal Rifle Corps.

MMGS	Motor Machine Gun Section.
PPCI	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.
RFA	Royal Field Artillery.
RGA	Royal Garrison Artillery.
RHA	Royal Horse Artillery.
RMA	Royal Marine Artillery.
RND	Royal Naval Division.
SLI	Somerset light infantry.
WAR	West African Regiment.

Others

CWGC	Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
OCB	Officer Cadet Battalion.
OTC	Officer Training Corps.
PoW	Prisoner of War.
RMA	Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst (Training officers for the infantry).
RMC	Royal Military College, Woolwich (Training officers for the Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers).

Distinctions and Awards

CBE	Commander of the British Empire.
CMG	Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George.
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal.
DSO	Distinguished Service Order.
KCB	Knight Commander of the Bath.
MBE	Member of the British Empire.
MC	Military Cross.
MID	Mentioned-In-Despatches.
MM	Military Medal.
OBE	Order British Empire.
VC	Victoria Cross.

Introduction

Can you verify if Thomas Wadner, 4, Dudley Street, Bedford is entitled to use the rank of Captain. This man is in our employ and it seems incredible to us that he has ever held this rank. He claims to have been a Captain in the K.R.R.'s. We should be much obliged if you could verify this.¹

In 1936, a director of Laxton Bros., a Bedford plant nursery, wrote to the War Office asking about the military record of one of their employees. As their incredulity suggests, the King's Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC) was an elite infantry regiment of the British army, and widely perceived as being exclusively officered by public school-educated gentlemen. Despite his military record, Thomas Wadner did not fit with this perception. Born into a working-class Bedford family, he was an agricultural labourer and then a groom, until 1904, when he and his brother attested into the army.² He served in the ranks of the KRRC, including in garrisons in Malta, Crete and Egypt, until 1912, when he was placed in the army reserve and returned home. On 5 August 1914, he was mobilised, and went to France with the British Expeditionary Force, with the rank of corporal. On 1 October 1914, Wadner and 186 men from the ranks of the British Army, including his brother, were commissioned on a single day.³ This was an unprecedented moment; an average of only 11 officers had been commissioned from the ranks each year in the entire decade before the First World War, and there had never been such an influx of officers from working-class backgrounds, as occurred in the autumn of 1914.

The query from Laxton Bros. suggests how, as late as the 1930s, the power of the gentleman-officer ideal was so strong that Wadner's accent, mannerisms, occupation, and social class meant that his employer could simply not believe that he had been an officer in the First World

¹ The National Archives, hereafter shown as TNA, WO 339/13716 Thomas Wadner.

² TNA WO 339/13716 Thomas Wadner, TNA WO 339/13714 Frederick Wadner.

³ War Office, *The Quarterly Army List for the Period Ending 31st March 1915* (London: HMSO, 1915).

War.⁴ Wadner was one of almost 10,000 soldiers from the ranks of the pre-war British army who were commissioned during the war. Between 1903 and 1914, 109 officers were commissioned from the ranks, a figure that represented only two per cent of annual regular army commissions.⁵ Between 5 August 1914 and 1 December 1918, however, the official statistics alone identify 6,713 men from the ranks who were granted commissions in the regular army in the period. This amounted to 41 per cent of the 16,713 regular army commissions in the war. These are investigated for the first time in this thesis.⁶

This thesis provides the first sustained and systematic study of the men who were promoted from the ranks before and during the war. It addresses a striking absence in the historiography. It provides a full survey of their number and social background. It explores the institutional, political, and cultural contexts that shaped promotion from the ranks, and traces the ways in which they were perceived in the army, in the wider public debate, and in turn understood their own ambiguous social position.

The study draws attention to both the enduring social and cultural organisation of ideas of military status and the elision of the ‘ranker officer’ from public life and the historical record. Paradoxically, this also forces us to acknowledge the emergence and importance of the ranker officer as a distinct identity that emerged through the pressures of the war. The ranker officer was a wartime phenomenon, an ‘appearance and disappearance’, that has been unexplained. This thesis explores the nature of that process and its implications for our understanding of the relationship between social class, gentility, and military service in Edwardian and Georgian Britain.

⁴ Henceforth all references to ‘the war’ will be to the First World War or Great War, and all references to the army will be to the British army, unless otherwise stated.

⁵ Christopher B. Otley, “The Educational Background of British Army Officers,” *Sociology* 7, no. 2 (1973): p. 193.

⁶ War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War, 1914–1920*, War Office, March (London: HMSO, 1922), p. 234.

1) The Argument

Drawing heavily upon the details of over 7,000 officers collated in a prosopography and archival research, this thesis traces the rise and fall of the ranker officer in the British army in the early twentieth century. The ranks produced very few army officers before the war, less than two per cent per annum. The war produced vastly increased numbers of promotions from the ranks, from the same pre-war regular army ranks, and the emergence of the ranker officer as a distinct type. The rapid expansion in the number of promotions from the ranks meant that the class of officer that became known as a ‘ranker officer’ in the army was called into being as a social type and cultural identity during the war. The identity that emerged was a pejorative one, based on a caricature. This was a reaction to the presence of those officers commissioned from the ranks, who did not conform to the dominant, gentlemanly identity, traditionally belonging to the British army officer.

This study draws on detailed analysis and vast archival research to show how ranker officers’ careers and identity were socio-culturally transacted through the regiment and the mess, and created dissonance with the prevailing ideas of leadership. In doing this, it considers commissions from the ranks in the nineteenth century, and more particularly analyses them in detail in the decade before the war to establish pre-war patterns of promotion from the ranks and the ways in which these officers were perceived. This enables an understanding of the nature and significance of the change that took place during the war. It introduces a new, important, and previously neglected civil-military tension; the politics of democratising the army during the pre-war period.

Drawing on the case study of the ranker officer, it then explores the tension between social change and institutional cultures. It illustrates the processes at work when these tensions escalate, and shows the formal and informal measures taken by an elite group to maintain their

cultural hegemony and military power. The pre-war emphasis on assimilating officers commissioned from the ranks shifted to become one of differentiating them based on their breaching socio-cultural benchmarks that policed the boundaries of the gentleman's institutional habitat in the army; the officers' mess. The statistical detail assembled to support the study shows that there was an elite within an elite, a regimental league table of exclusivity driven by wealth, traditions, and Royal patronage — ideas that are familiar. Revealed for the first time in this study is the negative esteem attached to having officers commissioned from the ranks. This persisted even in the war, making the status of a regiment inversely proportionate to the density of ranker officers present.

This informs our understanding of the persistence of these traditional social elites in modern Britain and illuminates how the officer class that emerged from the First World War confronted major professional and social challenges to its exclusivity. The persistence of the gentlemanly ideal and the British elite attached to it, has a long undulating historiography, and, within which, definitions of 'gentility are slippery'.⁸ This study begins in a pre-war context where the idea of the gentleman, through its incarnation in the identity of the officer, had a more robust definition than at any other time and place.⁹ The war threatened that exclusivity, and this case study is an important example of the profound shock that it received and its resilience in the military sphere. The study is therefore concerned with how the social and cultural continuity of the gentlemanly identity of the army officer coped with change and vigorously re-emerged in the post-war era. In wider society, the risks to exclusivity persisted but in the institution of

⁸ Matt Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 36; Marcus Collins, "The Fall of the English Gentleman: The National Character in Decline, c. 1918–1970," *Historical Research* 75, no. 187 (2002); Penny Corfield, "The Democratic History of the English Gentleman," *History Today* 42 (1992).

⁹ Christine Berberich, *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia* (Farnham: Ashgate publishing, 2007); John Tosh, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005).

the officer class the door was firmly closed, at least until the next war.¹⁰ This study positions itself in the historiography of gentlemanliness and adds to the understanding of the operation of modern elites and their persistence.¹¹

The social history of the British army in the Edwardian army is a reference point for understanding the structure and processes underpinning the inextricable fusion of the officer and the gentleman. Keith Simpson defined the gentlemanly identity of an army officer shortly before the war as coming from ‘a select area of the middle class and definitely the upper class’ and in which the qualities of an ‘exclusive social and educational background, the gentlemanly ethos, a commitment to country pursuits, loyalty to institutions, self-confidence and physical courage’ were necessary.¹² The acquisition of this was mediated through a dense socio-cultural immersion in select public schools such as Bedford, Cheltenham, Clifton, Eton, Harrow, Marlborough, and Wellington that once completed, meant that a young man had met the educational and social criteria to be an officer, and the ‘character’ he needed to lead was formed.¹³ Further education of officers at Royal Military Academy, Woolwich and Royal Military College, Sandhurst, and early days in a regiment, served not to teach leadership, but supplement military skills and ethos.¹⁴

¹⁰ Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*, pp. 33–45.

¹¹ David Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); F.M.L. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture: Britain 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); David J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation 1918-1940* (London: Random House, 2010); Owen Jones, *The Establishment; And how they get away with it* (London: Penguin UK, 2014).

¹² Keith Simpson, “The Officers,” in *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 65.

¹³ Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 10.

¹⁴ Hereafter referred to as Sandhurst and Woolwich.

Inherent in a public school education and its gentlemanly product was the idea of ‘character’ formed through sports and self-discipline and ‘playing the game’.¹⁵ Character was preferred over ‘brains’ and produced ‘a disdain for materialism, and an anti-work ethic opposed to the more ruthless and competitive aspects of professionalism’.¹⁶ Whilst character remained unchallenged as the qualification for leadership in the officer class, military historians contest the degree of pre-war professionalism.¹⁷ Simultaneously, the nature of increasingly militarised public schools, Christian ethics and gentlemanly ideals generated a belief in the moral qualities and rights and responsibilities of the gentleman-officer.¹⁸ The elite pedagogy of the content and material forms of education in public schools and their importance to British political history, investigated by Patrick Joyce, shows how ideas were fashioned into institutions.¹⁹ The limitations of the historiography explaining this context to date, are that the resilience of these ideas and relationships are rarely explored. How they resisted long-term change that might have been anticipated as result of the assault of non-gentlemanly officers on the privileged arenas of the gentleman-officer are neglected areas of scholarship.

Since the publication of Arthur Marwick’s *The Deluge* in 1965, there has been an ongoing debate as to the extent to which the First World War was a catalyst for ‘changes’ in the economic and social order in Britain.²⁰ For the identity of the officer and gentleman it was potentially a cataclysm. This identity embodied in the officer class of the army confronted a

¹⁵ James Anthony Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 55-56.

¹⁶ Collins, “The Fall of the English Gentleman,” p. 93.

¹⁷ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 217; Spencer Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012) pp. 213-215.

¹⁸ Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society, Studies in Social History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 277.

¹⁹ Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁰ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society & the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 1965). See also Arthur L. Bowley, *Some Economic Consequences of the Great War* (London: Thomas Butterworth, 1930); Arthur Marwick et al., *Total War and Historical Change: Europe, 1914–1955* (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001).

war of scale and type that challenged its small elite composition and ideas of leadership.²¹ This demanded the recruitment of officers from outside the elite group that had previously monopolised the officer class.²² The discovery that officers commissioned from the ranks could be effective and at risk of disrupting the hegemonic identity of the gentleman-officer was destabilising to this traditional elite. Surprisingly, regardless of this trauma, the identity of the gentleman-officer proved resilient in the military context.²³ This had much to do with how ranker officers were subsequently represented. Despite this challenge to ideas of the gentleman-officer, older ideas of social status persisted and the ranker officer is forgotten in public life and historical record. This study, the first of its kind, intends to illuminate the ranker officer and make further study possible.

The attitude to officers being commissioned from the ranks can only be appreciated by understanding the social, cultural and political context in which these events happened. To inform the analyses of the transformation that occurred, the study focusses on a crucial period from 1903 until the end of the war in 1918. This encompasses the ten years leading up to the outbreak of war, when commissions from the ranks were rare and assimilation into the gentleman-officer identity was essential if they were to be accepted. The exigencies of a mass, technological war necessitated a paradigm shift in policy to commissioning from the ranks. Despite the massive growth of the army, the regular officer class could ‘distinguish’ themselves from other types of officer, the temporary and territorial, who had only become full-time soldiers for the duration of the war. Officers commissioned from the regular army ranks were

²¹ Gary D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 41-60.

²² Peter Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914–16* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 212-230; Simpson, “The Officers.”

²³ Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) pp. 44-70; Peter E. Razzell, “Social Origins of Officers in the Indian and British Home Army: 1758–1962,” *British Journal of Sociology* 14 (1963); David French, *Raising Churchill’s Army: The British Army and the War against Germany, 1919–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 48-80.

afforded permanent, regular commissions and the sheer scale of these commissions, relative to the numbers of regular officers created an identity crisis. This compounded what has been described as the ‘imperial anxiety’ of the officer class.²⁴ This study will argue that a process of ‘Othering’ led to the creation of a new identity and the invention of the ranker officer.

This study situates itself within the historiography of gentlemanliness and masculinity, since they provide the tools to unlock the processes that marginalised and obscured the status of the ranker officer. The situation of the ranker officer informs our understanding of events that unfold when an officer associated with particular class attributes did not meet elite ideals of manliness that crystallised in the figure of the gentleman officer. R. W. Connell has seen hegemonic masculinity as central to social control and cultural othering in asserting authority over subordinated masculinities.²⁵ The ranker officer in this study is understood as a marginal figure in the military who was Othered through a range of strategies, in the army, political life, and public culture. The process of Othering has been widely used as a conceptual tool in post-colonial, gender, and minority discourses; establishing one’s own identity through opposition to and, frequently, vilification of this Other, is often described as a particular strategy of the English imperial gentleman to justify their domination and subordinate of others in the colonial enterprise.²⁶

The figure of the ranker officer explored in this study was associated with a range of traits and behaviours that both distanced him from the hegemonic ideals of the gentleman-officer and marginalised the officer promoted from the ranks in public perception, popular memory, and

²⁴ Michael A. Ramsay, *Command and Cohesion: The Citizen Soldier and Minor Tactics in the British Army, 1870–1918* (London: Praeger, 2002), p.115.

²⁵ Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities: Second Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

²⁶ Yiannis Gabriel, *Organizing Words: A Critical Thesaurus for Social and Organization Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), p. 213. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Edward W. Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered,” *Race & Class* 27, no. 2 (1985).

academic historiography. The construction of these depictions began in the officers' mess — the homosocial, exclusive institution of the gentleman officer — where the proximity of the ranker officer to the traditional officer elite made their presence threatening.²⁷ This study shows that the 'the narcissism of minor differences' — the speech, appearance and other differences, appearing small and absurd in the context of a war, were exploited and amplified.²⁸ The politics of exclusion saw the rapid removal of many ranker officers at the end of the war. However, despite their general absence, the caricature that had been created gravitated into the public domain and popular memory.

This was brought into sharp relief in, for example, the play *Journey's End* by R. C. Sherriff. First performed in 1928, it has become an iconic representation of 'war, class and leadership', and, enduringly popular, it has been presented to different audiences through nearly 90 years of performance.²⁹ The content, a story about a group of officers in a dugout in 1918, is regularly explored and utilised in education. It has had a consistently powerful impact and been put to a variety of academic uses, more recently to explore the emotional impact of war.³⁰ In the 1960s and 1970s, there were stirrings of resentment against the class bias of the production because it centred on officers, and not the rank and file, who had worse conditions and less privileges than their officer counterparts.³¹ However, class prejudice could more immediately have been found in the portrayal of one of the officers. The character, Captain Stanhope, a 20-year-old military prodigy, is a striking figure of masculinity and the epitome of the doomed, fragile,

²⁷ Quintin Colville, "Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity: Royal Naval Officers and Their Shipboard Homes, 1918–39," *Gender & History* 21, no. 3 (2009). Colville offers an original and useful analysis of an officers' mess.

²⁸ Anton Blok, "The Narcissism of Minor Differences," *European Journal of Social Theory* 1, no. 1 (1998).

²⁹ R. C. Sherriff, *Journey's End: A Play in Three Acts* (London: Victor Golancz Ltd., 1929). See Amanda Phipps for a comprehensive review: Amanda Phipps, "Journey's End: An Account of the Changing Responses Towards the First World War's Representation," *Retrospectives: A Postgraduate History Journal* 3, no. 1 (2014).

³⁰ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

³¹ Phipps, "Journey's End".

public school-educated temporary officer. This is a universally familiar, tragic and sympathetic character. In the background is another officer, Trotter, described variously as: ‘middle aged’, ‘homely looking’, ‘who drops his h’s’, ‘the only soldier to put weight on in the trenches’, ‘jovial’, ‘unimaginative’, ‘unexpectedly promoted’, ‘two dimensional....’³² Trotter was the ‘other’, the archetypal ‘ranker officer’.³³ The unique combination of ‘processes specific to the interwar era blurred the play’s ontology as a commercial entertainment and catapulted it to international success’.³⁴ Emily Curtis Walters observed: ‘The play’s characters are, in fact, archetypes. But this flattening of “real” men into one-dimensional stock characters only served to make the interwar observer’s process of imaginative displacement even easier.’³⁵ The social and cultural legacy of this play was to define the character of the ranker officer; it made the gentleman-officer emotionally seductive and enduring, and his opposite an unappealing marginal figure.

The problem for the historiography and military history has been to separate this characterisation that has dominated literary depictions of the war from the experience of ranker officers in the war. This was difficult, because the means to articulate the experience of war lay with the ‘Stanhope’ generation, and the quantity and quality of lower middle-class and middle-class depictions were overwhelming. This was compounded by regimental narratives, written to reinforce tradition and regimental prestige, and a post-war rationalisation of the ranker officer experience grounded in the restoration of the gentleman-officer identity. These factors combined in the reassertion of the gentlemanly ideal after the war and the

³² See, for instance, Robert Gore-Langton, *Journey’s End: The Classic War Play Explained* (London: Oberon Books Limited, 2013), p. 52.

³³ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 33. Trotter’s background is never made explicit in the play, but Sherriff said he was an officer commissioned from the ranks, and in various articles he was described as a ‘ranker officer’ and a ‘professional soldier’.

³⁴ Emily Curtis Walters, “Between Entertainment and Elegy: The Unexpected Success of R. C. Sherriff’s *Journey’s End* (1928),” *Journal of British Studies* 55, no. 02 (2016).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

marginalisation and silencing of the ranker officer. The positivist, didactic tradition of popular military history has swerved away from cultural analysis and addressing the problems posed in this study.

2) The Contemporary Resonance of this Case Study

Cultural studies of the First World War and its impact on the identity of the British army officer are crucial in understanding how our present-day attitudes have evolved and how its cultural heritage impacts on the officer class outlook today.³⁶ The influence of the powerful alignment of gentlemanly attributes with the British army officer have persisted, and public discourse about what constitutes the desired attributes of an army officer are still driven by an expectation of heroic, intuitive and impulsive behaviour, counter to the expectations of a modern technology-driven army.³⁷ More broadly, this study addresses themes that can be found in the work of Mike Savage and Owen Jones concerning the general persistence of elites and class.³⁸ The scope to progress from the ranks of the British army has informed a discourse about the exclusivity of the British officer class, its relationship to public schools and power in Britain that continued throughout the twentieth century.³⁹ The social diversity of the officer class remains a concern that has persisted into the current century, and the issue of public schools dominating access to the officer class remains an important political question.⁴⁰ Similarly, the

³⁶ Stephen Deakin, “Education in an Ethos at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst,” *Ethics Education in the Military*, eds., Paul Robinson, Nigel De Lee, Don Carrick (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Rod Thornton, “The British Army and the Origins of Its Minimum Force Philosophy,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 15, no. 1 (2004).

³⁷ Peter Bracken, “Women in the Army,” *The British Army, Manpower and Society into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan (London: Cass, 2000) p. 115.

³⁸ Mike Savage, “Introduction to Elites from the ‘Problematique of the Proletariat’ to a Class Analysis of ‘Wealth Elites’,” *The Sociological Review* 63, no. 2 (2015); O. Jones, *The Establishment: And How They Get Away with It* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2014).

³⁹ See for example: Peter Worsley, “The distribution of Power in Industrial Society” in *Power in Britain: Sociological Readings*, John Urry and John Wakeford, eds., (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), p. 252–3.

⁴⁰ Alex Massie, ‘Half of the British Army’s Officer Corps is Privately Educated. Does that Matter?’ *The Spectator Blogs*, 31 January 2013, <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/alex-massie/2013/01/half-of-the-british-armys-officer-corps-is-privately-educated-does-that-matter/>. Accessed January 1, 2017.

enduring relationship of certain public schools to elite regiments has drawn attention.⁴¹ In 2014, *Elitist Britain*, a report from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission highlighted that one in ten (7%) of senior armed forces officers went to comprehensives and were largely educated in independent schools (62%), a higher proportion than Permanent Secretaries in the Civil Service (55%) and second only to senior judges (71%).⁴² It stated that:

In a democratic society, institutions – from the law to the media – derive their authority in part from how inclusive and grounded they are. Locking out a diversity of talents and experiences makes Britain's leading institutions less informed, less representative and, ultimately, less credible than they should be. Where institutions rely on too narrow a range of people from too narrow a range of backgrounds with too narrow a range of experiences they risk behaving in ways and focussing on issues that are of salience only to a minority but not the majority in society. This risks narrowing the conduct of public life to a small few, who are very familiar with each other but far less familiar with the day-to-day challenges facing ordinary people in the country. That is not a recipe for a healthy democratic society.⁴³

These comments are a striking echo of those made by John Ward, a radical Member of Parliament (MP) in 1909, who was an advocate for commissions from the ranks as a means of ‘democratising’ the army and it becoming truly ‘national’, marking over one hundred years of concern about the social composition of the British officer class.⁴⁴ The British army, has over the years devised new schemes that make progression from the ranks more achievable, and direct entry to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst more accessible, however, its officer class and their educational backgrounds have generally remained highly exclusive.⁴⁵ Historical studies such as this, explain the processes by which traditional elites manage exclusion. Public reminders of the ‘gentleman-officer’ are regularly seen, for example, when Major-General

⁴¹ Keith Macdonald, “Black Mafia, Loggies and Going for the Stars: The Military Elite Revisited,” *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 1 (2004).

⁴² Gov.co.uk, Detailed analysis of the educational background of business, political, media and public sector leaders in the UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elitist-britain>. Accessed January 1, 2017 p. 48.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Hansard, H. C. Deb, 4 March 1909, vol. 1, C.C. 1595–662

⁴⁵ Keith M. Macdonald, “The Persistence of an Elite: The Case of British Army Officer Cadets,” *The Sociological Review* 28, no. 3 (1980); G. Salaman and K. Thompson, “Class Culture and the Persistence of an Elite: The Case of Army Officer Selection” *The Sociological Review* 26, no. 2 (1978).

James Cowan, a graduate of Wellington College an elite public school, banned eating sandwiches in the mess, telling his officers that eating with their hands was barbaric, and providing a litany of etiquette and manners that was expected of a gentleman.⁴⁶ The trinity of public school, the gentleman and the British army officer was severely shaken in the First World War, and, in response to the incursion of officers from outside, it developed a resilience that has persisted, and it continues as a major form of public representation. By simply casting light on the experience of the ranker officer, we can represent an historical alternative identity, one that reflects the existence of officers who were not gentlemen.

3) Defining the Ranker Officer

In investigating the ranker officer, it is necessary to give the identity substance because it was an informal designation often misinterpreted in the historiography. First World War army officers were broadly professionally identified as regular, territorial or temporary officers.⁴⁷ Regular and territorial officers had a pre-war tradition that meant that their officer class had distinctive cultures.⁴⁸ They were not entirely divorced, since young territorial or militia officers could, and often did, obtain regular commissions, a route described as a ‘back door’ since the educational requirements were less, and the territorials were dependent on the allocation of regular officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) for their training and development.⁴⁹

The social composition of the pre-war territorial officers’ class had a similar history of

⁴⁶ Daily Mail Online, March 6, 2014, ‘Sandwiches are banned, chaps! Army commander tells his men that eating with their hands is ‘barbaric’: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2573624/A-gentleman-uses-knife-fork-Privately-educated-general-bans-SANDWICHES-officers-mess-end-barbaric-practice-chaps-eating-hands.html#ixzz4VrD46Hk0>. Accessed January 1, 2017.

⁴⁷ The British officer corps of the Great War was an heterogeneous body consisting of seven varieties of regimental officers; see Gary D. Sheffield, “The British Officer Corps, 1914–18,” in Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ William Mitchinson, *Gentlemen and Officers: The Impact and Experience of War on a Territorial Regiment 1914–1918* (London, Imperial War Museum Department of Printed Books, 1995), pp. 15-26.

⁴⁹ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 113.

exclusiveness as regular officers.⁵⁰ They had more autonomy than their regular counterparts, self-selecting new officers and could discriminate on religious and other grounds, but ‘gentlemanliness’ was a minimum requirement.⁵¹ The territorial force was seen as the means of expanding the army before the war, however, the preferred primary solution following the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, was to enlarge the army through the creation of service battalions and the recruitment of temporary officers.⁵²

The massive expansion of the army between 1914 and the end of the war in 1918 necessitated 229,316 combatant commissions.⁵³ It has been observed that a cultural continuity linked the 12,738 regular officers that began the war in 1914, and the 12,974 serving in 1924, who remarkably retained their pre-war gentlemanly characteristics.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, given the size of their contribution, the focus of attention has been on the social, cultural and military impact of those temporary officers on officer identity.⁵⁵ This has been fuelled by the post-war literary outpourings of temporary officers, such as Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon providing a rich source of material.⁵⁶ The first tranches of officers commissioned, particularly into regular battalions and elite regiments were gentlemen, but the nature of recruitment to officer service battalions saw more officers from commercial and professional backgrounds absorbed. Gentlemen also enlisted in the ranks, out of conviction or sheer enthusiasm to join the war. The first year of the war saw numerous gentlemen ‘combed’ out of the ranks and commissioned to

⁵⁰ For a full discussion of the social background of regular and territorial officers; see *Ibid.*, pp. 7–40.

⁵¹ Mitchinson, *Gentlemen and Officers*; Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, see p.114, Officers ‘should be gentleman but also Protestants’.

⁵² Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army*, pp. 212–31.

⁵³ War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War, 1914–1920*.

⁵⁴ Simpson, “The Officers,” p. 92.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1926); Siegfried Sassoon, *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (London: Faber & Faber limited, 1937).

cope with attrition and expansion.⁵⁷ These officers are sometimes mistakenly described as ‘ranker officers’ when few of them or their contemporaries would have understood them to be.

From 1916, the army moved from voluntary recruitment to conscription. The previously wholly inadequate and unsystematic form of officer selection and training changed to a more meritocratic, organised system, based on serving in the ranks.⁵⁸ Some of these officers, and increasingly as the war progressed, were from lower social classes. This was a characteristic they shared with ‘real’ ranker officers, but they were temporary officers and are again mistakenly referred to as ‘ranker officers’.

Crucially, this study set out to establish to whom the designation ‘ranker officer’ belonged. Archival research found that in contemporary terms the ‘real’ ranker officer was the officer, usually a senior NCO, commissioned from the ranks of the pre-war regular army. That was the contemporary meaning, although because it was not a formal definition, it could be used casually, particularly after the war to refer to any officer who had served in the ranks and as form of disparagement. However, this study has researched numerous references to ‘ranker officers’ from contemporary sources and most lead to a homogenous identity; the ranker officer commissioned from the ranks of the pre-war regular army. In the preparation of the prosopography and quoting any evidence, every effort has been made to confine analysis to this definition.

The seminal work from military history on the social relationships and identity of officers in the First World War was written by Keith Simpson in 1978.⁵⁹ Here is perhaps the most striking example of how the enduring social and cultural organisation of ideas of military status,

⁵⁷ Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army*, 224–5.

⁵⁸ Basil Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies* (London: Constable & Co., 1918).

⁵⁹ Simpson, “The Officers.”

exemplified by the hegemony of the gentleman-officer, led to an assumption and the elision of the ‘ranker officer’ from the historical record. Simpson claimed that:

No less than 41 per cent of all permanent commissions in the regular army were awarded to NCOs during the war. However, it would be wrong to assume that this was a dramatic change in recruitment away from the 2 per cent from the ranks, because many of the wartime NCOs were volunteers from middle-class backgrounds.⁶⁰

Keith Simpson’s research and conclusions were based on a questionnaire distributed to surviving First World War officers in early 1976.⁶¹ Over 200 responses were received from regular, temporary and territorial officers, omitting ranker officers as a category, although respondents were asked about ranker officers. In researching this study, I was given access to the original research data, and this provided helpful source material, although it has been regarded with some caution because of the time that has elapsed since the war. The expression of social and cultural prejudices that this study was looking to garner was likely to be inhibited by the shift in attitudes prevailing in a more egalitarian British culture at the time the questionnaire was completed, sixty years after the war ended.

This study began by challenging the basic assumption that Simpson had made regarding the backgrounds of regular officer commissions from the ranks in the war and by eliciting the raw data informing the core characteristics of the 41 per cent of commissions from the ranks into the regular army awarded in the war. This was achieved by reviewing the commissions listed in the 16 editions of the *Quarterly Army List*, published by the War Office and containing complete lists of the names, regiments, dates of birth, rank at time of publication and, crucially, the period spent in the ranks before their commission.⁶² This considerable task, followed by calculating their dates of commission, proved that these were not ‘wartime NCOs’ who ‘were

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 70–1.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶² War Office, *The Quarterly Army List for the Quarter Ending 31 July 1914* (London: HMSO, 1914).

volunteers from middle-class backgrounds'. These were officers who had served in the ranks of the pre-war regular army. This was a group of people neglected by the historiography who had a distinct identity; they were ranker officers. Furthermore, this group of officers understood themselves to be 'ranker officers', and distinct from others. The most conclusive evidence for this was that in 1918, a pre-war regular NCO, commissioned in the war, wrote an important article for a professional journal, a discussion about the future of his type of officer, the pre-war regular NCO commissioned during the war, after the war ended. The title of the article was *The Ranker Officer*.⁶³

The literature often references the scarcity of commissions from the ranks of the regular army before the war as a measure of the exclusivity of the officer class.⁶⁴ Drawing upon extensive data collection and archival research creating biographies of these officers, this study elucidates the identity of the small percentage of officers who were commissioned leading up to the war. They are important comparators, not labelled as ranker officers in contemporary sources. They had a distinct set of characteristics that were considerably different to the ranker officer. Henceforth all officers commissioned from the ranks before 1914, are described in this study as 'officers commissioned from the ranks' and not ranker officers. Paradoxically, the study will show that, in the public imagination, the few successful rankers were valorised and acclaimed, despite being increasingly unrepresentative of opportunities and experiences generally afforded to officers commissioned from the ranks before the war. The gentleman-officer idea was pragmatic; as with other aspects of imperialism and elitism in Britain, virtues such as great wealth and heroism could buy very few admissions into the world of the gentleman-officer, otherwise gentlemanliness was a strict prerequisite.

⁶³ Samuel Warne 6197 R.G.A. (S. W.), "The Ranker Officer," *Royal United Services Institution. Journal* 63, no. 451 (1918).

⁶⁴ Edward M. Spiers, *Late Victorian Army, 1868–1902*, Manchester History of the British Army Series (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 103-104.

The purpose of making these definitions clear is to be precise about the groups of people discussed in this study. However, it should be recognised that the lack of specificity as to what constituted a ranker officer has led to methodological approaches to the study of British army officers that have excluded the presence of the ranker officer. This has left most of the historiography to focus on the relationship between the regular and the temporary officer and reduced the ranker officer to a confused and marginal figure. Gary Sheffield's influential study of the relationships between officers and their men contains important assessments of the declining impact of class on relationships and officering the army as the war progressed, but again, does not illuminate the identity of the ranker officer.

Sheffield notes the ambivalence of an officer towards ranker officers in general and then observes that the officer was himself a 'ranker officer' having been commissioned in the London Rifle Brigade, a middle-class territorial unit and that the officer 'regarded himself as being in a very different category', although he too had been commissioned from the ranks.⁶⁵ The crucial point is that the officer did not fit with the contemporary definition of a ranker officer, moreover he did not recognise himself as one, his military origins being in the elite or class corps ranks where he could be a gentleman in the ranks. In confusing the identity of the ranker officer, the enormous class prejudices pervading judgements, when using sources attributed to middle-class officers, are overlooked. Adrian Gregory has observed: 'Matters of class mattered a vast amount in wartime Britain. Any discussion of the world before the war, the world we have lost, must start from the realisation that Edwardian Britain contained not one, but several worlds within it.'⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 112.

⁶⁶ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 278.

Since the publication of *Journey's End* and the work of soldier-poets like Sassoon and Richard Aldington, the 'temporary officer' has become the dominant representation of the subaltern on the Western Front.⁶⁷ The temporary officer was also a necessary feature of the war that evolved because of its unprecedented scale, but ultimately this class of officer was less likely to present a threat to the professional or social identity of the regular officer because, in its early incarnation, it shared the same gentlemanly qualities and was only ever intended as a temporary measure. The progressive dilution of class in the commissioning of temporary officers, generated the need to ensure this group of officers would also be differentiated by the term 'temporary gentlemen'.⁶⁸ First seen in print in 1916, the term was used in the title of a propagandist collection of letters purportedly from an officer who had been an auctioneer's clerk.⁶⁹

The absence of the contribution of the ranker officer from the wider public and historical discourse has cemented the assumptions about the class base of all regimental officers in the First World War, and in the words of one scholar, 'traps the junior officer on the western front in the public-school idiom'.⁷⁰ The extensive archival research that informs this study allows us to challenge this perception and restore the ranker officer into the literature. It is by carefully defining what constituted the ranker officer in the war that we can begin to differentiate and liberate an alternative, neglected officer identity.

⁶⁷ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 98.

⁶⁸ Captain A. J. Dawson, *A "Temporary Gentleman" in France: Home Letters from an Officer in the New Army* (London, New York: Cassell, 1916).

⁶⁹ M. Sanders and P. M. Taylor, *British Propaganda During the First World War, 1914–18* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 52.

⁷⁰ John M. Bourne, "Two British Officers of the Great War", in *The Response. An Occasional Magazine of the Northumberland and Durham Branches of the Western Front Association*, 11 (2000), pp. 1–8.

4) Social Change, Institutional Cultures and the First World War

This study draws on, and contributes to, the literature that focuses on the tension between social change and institutional cultures. It is part of a wider discussion and argument about the temporary and lasting effects of the war and our understanding of the resilience of class and social and political elites in modern Britain. The army was one of the most important British institutions that was directly impacted on by the war, and there are surprisingly few fine-grained assessments of how this impacted on its culture and social constitution.⁷¹ Estimations, such as this one by Ian Beckett, tend to be broad brush assessments:

Generally, however, it would appear that institutional mechanisms are more liable to change than social structures, although here, too, the example of the British army in the First World War is instructive. In theory it ought to provide clear evidence of the impact of social change, since a small pre-war cadre of 250,000 officers and men expanded to almost 6 million in the course of the war, becoming theoretically more representative of society than ever before. In fact, the army remained unrepresentative of British society through the unequal distribution of war service and, in the long term, there was little or no change in its social structure or ethos owing to the survival of the pre-war officer corps. Even the impact of service life may be challenged, since the popular image of men such as Robert Graves or Siegfried Sassoon as representative of the thousands who served in the army is hardly compatible with the reality. In short, armies as institutions do not seem to change to the same extent as society is said to change as the result of total war.⁷²

Beckett refutes the thesis that the war was ‘a crucible for social change’ for the army, a conclusion endorsed by this thesis, particularly in identifying the consistent nature of the regular army that prepared, engaged and finally emerged after the war. However, Beckett does not examine the reasons for this and simply attributes the absence of change to the survival of the pre-war officer corps.⁷³ This thesis will argue that it was not simply the ‘survivors’ of the pre-war officer corps that ensured its ethos persisted. It was the ‘idea’ and its institutional expression that persisted. Modern industrial warfare challenged, but could not displace, the

⁷¹ Ian F. W. Beckett et al., *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

⁷² Ian F. W. Beckett, “Total War,” in *Total War and Historical Change: Europe 1914–1955*, ed. Clive Emsley, Arthur Marwick, and Wendy Simpson (Buckinghamshire: Open University Press, 2001), pp. 39–40.

⁷³ See also Simpson, “The Officers”, p. 92.

established associations between gentility and military rank. The persistence of the gentlemanly ideal was also a shared responsibility with others outside of the military; the gentlemanly images created in the semi-biographical works of Graves and Sassoon colluded with the persistence of the idea of the gentleman-officer.⁷⁴

The literature on the social history of the army provides context for this study. The work of Edward Spiers provides a detailed analyses of the army and officer, but does not examine the conflicting public and military attitudes to commissions from the ranks or the increasing political civil military tensions surrounding the issues in the Edwardian era.⁷⁵ Gwyn Harries-Jenkins has provided a more analytic account of the Victorian Army and particularly the cultural factors that delayed professionalisation which are relevant to this study.⁷⁶ Two recent studies have concentrated on the preparedness of the Edwardian army for the war in 1914; Spencer Jones looking at tactical development and Timothy Bowman and Michael Connally taking a broader and more critical view, particularly of the prevailing social structure of the officer class.⁷⁷ However, the civil-military tensions surrounding commissions from the ranks have been neglected or only loosely referenced, and hence this thesis has undertaken original research into public perceptions and the pre-war development of policy, and the tensions this created within the officer class.⁷⁸ Studies that are grounded in policy can only offer limited insights into this study's area of enquiry, since this research illustrates that policy alone could not change powerful institutional cultures opposed to commissions from the ranks, particularly

⁷⁴ Berberich, *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature*, pp. 47-68; Graves, *Goodbye to All That*; Sassoon, *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston*.

⁷⁵ Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914*, Themes in British Social History (London: Longman, 1980), pp. 1-34; Spiers, *Late Victorian Army, 1868–1902*.

⁷⁶ Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society*, pp. 133-170; Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, “The Development of Professionalism in the Victorian Army,” *Armed Forces & Society* 1, no. 4 (1975).

⁷⁷ Bowman and Connally, *The Edwardian Army*, pp. 7-40; Jones, *From Boer War to World War*.

⁷⁸ Bowman and Connally note the pressure on the Government from the Labour party: Bowman and Connally, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 166.

with the autonomy located in a regimental culture and for whom increasingly exclusive gentlemanliness was a badge of status.

Studies of social class and the impact of the war inform understanding of the resilience of social and political elites in modern Britain.⁷⁹ Class interpretations of the changing social attitudes generally see the war as pivotal, particularly because, as one study argues, of the distrust it generated in the ‘military caste and the pre-war social hierarchy.’⁸⁰ This conclusion fails to explain why, given this mistrust, the military caste and its companion, the idea of the gentleman, persisted. However, the use of the term ‘caste’ is a useful idea if understood as a group that inherit exclusive privileges and are perceived as socially exclusive. Analysis of the pre-war officer class as an ‘imperial class’, described by Bernard Porter as ‘almost a caste within a class’ that devoted itself to imperial duties in the form of colonial service in the army and colonial administration, is helpful because it hints at the broader institutional context in which the gentleman dominated.⁸¹ This ‘caste’ had formed a dynasty in which, according to Robert Heussler, young men followed uncles, fathers, older brothers and friends into the imperial services, including the officer class of the army.⁸² The masculine identity imagined in the pre-war imperial context has given rise to a number of interpretations of the caste or elite that formed the officer class.⁸³ Most studies claim or infer that Empire was a constant frame of reference for white masculinity before the First World War, and that defining themselves in relation to the colonial enterprise in which they were located was significant in forming the

⁷⁹ B. A. Waites, *The Effects of the First World War on Aspects of the Class Structure of English Society* (London: Open University, 1982); Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: Britain 1914–18* (Oxford: Berg, 1987), p. 96.

⁸⁰ David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London: Penguin UK, 2000), p. 128.

⁸¹ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 41.

⁸² Robert Heussler, *Yesterday’s Rulers. The Making of the British Colonial Service* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 73.

⁸³ Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 2013); Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man’s World* (London: Routledge, 2015).

identity of the British army soldier.⁸⁴ This idea of a caste that generates a particular form of masculinity that differentiates itself is useful to this study because we can begin to explore how this identity was policed and maintained.

Unhelpfully for this study, the soldiers in the ranks of the British army have been prejudiced by their living outside of what John Tosh has termed the ‘charmed circle of literacy’.⁸⁵ Hence most early studies have concentrated on army data that dealt with drunkenness, crime, and illiteracy. Nicolas Mansfield has recently looked at the nineteenth century British army soldier as a form of labour, providing a more detailed analysis of life and relationship to class.⁸⁶ Edward Coss has provided a much clearer insight into the ordinary soldier, his motivations and the daily privations of the enlisted soldier who was maligned by Wellington’s scathing ‘scum of the earth’ remark, that helped acquire a reputation ‘as being a thief, scoundrel, criminal, and undesirable social outcast’.⁸⁷ Despite these attempts at revision the ranks of the army are generally depicted as passive and unambitious. This thesis counters that argument despite the lack of a coherent historiography of the NCO and suggests many of the ranks were aspirant for intergenerational mobility, similar to owners of small businesses, who had ascended from the ranks of manual labour.⁸⁸

This study poses a challenge to those studies looking at the impact of military service as an officer on post-war identity; producing contrasting evidence. Jonathan Wild has argued that

⁸⁴ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and The ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁸⁵ John Tosh and Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Pearson Education, 2006), p. 101.

⁸⁶ Nicholas Mansfield, “Exploited Workers or Agents of Imperialism? British Common Soldiers in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The British Labour Movement and Imperialism*, ed. Craig Horner, Billy Frank and David Stewart (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

⁸⁷ Edward J. Coss, *All for the King’s Shilling: The British Soldier under Wellington, 1808–1814* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), pp. 29-50.

⁸⁸ Andrew Miles, ‘The Changing Social Structure, 1900–1939’ in Chris Wrigley, *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 342.

office clerks, an occupational group whose social status was always ambiguous, gained confidence from their wartime experiences.⁸⁹ Many were commissioned temporary officers, and had their status enhanced, evidenced by their representation in post-war literature. This supports the contention of many authors in the post-war era, such as Charles Carrington, who applauded the contribution of grammar-school educated temporary officers claiming it revealed their talent for leadership.⁹¹ However, was it officer status and propensity for leadership or a fleeting embrace with gentlemanliness that enhanced the status of clerks and grammar school educated young men?

Martin Petter's defining investigation of the post-war problem of identity, created by the mass demobilisation of temporary officers in the post-war era is particularly relevant to this thesis because it highlights the identity crisis created by the apparent gentrification of lower middle class men, some of whom assumed they were entitled to recognition as gentlemen.⁹² Matt Houlbrook has argued that the shift to gentlemanliness devolved into personal styles and emotional positions of self-control and coolness, and that disposition to look and sound like an officer with accessible material culture, such as uniforms, made post-war impersonation of the gentleman-officer possible.⁹³ This study will demonstrate that these shifts were not permanently possible within the well-defined socio-cultural milieu of the officer class.

This study sets out to assess the impact of the ranker officer during the war, one of the most significant changes in the social composition of the army, however it is neglected in the literature. Gary Sheffield alludes to the presence of ranker officers, and sees this and other class

⁸⁹ Jonathan Wild, “‘A Merciful, Heaven-Sent Release’?: The Clerk and the First World War in British Literary Culture,” *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 1 (2007); Michael Heller, *London Clerical Workers, 1880-1914, Perspectives in Economic and Social History* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011).

⁹¹ Charles Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), pp. 75-76.

⁹² Martin Petter, “‘Temporary Gentlemen’ in the Aftermath of the Great War: Rank, Status and the Ex-Officer Problem,” *The Historical Journal* 37, no. 1 (1994).

⁹³ Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*, pp. 28-35.

differences reconciled to a ‘graben-kamaradeschaft’, the comradeship of the trenches.⁹⁴ However, it is more generally believed that the regular army tended to reinforce social hierarchy and that, during the war, this was hardly broken down. Gerard De Groot states ‘it requires a precarious leap of reason to believe that barriers were broken down in the army, which was even more rigid and hierarchical than civilian life.’⁹⁵ George Robb recognised that although the war afforded more contact between social classes and changed perceptions, there was no ‘equality of sacrifice’ when comparing the lives of officers and enlisted men.⁹⁶ The wartime propaganda depicting the army as a ‘unifying force and promoter of social harmony’ has arguably influenced the emphasis on the ‘camaraderie of the trenches’.⁹⁷ Helen McCartney shows that the middle class in the ranks of the territorial unit she studied did not respond to the breakdown of social homogeneity and form social relationships with working-class recruits, but rather ‘clung to the prejudices and affinities learned in civilian life, and the experience of the trenches did not make friendship across the chasm of social class any more attractive’.⁹⁸

The idea that the war was only a temporary suspension of pre-existing cultural prejudices and affinities concurs with much of the work on gender and work on the Home Front. Here the relationship of gender to industrial war effort has been a focus.⁹⁹ This scholarship of women’s activities during the First World War, measuring change and the impact of war as an instigator, has moved away from simplistic interpretations and developed a view of the war as a

⁹⁴ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 126.

⁹⁵ Gerard J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1996), p. 164.

⁹⁶ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 48.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Helen B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War*, Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare, vol. 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 56.

⁹⁹ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars*, vol. 5 (London: Routledge, 2012); Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2012); Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: IB Tauris, 2000); Deborah Thom, “Women and Work in Wartime Britain,” *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914–1918*, ed., Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2005).

mechanism that ‘enacted the crucial reconfiguration of concepts of gender within public cultures’.¹⁰⁰ Here too, as demonstrated by Nicoletta Gullace and Susan Grayzell, change was limited, and despite women’s incursions into masculine roles, core gender and national identities were maintained and reaffirmed.¹⁰¹ Curiously, in a context that is total inversion of the army and identity investigated in this study, Anne Spurgeon, studying munitions workers and the role of factory inspectors, has observed that the fundamental pre-war good work in protecting the health and well-being of women working in hazardous environments was seriously derailed in the war by the co-opting of inspector and supervisory roles by middle-class women who, in establishing a regime of ‘paternalism’, became more interested in the moral welfare of workers rather than their safety.¹⁰²

Particularly important to this thesis is the idealised identity of the gentleman that had reached its apotheosis by 1914.¹⁰³ Its decline and re-imagination after the war has been investigated by several scholars. Marcus Collins has reported the contested support it received until the mid-nineteen-fifties and its ‘irreparable damage at the hands of a post-war generation seeking scapegoats for the country’s perceived economic, geopolitical and moral decline.’¹⁰⁴ The hegemonic influence and persistence of the officer-gentleman ideal that informs this thesis has steadfastly endured. The subverting of the ‘gentleman’ idea through the depiction of the

¹⁰⁰ Nicoletta Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (London: Macmillan, 2002); S. R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (London: Longman, 2002); *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Laura Doan, “A Challenge to ‘Change’? New Perspectives on Women and the Great War,” *Women’s History Review* 15, no. 2 (2006).

¹⁰¹ Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons*; Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*; *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*.

¹⁰² Anne Spurgeon, “Mortality or Morality? Keeping Workers Safe in the First World War,” in *The Home Front in Britain* (London: Springer, 2014), pp. 57-72.

¹⁰³ P. Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1982).

¹⁰⁴ Collins, “The Fall of the English Gentleman,” p. 108. Collins also felt that in updating the gentlemanly ideal ‘James Bond’ altered it almost beyond recognition. For a military context see Simon Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914–1918: Defeat into Victory* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 4.

fictional burglar, Raffles, written about between 1898 and 1939, set the tone for less respectable depictions of the gentleman.¹⁰⁵ However, the gentleman-officer was largely inured or survived disparagement. The persistence of the gentleman-officer required a political acquiescence and Walter Bagehot's view, that the deference to upper middle-class institutions was procured by a combination of theatricality and ideas of fairness, still has validity. An idea explored and developed by Ross McKibbin, it has considerable weight when we search for explanations for gentlemanly officer resilience.¹⁰⁶ These are macro explanations and are of less use to this study which is concerned with the practicalities of differentiation, or how gentlemen-officers asserted their differences and supposed superiority.

In determining the methodological approach to this investigation the work of Quintin Colville in studying gentlemen-officers' relationship to material culture in the navy has been a major influence in the approach employed to understanding the socio-cultural meanings attached to uniform and space in the form and organisation of the officer's mess.¹⁰⁷ The cultural expectations of gentlemen-officers have been informed and in turn employed to understand the significance of difference and the policing of the boundaries of gentlemanly identity.

The scholarship of national character and ideas such as Englishness is important to this study in explaining the resilience of the gentleman-officer and the repression of the ranker officer. Peter Mandler has considered 'national character', an idea that he locates as evolving from the work of Edmund Burke and the 'civilising mission'.¹⁰⁸ Mandler is at odds with the idea of

¹⁰⁵ Eloise Moss, "'How I Had Liked This Villain! How I Had Admired Him!': A.J. Raffles and the Burglar as British Icon, 1898–1939," *Journal of British Studies* 53, no. 01 (2014).

¹⁰⁶ Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1867); Ross McKibbin, "Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?," *The English Historical Review* 99, no. 391 (1984).

¹⁰⁷ Quintin Colville, "Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer: The Role of Uniform in Shaping the Class-and Gender-Related Identities of British Naval Personnel, 1930–1939," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Sixth Series)* 13 (2003) Quintin Colville "Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity: Royal Naval Officers and their Shipboard Homes," *Gender & History* 21, no. 3 (2009).

¹⁰⁸ Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp.138–9. Mandler regards the emergence of 'John Bull' as arising

Englishness as a construct, however the concept of Englishness employed as a contemporary tool is important to this thesis and it presents evidence that it was central to the idea of military deference.¹⁰⁹ It underpinned one aspect of officering the British army relied upon, the idea of ‘paternalism’.¹¹⁰ Paternalism, a social attitude that informed an outlook at different levels in Victorian and Edwardian England, took on particular importance in maintaining the wider social hierarchy.¹¹¹ In military history, particularly in association with the British army, it has taken on a totemic status as part of an ‘unspoken deferential bargain’ that explains officer-man relations.¹¹² This has framed the idea of officer-man relations being underpinned by ‘noblesse-oblige’, an aristocratic claim extended to the gentleman-officer that justified privilege. This informed a belief that the relationship between officers and men was consensual because of predetermined roles in the class system. This idea pervades the way the war is imagined and commemorated, and reflected in more scholarly studies such as *Playing the Game*.¹¹⁴ The presence of ranker officers, officers who were not gentlemen, undermined many of the precepts of leadership that legitimised the claims of gentlemen to exclusively officer the army, and which have been largely unchallenged. This study threatens to destabilise these ideas.

Of all the literature and ideas explored in scoping this study the idea of the gentleman is key, it was a constant contemporary cultural reference point before and after the war. The ranker officer was a necessity of the war and simultaneously incongruous with the whole framework

from a fascination with England’s Anglo-Saxon roots, but believes that first the Anglo-Boer War and then the First World War eclipsed that national Character, reducing it in scale to the ‘little man’ epitomized by a newspaper cartoon figure. This identity collapsed after the Second World War and nothing coherent followed.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Mandler, “Against ‘Englishness’: English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850–1940,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 7 (1997).

¹¹⁰ Gerald Dworkin, “Paternalism,” *The Monist*, 56, (1972). Defined by Dworkin as ‘roughly the interference with a person’s liberty of action justified by reasons referring exclusively to the welfare, good, happiness, needs, interests or values of the person being coerced.’

¹¹¹ David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (Taylor & Francis, 2016).

¹¹² Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*; Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 161.

¹¹⁴ Christopher Moore-Bick, *Playing the Game: The British Junior Infantry Officer on the Western Front 1914–18* (Solihull: Helion, 2011).

of how gentlemen-officers understood themselves and their identity. The study is concerned with how the social and cultural continuity of the gentlemanly identity of the army officer coped with change, the idea of the ranker officer, and robustly re-emerged in the post-war era.

5) Methodological Considerations

The ranker officer as a case study depended on defining the officers commissioned from the ranks before the war (1903–1914) and the ranker officers commissioned during the war (1914–1918). This involved gathering personal data, name, age, regiment, years in the ranks and career profiles of over 7,000 officers.

A challenging part of this study was to establish the quantitative boundaries surrounding the numbers of ranker officers commissioned in the war. The official statistics attribute 6,713 men from the ranks as being granted commissions in the regular army in the period 5 August 1914 to 1 December 1918.¹¹⁵ Beyond these crude statistics, the presence of ranker officers in the army is statistically opaque; there has been no fine grain assessment showing regimental differentiation or data showing the distribution of commissions across the course of the war, and this study makes an important contribution to addressing this. To date, this has severely impacted on public perceptions and scholarship.

The prevalence of what was understood to be a ranker officer was greater than these figures suggest. The candidate for a regular commission had to be serving in the ranks or reserve of the regular army to meet the criteria for a ‘permanent’ commission. At the outbreak of war, the War Office issued a call for all senior regular NCOs to re-enlist in the army to help train new recruits with many of these NCOs being commissioned, and, since they had re-enlisted for war

¹¹⁵ *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War, 1914–1920*, (London: H.M.S.O., 1922), p. 234.

service only, they were given temporary commissions.¹¹⁶ These pre-war regular NCOs and warrant officers constituted at least another 2,500 officers.¹¹⁷ Unlike the 7,000 ranker officers awarded regular commissions who were listed in the *Quarterly Army Lists* and who could be individually identified and researched to support this thesis, it is impossible to identify all of these officers. However, their characteristics, background, and identity were consistent with other ranker officers, they were regarded by their contemporaries as ranker officers and, when relevant and their background is apparent, their stories and experience have been included in this study.

It is important to establish some boundaries around the study hence there are some other types of officers that have been excluded. Regular army ‘honorary’ quarter-masters, riding-masters and warrant officers continued to be appointed throughout the war in vastly increased numbers. These are another group of rarely acknowledged officers in the historiography that are described, but not researched in this thesis. They represent a route to a form of seniority for soldiers in the ranks who were not gentlemen. They are relevant to the identity of officers commissioned from the ranks before the war, and their identity is discussed in chapter one.

The ranks of the pre-war British army also populated the Imperial Forces of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada. They were sent to Europe and other Fronts during the war, and contained many ex-British regular army rankers who were commissioned in the war. The Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) included many pre-war British soldiers who had migrated to Canada.¹¹⁸ For example, Edward Hilliam, a trooper in the 17th Lancers emigrated

¹¹⁶ For example, Captain Sidney James Alexander MC (TNA WO 339/22795 Sidney James Alexander); Lieutenant-Colonel John Patrick Hunt, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, (TNA WO 339/43268 John Patrick Hunt).

¹¹⁷ These figures are based on the claims of the Ex-Ranker Officers Association, formed post-war to secure better pensions for this group of officers, who reverted to receiving non-commissioned officers’ pensions after the war.

¹¹⁸ See Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up : The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993).

to Canada to join the North West Mounted Police and returned to the war in Britain an officer.¹¹⁹ He was one of two senior CEF officers who reached the rank of brigadier-general, born in Britain, and who had previously served in the British army ranks.¹²⁰ These officers were not included here because the military culture of these colonial forces was different and beyond the scope of this study.

In the absence of statistics that explained who ranker officers were and when they were commissioned, one of the initial challenges to this study was to extract data from *The Army List* and to collate it in a limited prosopography. *The Army List* was, and remains, the official listing of all those officers holding a commission in the British Army.¹²¹ *The Army List* is not an entirely dependable source of data, as some ranker officers were killed or died after being ‘gazetted’, with an announcement in *The London Gazette*, but before they were included in the list. Although all commissions were gazetted, even posthumously, death before publication led to exclusion from *The Army List*. Basic information gleaned from *The Army List* was tested and complemented by information available in *Officers Died in the Great War* and the *London Gazette*.¹²² Casualty information was also investigated on the Commonwealth War Graves

¹¹⁹ Major-General Edward Hilliam, (1865–1949) “Obituary Major-General E Hilliam,” *The Times*, May 30, 1949.

¹²⁰ Brigadier-General James Kirkaldy, (1866–1957).

¹²¹ William Spencer, ed., *Army Service Records of the First World War*, (Richmond: Public Record Office, 2001). The status of the Army List is confirmed under the Army Act 1881, section 163 (d), as evidence of the status and rank of the officers mentioned within it. There were several forms of Army List published during the Great War. The most frequently published list was the monthly Army List that listed all officers whether they were Regular army, Territorial Force or reserve, giving commission dates in the rank held at publication and unit currently served in. The quarterly and half yearly Army Lists contain information only on officers holding permanent commissions. This list is ordered by ‘gradation’ in schedule 3 of the contents. Officers are listed within rank and then in graduation order, the date upon which an officer was promoted to a given rank. These lists also contain date of birth, date of first commission and subsequent promotion and courses attended. The quarterly Army Lists also uniquely contain War Services in the January edition, identifying any campaigns the officers were involved in and medals awarded.

¹²² Officers Died in the Great War 1914-1919 (London: HMSO, 1919).

Commission (CWGC) website.¹²³ Finally, selected officers' post-service careers were researched through local newspapers and obituaries.

The main additional source used to explain why and how ranker officers' careers were affected by their status, is their contemporary service records. Records of service for men commissioned from the ranks can be found in The National Archive (TNA).¹²⁴ The TNA contains 217,000 records of service of officers who saw service in the war. There were two major limitations on the availability of records related to the cohorts of men studied. Firstly, officers who were still serving after 31 March 1922 or left before that date but were recalled or re-joined, have files named 'P' files, retained by the Ministry of Defence. Many of the regular rankers commissioned were career soldiers and this limited the availability of files.¹²⁵ Secondly, an officer's file consisted of three parts, the record of service (AF B199), confidential reports (AF B196) and the correspondence file. The first two parts of the files of men commissioned after 1901 were separated from the correspondence and destroyed in 1940. This, and the 'weeding' of the correspondence file leaves a relatively limited content in most files. The strength of this data lies in that it contains contemporary observations of officer suitability and performance in the ranks. Its weakness is that it is partial in terms of the overall population and weeding involved removing large amounts of data.

There are few ranker officers' memoirs compared to the dominance of public school ex-officers in the first-person literature. John Lucy's memoir of his experiences proved an excellent source, describing his life in the ranks, from 1912 until 1917, and his subsequent commission.¹²⁶ Diaries and memoirs of the ranks and ranker officers tend to be factual and less

¹²³ Commonwealth War Graves Commission: <http://www.cwgc.org>. Accessed April 7, 2007.

¹²⁴ The National Archives, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>. Accessed April 7, 2017.

¹²⁵ All the available files of ranker officers commissioned from 1903 until 1 Jan 1915 were examined in detail, thereafter selected files were reviewed.

¹²⁶ John F. Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1993).

reflective, particularly concerning class, demeanour and affect.¹²⁷ They came from a background that did not support writing the sort of ‘canonical literary accounts’ that came from the middle classes.¹²⁸

To enable an analysis of the how the representation of ranker officers evolved, a huge range of memoirs and diaries of temporary, regular, and territorial force officers have been reviewed. They are based on a particular class view of the war and the relationship between participants. They have generated a ‘narrative’ of the war that is peculiarly British, a collective biography of ‘middle class officers’ and which has come to stand for the totality of men’s experiences of the war.¹²⁹ Slipped into these narratives are fleeting references to ranker officers, their difference creating amusing anecdotes, disparaging comments, and military deference. These are a rich source of material.

6) Structure and Organisation

To assemble the argument underpinning this thesis, it is necessary to set out the background to commissioning from the ranks and provide definitive evidence of commissioning from the ranks of the pre-war regular army during the war, since this has never been previously presented with clarity in any literature.

The first chapter of this study presents how commissions from the ranks have been addressed in the historiography of social change and military history. It will deal with the emergence of officer identity in the British army and its representation in the nineteenth century and the years leading up to 1914, sketching the idea of the gentleman and how this uniquely mapped on to the army officer. It will discuss the growth and legitimacy of other types of officer that served the professional and cultural needs of the army and their relationship to the dominant ideal type

¹²⁷ For example: Ernest Shephard, *A Sergeant-Major's War* (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press, 1985).

¹²⁸ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 273.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 283

of gentleman-officer. The literature describing the ranks of the British army up until 1918 and the emergence of social and professional strata within the ranks and the status of the NCO is sparse and yet important in understanding the discipline and performance of an army struggling with tradition embedded in its culture and addressing new military demands. This is important context.

The second chapter analyses how understandings of gentlemanliness, in the civil and military domains, shaped institutional policies and procedures for promoting from the ranks leading up to 1914. It charts the pre-war tension between the institutional culture of the army and social change manifest through political pressure to commission more officers from the ranks and how the outcomes were shaped by discourses, assumptions, mentalities, and class. The thwarting of attempts to create an educationally progressive route from the ranks to a commission were illustrative of a deteriorating relationship between the army and state. Drawing on the prosopographic data on the 1903–1914 officers, it explains the nature of pre-war commissions, based and modelled on assimilating into the identity of gentlemanly subalterns. The chapter investigates the cultural policing of the boundary between the officer class, ‘imposters’, and the ranks and its relationship to gentlemanly identity. The data and contemporary sources will be used to explain how the regimental hierarchy and a competition of exclusiveness created a backlash of prejudice towards officers commissioned who carried the stigma of service in the ranks.

Drawing on the evidence of the prosopography, the third chapter is crucial in establishing the collective identity of officers commissioned from the ranks of the pre-war army — ranker officers — and draws on the data collected on over 7,000 individuals to set the scene for understanding how the identity of officers commissioned from the ranks shifted. It explains the changing pattern of wartime commissions and the significance to the arms of service,

particularly the infantry and artillery. In looking at regimental data, this chapter raises questions about the importance of the ranker officer in maintaining regimental identity and securing professional knowledge in the deepening crisis of a prolonged war and argues that the phenomenon was more significant than previously considered.

The fourth chapter identifies the cultural practices and the place where participation in the officer class was negotiated with a particular focus on the regimental mess and the regulating rules and codes. They are discussed in this chapter with particular reference to how they articulated with officers commissioned from the ranks and their identity, comparing the pre-war and wartime contexts. This discussion is organised to consider the acting out of cultural practices in three domains; through regimental identity, within the culturally constructed space of the mess, and through formal and informal rules that governed officers' behaviour. Of these, the mess was most central to the maintenance of social and cultural difference, maintained through a range of cultural practices. The chapter considers how these practices and dynamics shifted in the war. It is in this milieu that gentlemen-officers began to construct the identity of the ranker officer that dominates the literature from the war.

The fifth chapter continues to explore the theme of how gentlemen-officers accentuated the 'difference' between themselves and ranker officers. This is through a broad set of appearance and performances in which class and military status were located that include uniform, demeanour, mannerism, posture, movement, accent, and speech — all things we might understand as front or facade. This chapter evidences the main argument of the thesis; the progressive differentiation and creation of the 'ranker officer.' The creation of the identity of the ranker officer and subsequent representations illuminate the hegemonic influence of the gentleman-officer.

The sixth chapter returns to the prosopographic evidence and other sources to consider the martial status of ranker officers and their prominence at the end of the war, including producing the most decorated regimental officer of the war.¹³⁰ This chapter charts how the leadership of ranker officers challenged the idea of ‘Englishness’ and the implicit class based relationships and identity embedded in the roles of the leaders, and the led, in the pre-war British army. It tests whether this evidence that conflicts with ideas about leadership, character, and paternalism was repressed because of the pre-eminence of the idea of gentlemen-officers, to the extent that it is now counterintuitive to popular and academic perceptions of the war.

The final chapter explores how the ranker officers’ self-perception of their collective identity was formed towards the end, and after the war. The fragility of ranker officer status is explored through the process of their exclusion from the officer class at the end of the war as the army reverted to its pre-war size and character. Their public representation only emerged in the post-war struggle by ex-servicemen for a just post-war settlement. Their increasing political impotence is indicated by their frustration at prematurely ended careers and injustice at their pensions and lack of post-war opportunity. The decline in the reputation of the ranker officer accelerated following their popular representation in the late 1920s and 1930s, marking the denouement of the Othering of the ranker officer.

This is a case study in the persistence and defensive reassertion of powerful differences of class and notions of gentlemanliness. Here is the important chronology through which the gentleman was reasserted and the ranker officer denigrated and marginalised, in the aftermath of war.

¹³⁰ James F. Plunkett of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, commissioned in 1915. He was recommended for a Victoria Cross twice and ended the war a DSO & two bars, MC and DCM. See Charles Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army, 1914–18* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), p. 298.

Chapter One

Identity, Officers, and ‘Other Ranks’ in the British Army before the First World War

This chapter examines three important military identities and their relationship to one another in the regular army in the era before the First World War. This is important in explaining the resilience and persistence of gentlemen-officers through the institution of the army. The identities examined are the regular army officer, the ‘other ranks’, and a hybrid officer, called the ‘honorary’ officer. This analysis seeks to show how the binary differentiation between commissioned officers and all other types of army professionals was based on deep rooted cultural, rather than a professional set of differences. The analysis suggests an increasing blurring of boundaries at the professional interface as the war approached and extrapolates what that meant in terms of cultural barriers. The chapter first explores the emergence of the gentleman-officer identity and how its ethos was derived from a public-school education. It then analyses how technology, complexity, and widening educational opportunity caused the emergence of a social and professional strata of NCOs in the army, and the reaction this created in terms of existing culturally important ideas of leadership and authority. This chapter discusses the growth and legitimacy of other, or hybrid, types of officer that were created and served the professional needs of the army, and their relationship to the dominant gentleman-officer ideal. Understanding how these identities were formed within the cultural milieu of the army is important to understanding the increasing reluctance to commission officers from the ranks of the army in the Edwardian era, when, paradoxically, NCOs were well educated, and there was an acute shortage of army officers.¹ To appreciate what lay behind this paradox, it is

¹ Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914, Themes in British Social History* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 279.

necessary to consider the cultural alignment of the army officer class, the public-school system, and the evolution of the gentlemanly ideal that evolved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The first section explores the development of the idea of the gentleman-officer that gathered momentum and became pre-eminent by 1914. It considers the social and cultural alignment of the British army officer class and the public-school system from which its members were drawn. The habitat of the gentleman-officer primarily comprised homo-social environments and membership of gentlemen's clubs, culturally corresponding to the officers' mess in the regimental setting.² The culture and traditions surrounding the officers' regimental mess are explored here, since it is a continuing and important presence throughout this thesis. It was a crucial space in the negotiation of gentleman-officer identity and participation that determined the acceptability of officers commissioned from the ranks.

The ranks of the army are poorly described or differentiated in the historiography. In accessing their status, it is necessary to begin by contrasting the representation of the 'other ranks' with their increasing sophistication as evidenced by their professional development and the increasing importance and authority of NCOs.³ This neglect has been important in diminishing the identity and status of the British army ranker. It is also important to recognise the presence of alternative types of officers who were from the ranks and who served 'domestic' functions, maintaining the army as a home to several thousand men, in contrast to those performed by the masculine gentleman-officer whose purpose was to lead. The 'honorary officer' was a type of

² Amy Milne-Smith, "A Flight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen's Clubs of London, 1880–1914," *The Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 04 (2006); A. Milne-Smith, *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late Victorian Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Barbara Black, *A Room of His Own: A Literary-Cultural Study of Victorian Clubland* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012).

³ The dependence on first person accounts is one reason. See Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 41.

officer that was afforded some of the privileges and appearance of commissioned officers and yet remained different. This was a form of officer that did not threaten gentlemanly identity through the way it was differentiated and because of its limited presence. They remain opaque in the literature and hitherto regarded as undeserving of attention in the public and academic spheres.⁴ Describing them provides a useful way of understanding the antecedents of ‘ranker officers’ who became more ubiquitous and challenging to the traditional gentlemanly identity in the First World War.

1) The Officer Class, Public Schools, the Gentlemanly Ideal, and the Army Officer.

The public schools and military colleges created a hegemonic masculinity that was idealised in the form of the gentleman-officer. This had evolved from its prosaic form of being one who had the right to possess a coat of arms, to become a much more complicated cultural identity, containing many possible interpretations. Importantly, gentlemen were credited, whatever place they found themselves, with instinctively recognising one another.⁵ The most elite and institutionalised form of gentlemanly identity in the British imperial world by 1914 was the ‘officer and the gentleman’.⁶ This section primarily concerns the institutional mechanisms and processes that shaped access to the officer class, formed the character of the British regular army officer, and the ways in which he learned to recognise and distinguish himself in a world of increasing professionalism.

The social background of regular army officers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been researched by Peter Razzell, Christopher Otley, Edward Spiers, and more recently Mark Connelly and Timothy Bowman.⁷ Theirs are not comprehensive reviews because of their

⁴ They warrant little attention and are often misrepresented: ibid., p. 29.

⁵ A. Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014), P. 357.

⁶ J. Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2001), pp. 31-31.

⁷ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army : Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902-1914*, p. 9. Christopher B Otley, "The Educational Background of British Army Officers," *Sociology* 7, no. 2

sample size and categorisation.⁸ Spiers researched the social composition of senior army officers, comparing each on the threshold of war in 1854, 1899, and 1914. He concluded that in 1914, with some consistency across the periods studied, 26 per cent came from the gentry, 23 per cent from military or armed services backgrounds, 12 per cent from the clergy, 12 per cent from select professions and 7 per cent from the peerage or baronetage.⁹ The other approach has been to investigate the Sandhurst and Woolwich cadet registers, looking at the social background of entrants; a limited approach as only 55 per cent of officers came through the cadet system.¹⁰ The investigation of the 1914 cohorts suggests that the social background of senior officers in Spiers' study and the entrants to Sandhurst were in remarkably consistent proportions.¹¹

There were other routes of direct entry to the officer class; for example, from the university, special reserve and militia. However Spiers believes these would have been even more exclusive than the cadet route.¹² The homogeneity of the officer class was strengthened by the connection between the army and land, the county communities producing 65 per cent of senior officers in 1914.¹³ A small amount of social mobility lay behind this data in that rich industrialists consolidated their status by buying large land holdings, and sending their children into the army was part of a process of gentrification.¹⁴ The social backgrounds of regular senior army officers and cadets have been collectively said to represent the 'leisured class' prepared

(1973); Peter E Razzell, "Social Origins of Officers in the Indian and British Home Army: 1758-1962," *British Journal of Sociology* (1963); Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914*.

⁸ See Spiers, *The Army and Society*, Appendix 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6. For figures based on a cross section of entrants in 1913, see: Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 13.

¹¹ *The Edwardian Army*, p. 9.

¹² Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴ Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1987), p. 51.

'to commit to the part-time, part paid nature of soldiering, at least for a few years'.¹⁵ Of particular note in these studies is the core of 'military families'; several generations serving in the army with particular regimental affiliations. The hereditary system had worked against the interests of 'second sons' whose wealth, and that of their children, were diminished. However, these families continued to support their sons in their army officer careers.¹⁶

These origins had become increasingly allied in importance to a public-school education that instilled 'gentlemanly values'.¹⁷ Christopher Otley's work has shown that the greatest change was the emergence of the public school as the prerequisite to entry, not providing vocational preparation but rather as Gwyn Harries Jenkins has observed 'The essential objective of the public school and the university were thus the transmission of a body of cultural values, to the total exclusion of considerations about vocational or professional need.'¹⁸ It is important to consider how the identity of the army officer in the early twentieth century became so inextricably bound to the public-school and the popular idea of the gentleman.¹⁹ It is claimed the origin of the gentlemanly ideal was in the landed classes. It is axiomatic to think that because these same landed classes, particularly the British aristocracy, had raised armies in support of, or against the crown, since feudal times, that this was their link to the military tradition.²⁰ The incorporation of a chivalric moral code in the gentlemanly ideal would seem to support this feudal past. However, the scope of social backgrounds that embraced the

¹⁵ Edward M. Spiers, *Late Victorian Army, 1868–1902*, Manchester History of the British Army Series (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992), p 94 and pp. 338–89. Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, pp. 8–9. Spiers compared the social background of senior Regular army officers in 1899 and 1914, Bowman and Connelly looked at a random sample of cadets admitted into RMC from 1910 until 1914.

¹⁶ Nicholas Perry, "The Irish Landed Class and the British Army, 1850-1950," *War in History* 18, no. 3 (2011): p. 328.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 317.

¹⁸ Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society*, Studies in Social History (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 112; C.B. Otley, "The Educational Background of British Army Officers."; C.B. Otley, "Militarism and Militarization in the Public Schools, 1900-1972," *British Journal of Sociology* 29 (1978), 321-39.

¹⁹ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 1.

²⁰ Elie Halevy, *A History of the English People* (London: Pelican, 1937), p. 114-15.

gentlemanly ideal proves that the ideal itself was without pretensions to being a birth right by 1914.²¹ By then, it was a far more complex cultural construction, the roots of which lay in the social background, public school education, and military education of the gentleman-officer.

It was this social and cultural background of gentlemen-officers that was parsed into the cultures and hierarchies that governed the army. It was omnipresent, reproduced in the everyday rituals of army life and embodied in the cultural practices that governed participation, particularly in the officers' mess. The gentlemanly culture of the pre-war army is explored here because it had an overwhelming influence on the nature and source of officers recruited into the army and acutely prejudiced recruitment from the ranks. The qualities of the gentleman have been variously described, and there is no common definition; for instance, W. L. Burn described the qualities of a gentleman as 'gentle birth, the ownership of land and if possible money also, some degree of education, courage and a high sense of honour, generosity and unselfishness', but it is clear that, dependant on the institutional setting, there could be a different emphasis on each of these criteria.²²

The ethos of the gentleman-officer came from a public-school education grounded in the core values of sport, militarism, racial, social superiority, and, first and foremost, the self-belief in the right to rule and lead others.²³ This entitlement to rule extended beyond the confines of Britain to the British Empire. The masculine, warrior identity was also formed through popular journals and books.²⁴ Recruits to the officer class of the army and the colonial service were

²¹ P. E. Razzell, "Social Origins of Officers in the Indian and British Home Army: 1758-1962," *The British Journal of Sociology* 14, no. 3 (1963); Otley, "The Educational Background of British Army Officers."

²² William Laurence Burn, *The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 1994), p. 257.

²³ Rupert Hugh Wilkinson, *The Prefects. British Leadership and the Public School Tradition. A Comparative Study in the Making of Rulers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); James Anthony Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2013).

²⁴ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 2013).

educated at public schools which had become crucial in generating a distinctive governing ethos. These schools' ability to generate self-belief was conjoined with a Christian ethic that was articulated into a paternalistic view of social domination; *Noblesse Oblige*.²⁵ This also served the idea of deference, integral to the idea of the gentleman, his wider social relations with lower classes, and officer-man relations in the army.²⁶ Leadership had a physical form, with young men learning a style of 'prettiness', described by Cyril Connolly as a way of deliberately exuding an 'effortless grace', a casual approach to even difficult tasks.²⁷

Some public schools had a military orientation; Wellington, Haileybury, and Rossall catered for the sons of army officers, and others such as Cheltenham had a preponderance of sons of colonial civil servants.²⁸ The inculcation of discipline, authority, and team spirit were delivered through sports, particularly team games, such as rugby.²⁹ An essential part of this process was the subordination of individual needs to the team good. The schools inculcated loyalty and patriotism. At the centre of the daily life of a public-school boy was the 'house', effectively a compartment of the school that was given a name and identity. A boy's first loyalty was to his house, then his school, and finally his country.³⁰ Within the confines of the house a boy would learn rituals, songs, and traditions and be expected to demonstrate total loyalty and devotion to his compatriots. Discipline was exerted through a clear social hierarchy led by prefects at the top and new entrants at the bottom. The young boys were expected to serve the older boys in

²⁵ Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914*, p. 26.

²⁶ For the bond of deference see Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society*, p. 3.

²⁷ C. Connolly, *Enemies of Promise and Other Essays: An Autobiography of Ideas* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), p. 174.

²⁸ Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, hereafter known as IWMSA, Interview, Norman Margrave Dillon, Catalogue Reference 9752, Dillon who became a regular officer describes his schooldays at Haileybury College 1910–1913. He sets out the emphasis on sport and fagging system at the school.

²⁹ James Anthony Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (London: Psychology Press, 2000).

³⁰ Rupert Wilkinson, "Political Leadership and the Late Victorian Public School," *The British Journal of Sociology* 13, no. 4 (1962).

rituals of deference called ‘fagging’.³¹ Any boy that did not conform to this culture or who was thought to be an outsider would be systematically bullied. This strengthened their identity, exclusiveness, and determination to keep out anyone incompatible with gentlemanly ideals.³² The development of excluding cultural practices were crucial in discriminating those without a gentlemanly identity.

The public-schools tethered themselves to Sandhurst and Woolwich through their curriculum, special army classes, and promotion of their students. Both institutions had an indifferent record from 1903–1914. The educational benefits, particularly in terms of military preparation, have been regarded as highly marginal.³³ The colleges cemented the bullying behaviour and exclusive mind-set that had established itself at public school.³⁴ The contemptuous attitude to lower ranks and social classes is illustrated by a remark made in a discussion in early 1914, as whether to locate a school at Sandhurst to prepare NCOs to become officers. The Army Council was advised against co-locating gentleman cadet and NCO schools because, it declared, ‘the public-school boy is very intolerant and might not behave sympathetically.’³⁵ This concern highlights the potential intimidation that public school boys were capable of towards lower social classes and particularly a group that threatened their exclusivity. In addition to forming these attitudes, the public schools provided knowledge that complimented family insights about the rituals and behaviours of prospective regimental messes to cadets.³⁶

³¹ Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *The Old School Tie: The Phenomenon of the English Public School* (London: Viking, 1977); Jane Hamlett, "Space and Emotional Experience in Victorian and Edwardian English Public School Dormitories," in *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial and Global Perspectives*, ed. Stephanie Olsen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³² Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos*. See Chapter 2, "The Best House of the Best School."

³³ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, pp. 14-26.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁵ The National Archive, hereafter known as the TNA, WO 32/8386, Minutes of the Army Council.

³⁶ Keith Simpson, "The Officers," in *A Nation in Arms : A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 66. The relationship between potential officers and regiments began at birth, and is described as 'pair bonding'.

A feature of young officers' education in college was 'classicising', where ancient history and archaeology, particularly Roman history was used to interpret the present.³⁷ The discourse adopted was to define the Roman civilisation in opposition to barbarian 'others' and draw parallels between this past and army officers' own imperial enterprise. This had taken hold in the Edwardian period and was used by Baden-Powell and others to defend imperial interests.³⁸ This was just one of many ways in which the officer class defined themselves against the 'other' and made the 'policing' of their identity even more rigorous. Any dilution of the 'officer and a gentleman' identity was perceived as a risk to the empire, not just the exclusivity of the officer class. How this exclusivity was 'policed' has rarely been explored. Crucial to understanding this, is an appreciation of the place where the gentleman-officer identity was nurtured in the army; this was the mess.

The officers' mess was at the heart of the regimental system. The word 'mess' is derived from 'officers' messuage', meaning officers' dwellings.³⁹ To the outsider, the mess can be perceived as simply a canteen, but in the army from the early nineteenth century it took on additional meaning in terms of military and regimental identity and culture. In addition to meeting practical needs of officers, it was a shared mental space of the officer group.⁴⁰ Key to this was the creation of a masculine environment where gentlemen could feel at home and comfortable

³⁷ Richard Hingley, *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen* (London: Routledge, 2013).

³⁸ Robert Baden-Powell, *Young Knights of the Empire: Their Code, and Further Scout Yarns* (London: C. A. Pearson, 1916).

³⁹ It is often stated that the word is derived from the French word 'mess' meaning a portion of food; there is evidence that it came to mean a place where a group of people ate meals served from the same dishes by the fifteenth century.

⁴⁰ Franziska Heimburger, "Mapping Allied Space in the Franco-British Coalition on the Western Front," (Paper presented at First World War Studies Conference, Innsbruck 2011). Franziska Heimburger discusses the process of negotiating the presence of French interpreters in the officers' mess on the Western Front.

with each other.⁴¹ The military recognised this as a source of group cohesion, of value in ensuring loyalty through a shared identity. One regular officer observed:

The soldierly qualities of the British officer have been learnt in the regimental mess. It is the only possible school, for tradition cannot be taught on the black board, no more than its spirit can be recorded by the historian. It may be that certain civilian qualities may not be so highly developed; but these other accomplishments and interests are of lesser importance to the nation.⁴²

These lines serve to underscore the cultural importance of the mess as a space where the officer was transformed, not through subject learning referenced in the ‘black board’ and ‘historian’, rather through immersion in the qualities that would distinguish him from a civilian gentleman; tradition and spirit. Messes provided for accommodation, food, servants, and facilities for guests, met through a collective fund managed by committee.⁴³ The officers’ mess embodied the independence of the officer class from government and the state. An important aspect of the space was that officers autonomously managed costs and behaviour. In the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, the affordability of living in a mess became a crucial issue for any aspirant officer and the level of expense a barometer of prestige.⁴⁴

The buildings were also large hegemonic structures that reflected power and prestige, both in Britain and India. The Woolwich Royal Artillery officers’ mess is the most prestigious example, described in 1913 as ‘one of the finest in the Kingdom as well as the oldest, in its long history it has been embellished with many interesting and valuable things in the shape of

⁴¹ Christine Berberich, *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), p. 65.

⁴² Walter Norris Nicholson, *Behind the Lines* (London: Cape, 1939), p. 102.

⁴³ R.J. Dickinson, *Officers' Mess: Being a History of Mess Origins and Customs from a Wealth of Military Records; Enlivened Anecdotes of Mess Times Remembered from a Host of One-Time Mess Members; and the Progress of Charles Oswald Littlewart from 2/Lieutenant to Major-General* (London: Midas Books, 1973).

⁴⁴ Report of the Committee appointed by the Secretary of State to enquire into the nature of expenses incurred by officers of the Army (Stanley Report) Cd., 1421, 1903 chaired by Lord Edward Stanley (1865–1948).

plate, portraits and pictures, records and sporting trophies.⁴⁵ Rudyard Kipling, before visiting it, said ‘what we would most like to see and admire is the Gunners mess and its plate. You see, it’s a sort of Mecca that one has heard talked about all over the world.’⁴⁶ The regimental messes of other regiments were not as grand, but followed a similar principle to Woolwich; a dining room, library, plate or trophy room, smoking room and officers sleeping quarters, with admission to officers and their mess servants, and guests to dine by invitation. This cultural space was intended exclusively for gentlemen-officers, and there was a rigid policing of mess space, particularly forbidding anyone, other than those serving their needs, to enter. This idea of exclusive space was reproduced, with less lavish investment, in sergeants’ and corporals’ messes.

The exclusivity of the officers’ mess was also protected by unwritten laws, and this was where the honour code and traditions peculiar to each regiment were learned and enforced. There was a direct corollary with masculinity and secretiveness of the ‘gentlemen’s clubs’ that burgeoned between 1870 and 1914; excluding women and ‘creating a bachelors’ ambience through smoking rooms, billiard rooms, and male orderlies’.⁴⁷ The same officers, and their brothers and fathers, were also part of these London clubs that Milne-Smith has shown were ‘surrogate homes’, ‘whose gossip helped shape class and gender ideals’.⁴⁸ The club and mess worlds were interchangeable, some having strong regimental ties, and dishonourable conduct in a club could lead to the loss of a commission.⁴⁹ The powerful rituals in the mess were centred on codes of behaviour, language, and deference. The ‘black bottle incident’, when a regimental colonel,

⁴⁵ “The Officers’ Mess,” *Morning Post*, 10 April 1913, p. 37. Alfred Higgins Burne, *The Royal Artillery Mess, Woolwich and Its Surroundings* (Portsmouth: Barrell, 1935).

⁴⁶ R. Kipling and T. Pinney, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling: 1920-30* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990), p. 37.

⁴⁷ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, C. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 125.

⁴⁸ Amy Milne-Smith, “Naughty Bachelors, Bad Husbands, and Mixed-Sex Possibilities,” in *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁴⁹ Amy Milne-Smith, *London Clubland*, pp. 65 and 106.

Lord Cardigan, sanctioned an officer for using a drink, porter, he had personally banned from the mess, illustrated the emergence of an expectation of aristocratic flamboyance and idiosyncratic mess behaviour even from officers with non-aristocratic backgrounds, and this set the tone for messes in the Edwardian era.⁵⁰ It also signalled the inability of the War Office to curb regimental excess, an issue it continued to struggle with until the war.⁵¹

The mess gained increasing importance in the bonding of regimental officers and the creation of technically valued, *esprit de corps*.⁵² The consequence of developing this military virtue was the legitimisation of excluding practices aimed at anyone who did not recognise and conform to the collective cultural identity that defined the corps. The legitimacy of anyone participating in the mess was, according to Captain Younghusband, decided by the group who took sanctions as they saw fit:

There is a good deal of nonsense talked about bullying, both amongst cadets and young officers. In the very large majority of cases a man brings retribution on himself, through not having learned to give and take. When a large number of persons live constantly together, virtually as one large family, a certain modus vivendi has to be inaugurated and maintained, and all who join that community must subscribe to its laws; it is only when some obstreperous youth refuses to conform to these unwritten laws that a misunderstanding occurs, in which the aforesaid youth comes off second best.⁵³

The author portrays the mess as a ‘family’, illustrating its cultural homogeneity and portraying anyone who does not understand the culture as ‘obstreperous’ and deserving of ‘retribution’, in effect deserving to be punished and excluded.

⁵⁰ Cecil Blanche Woodham Smith, *The Reason Why* (London: Constable, 1953), pp. 43–66; Saul David, *The Homicidal Earl: The Life of Lord Cardigan* (London: Little, Brown, 1997), 184–93.

⁵¹ French, *Military Identities*, p. 126.

⁵² *Esprit de Corps* is a French expression meaning literally ‘the spirit of the body’ denoting team spirit, mutual solidarity and devotion to a purpose. First used in a military context by the Foreign Legion, it has taken on a deeper meaning in a military context and is part of a set of core values including ‘honour’, courage, and selfless devotion, in the British case, to a regiment.

⁵³ Captain George John Younghusband, *The Queen's Commission: How to Prepare for It, How to Obtain It, and How to Use It* (London: Murray, 1891), pp. 138–39.

The mess was a discrete social world with its own codes and conventions — to the point that detailed guidance was needed to enable new officers to understand and navigate it. E.H. Pitcairn was an educationalist who tried to profit from describing the ‘unwritten laws’ which applied in both the military and other contexts, usually governing gentlemanly behaviour and self-discipline. His work emphasised the hierarchy based on deference to seniority, stating ‘that “neophytes” or young officers, were snubbed by their immediate superiors, regarded as an unavoidable nuisance in a crowded mess, and shown with the most convincing and sometimes unnecessary force, that he is the bottom rung of a very long ladder.’⁵⁴ Similarly, it informed the ‘law of Swagger’, chiefly designed to ‘prevent a newcomer thinking more highly of himself than he ought to think.’⁵⁵

Entry into the officers’ mess followed a prescribed pattern of rituals designed to maintain a culture of gentlemanliness. An older officer lecturing to graduating officer cadets in 1906 gave a very detailed account of how officers should introduce themselves to their new regiment, exactly detailing to whom the cadet should give his ‘card’ in the mess, and visits they should make to the commanding officer and his wife.⁵⁶ The details of etiquette extended to precise instruction about the length of conversations. Etiquette also dictated that the mess welcome guests with lavish dinners, particularly involving Royalty.⁵⁷

There were two aspects to ritual in the mess. The first was a generalised set of rules that governed behaviour that included not talking ‘shop’ or about women, personal, religious, or political matters, the dress worn for dinner, fine detail about when and where you could smoke

⁵⁴ E. H. Pitcairn, *Unwritten Laws and Ideals of Active Careers[...] Edited by E. H. Pitcairn* (London: Smith, Elder, 1899), p. 114.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁵⁶ William Daniel Conner, *Advice to Army Candidates as to Some Customs of the Service. Address Delivered to the Army Class, Trinity College, Dublin, Etc* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1906).

⁵⁷ Pitcairn, *Unwritten Laws and Ideals*, p. 116.

and more.⁵⁸ The second were regimentally specific rules and required knowledge of regimental military traditions and mess behaviours. These ranged from specific types of after-dinner toasting, seating arrangements, games, and traditions. Breach of these rituals would have been regarded as ‘a bad break or ‘la fâcheuse gaffe’ that would have serious consequences’.⁵⁹ These rituals and their effects worked to maintain particular hierarchies and exclusive cultures. The mess was a culturally constructed highly regulated space that required knowledge of the rituals and rules. These had close symmetry with the public-school experience that young officers brought with them to their regiments, and if they came from families with regimental ties, they would also have knowledge of the regimental-specific rituals they would encounter.

The manipulation of symbols, rituals, ceremonies, and histories to inform new regimental identities was a relatively recent phenomenon instituted in the 1880s. It was the reinvention of tradition with a vengeance, intend to create *esprit de corps*. David French has compared what was achieved as analogous to Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ where, like the ideal nation, there was of a ‘domain of disinterested love and solidarity’.⁶⁰ The strength of this regimental identity, a concern in terms of the homogeneous identity and functioning of the wider army, has been debated.⁶¹ However, it would, given the strength of the gentleman-officer identity and its impact on how commissions from the ranks were conceptualised, have catastrophic consequences for commissions from the ranks in the pre-war era. Preserving regimental, gentlemanly identity trumped qualities such as professionalism, and, in the next section, the way this impacted on the nature of the ‘other ranks’ and they became an

⁵⁸ Frank Levray, "Etiquette in the Mess-Rooms of the British Army," *The Lotus Magazine* 10, no. 3 (1919). E. G. Lieutenant-Colonel R. A. F. Mackenzie, *Notes on Mess Etiquette, Etc* (London: Heath Cranton, 1918).

⁵⁹ Levray, "Etiquette in the Mess-Rooms of the British Army," p. 107.

⁶⁰ French, *Military Identities*, pp. 78-79; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006).

⁶¹ French, *Military Identities*, pp. 259-89.

emergent threat, is analysed. How the culture of the regiment and the mess impacted on the identity of officers commissioned from the ranks will be examined later.

2) The ‘Other Ranks’ and the NCO

The soldier in the ranks of the late Victorian army was depicted in popular literature as a stoic with no ambition, illiterate, and having a poor level of education. The poems and stories of Rudyard Kipling exemplified this caricature.⁶² This representation was increasingly challenged as both inaccurate and damaging to recruitment by the early twentieth century, but remained dominant.⁶³ The discourse exemplified in the literature of Kipling helped maintain the simplistic binary trope of ‘officers’ and ‘other ranks’. Robert Blatchford, a journalist who had served in the army becoming a sergeant major and then a national journalist, was particularly resentful of the way dialect and poor speech was attributed in Kipling’s ‘comic caricature’, describing soldiers ‘as speaking more correctly than civilians of their own rank.’⁶⁴ This caricaturing of speech was later to become an important discriminatory tool of gentlemen-officers distinguishing themselves from ranker officers discussed later in this thesis.

This view of the ranks is, in part, generated by the officer class obsession with alcohol consumption, criminality, and other vices in the ranks. This was generated by the gentlemen-officers’ puritan ethic that was a distinctive feature. Harries-Jenkins describes this as an evangelical tradition of a bible in one hand and a sword in the other’ that was particular in its intensity amongst gentlemen who became officers, and Graham Dawson sees it as the ‘moral manhood’ of the Imperial warrior.⁶⁵ There were health and social problems in the ranks,

⁶² Rudyard Kipling, *Departmental Ditties, Ballads, Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* (New York: Lovell Co., 1900).

⁶³ Robert Blatchford, *My Life in the Army* (London: The Clarion Press, 1910), p. 286.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁶⁵ Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society*, p. 277; Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*.

however obsessive interest in them problematised the ranks, and has influenced the literature about them. The soldier in the twentieth century was still living with the persistence of the ‘scum of the earth’ label that started one hundred years before.⁶⁶

The work of Spiers, and more recently Bowman and Connelly, have tended to concentrate on these characteristics of recruits at enlistment.⁶⁷ Spiers investigated the occupational status of recruits from 1903 until 1907, and found 45 per cent were unskilled, 24 per cent were skilled, 26 per cent were from ‘other occupations’, 1 per cent from professions, and 4 per cent were boys under 17 years, and cautioned that a large proportion may have been unemployed, precipitating their enlistment.⁶⁸ The deprivations of the working class and lack of access to education that afflicted many who enlisted in the army did not reflect the ability of many recruits to progress when they were offered educational opportunity within the army. There has been no meaningful study to show how able soldiers progressed after enlistment. This study shows that many became highly literate and educated. They became NCOs, roles in an increasingly professionalised army that demanded a high degree of literacy, specialist knowledge, and authority.

There is evidence that the NCO in the Edwardian era was more capable than the historiography to date acknowledges. The Edwardian soldier was described as ‘steadier, better educated, keener, brighter and younger’ than his Victorian predecessors.⁶⁹ This rise in the influence, status, and role of the NCO continued into and throughout the war. A hint of the threat this

⁶⁶ See E.J. Coss, *All for the King's Shilling: The British Soldier under Wellington, 1808-1814* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 29-50.

⁶⁷ Spiers, *The Army and Society*; Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*.

⁶⁸ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, pp. 44-45.

⁶⁹ J. M. Brereton, *The British Soldier: A Social History from 1661 to the Present Day* (London: Bodley Head, 1986), p. 115. Brereton notes that in 1912 some 85 per cent of the other ranks were reported to enjoy ‘a superior education’. See Blatchford’s observations of soldiers on manoeuvre in 1909: Blatchford, *My Life in the Army*, pp. 283-85. He characterised soldiers as being ‘sober, steady, clean, and intelligent’.

represented to the ‘moral ascendancy’ of officers is evident in this quote from Ian Hamilton, a leading military figure:⁷⁰

British non-commissioned officers are now well read, clear thinking individuals, and what would have satisfied a sergeant fifteen years ago will hardly today, pass muster with a corporal. Our officers will have to play up for all they are worth to maintain this moral ascendancy over men who already are sometimes their superiors in technical knowledge of details of the profession.⁷¹

Hamilton’s concerns written in 1921, reflect a deep unease with the professional advancement of NCOs that might supersede the cultural supremacy of the gentleman-officer. A corollary to this increasing professionalism before the war was the growth of a parallel social hierarchy. This was exemplified by the sergeants’ mess, setting the sergeants apart from corporals and other ranks who lived in barracks. The sergeants’ mess replicated the organisation of that of the officers’ and provided an exclusive self-regulated social space.⁷² The hierarchical social structure of the ranks extended to wives and families living with regiments, described as being ‘on the strength’ of regiments. Their behaviour at a regimental sports day in India, in the early 1900s, was described thus: ‘The ladies collect in different groups apart from one another: one group of officers’ wives with the Colonel’s wife in command, another of senior NCOs’ wives with the regimental sergeant-major’s wife in command, and then the wives of the sergeants, corporals and privates, each group parading separately’.⁷³ The author described it as ‘class distinction with a vengeance’. It is difficult to comprehend the overwhelming degree to which this hierarchy dictated with whom, and where, people lived and the constraints on social and professional discourse it created.

⁷⁰ General Sir Ian Standish Monteith Hamilton (1853–1947).

⁷¹ Ian Hamilton, *The Soul and Body of an Army* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1921), pp. 127–8

⁷² French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, C. 1870-2000*, p. 125-27.

⁷³ Frank James Richards, *Old-Soldier Sahib* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), P. 159.

Although the officers and ‘other ranks’ were socially and culturally a world apart, it is important to recognise that the army world beyond the confines of officers was made up of several tiers that there were hierarchically arranged. The ordinary soldier could ascend through these groups by certification, good behaviour, and acquiring professional acumen, with the privileges of senior NCO rank and a long service pension as a career goal. The British army sergeant, one of the most overlooked figures in military historiography, was an important and pivotal figure in the day to day milieu of the army. Officers rarely had contact with ‘other ranks’. David French observed ‘for most privates, authority and leadership on a daily basis was personified by junior NCOs (corporals and lance-corporals), senior NCOs (sergeants) and warrant officers. They were an everyday presence in their lives in a way that officers rarely were.’⁷⁴ Blatchford, commenting on the difference between sergeants and the other ranks in 1910, wrote ‘The sergeant is a soldier, and the private is a soldier; but there is a difference between them beyond the difference of pay, position, responsibility and dress. The sergeant might belong to a different race. The sergeants are the most responsible men in the army.’⁷⁶

Blatchford gives an impressive assessment of the sergeant’s responsibilities:

Company Officers have very little responsibility. The captain is nominally responsible for his company, but the colour-sergeant and the sergeants are responsible. They are responsible to the officers, to the sergeant-major to the men. If the men are subordinate, untidy, lazy, the sergeants are held answerable. If the room is dirty, or the kits ill-laid out, or the men not out of bed in time the sergeant is held accountable. The sergeants call the roll, keep the accounts, command the guards and pickets, parade the duties, keep the roster of fatigues, inspect the companies on parade, attend to the rations, the clothing, the washing, the ammunition. There is something like a hundred or a hundred and twenty men in a company. The sergeants of the company must know the men, must know their regimental numbers, the numbers of their arms, the numbers of their accoutrements; must know where every man is and what he is doing.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ French, *Military Identities*, P. 170.

⁷⁶ Blatchford, *My Life in the Army*, p. 178.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

The emphasis on professionalism, knowledge, and expertise and the implicit challenge to officers on those grounds in this quote is striking. The officer is described as ‘nominally’ responsible for his company but the sergeants ‘are’ responsible. The NCOs were responsible for the domestic world of the army, the pervasive rhetoric of paternalism implies that much of the management of the domestic world of soldiers lay in the hands of officers, when it practically rested with NCOs. There has been a serious neglect of working-class masculinities, particularly in institutional settings such as the army outside of wars that prevents this being properly understood.⁷⁸ In everyday peacetime, life of the army was concerned with the care and sustenance of a large body of men. The feeding, quartering, and organisation of soldiers in barracks was a world managed by NCOs.

NCOs were charged with maintaining day-to-day order, and discipline was a key function. Sergeants and other NCOs played a crucial role in the development of individual and group discipline. The disciplinarian’s skills were based on ritualised practices and patterns of behaviour. These had evolved, based on ‘custom and practice’, and punishments related to infringements were increasingly required to be morally and legally acceptable. The shift away from formal physical violence and punishment within the army was part of a wider shift of masculinity moving away from physical violence into self-restraint.⁸⁰ Where fighting did occur in the ranks, NCOs attempted to regulate this by introducing boxing rules and etiquette.⁸¹ Paradoxically, gentlemen-officers, for whom self-restraint had become an established orthodoxy, were anxious about such a change as a disciplinary tool for the ranks, and it was despite this that widespread physical punishments were prohibited by public law makers.⁸² The

⁷⁸ Martin Francis, "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (2002).

⁸⁰ Martin Weiner, "The Victorian Criminalisation of Men," in *Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America*, ed. P C Spierenburg (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998); John Tosh, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005).

⁸¹ John F. Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1993), pp. 44-5.

⁸² Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 87-90.

King's Regulations of 1908 suggested NCOs adopt a 'milder tone' and called on NCOs to use admonition and persuasion.⁸³

The role of the disciplinarian was to instil self-discipline, particularly through drill.⁸⁴ NCOs also instilled discipline through the care of objects; boots, uniform, weapons, and other material culture in the barracks.⁸⁵ Edwardian NCOs regarded themselves as 'disciplinarians', practitioners of the art of instilling discipline, a skill transferrable to the police force or schools if they were considering a career after the army.⁸⁶ The instilling of discipline by NCOs was not entirely reserved for working-class soldiers; many retired regular NCOs were employed at Public Schools and in the Officer Training Corps (OTC) to drill middle-class cadets.⁸⁷ Organisations supporting the employment of retired soldiers and NCOs, such as the Corps of Commissionaires, flourished and saw drill and military bearing transferred to public spaces.⁸⁸

The ascent of the NCO began with the Childers Reforms of 1881 that generated a set of increased benefits for NCOs and created a 'class' of regimental 'warrant officer'. This provided a grade and status that senior NCOs, such as the regimental sergeant major (RSM), the regimental quartermaster sergeant (RQMS), and equivalent ranks could aspire to. These soldiers retained the rank of RSM and RQMS but were also graded warrant officer, meaning they received enhanced remuneration and could serve beyond the regulation 21 years.⁸⁹ They

⁸³ War Office, *The King's Regulations and Orders for the Army* (HMSO, 1908). These were periodically published regulations for the army.

⁸⁴ Brereton writes 'Obedience implies discipline, and discipline training'. The purpose of drill was to enable the manoeuvring of regiments in close order formation and to inculcate unhesitating obedience to words of command. Brereton, *The British Soldier*, p. 27.

⁸⁵ Mathieu Marly, "Inside the Barrack Room: Material Culture, Discipline and Promiscuity in French Republican Garrisons (1872-1914)," (Paper presented at Material Culture in Closed Spaces Conference, Walferdange, Luxembourg, October, 2012).

⁸⁶ Many retired Regular NCOs were employed at Public Schools in the Officer Training Corps (OTC) to drill school cadets: IWMSA, 9752 interview with Norman Margrave Dillon..

⁸⁷ IWMSA, 9752 interview with Norman Margrave Dillon.

⁸⁸ Alban Wilson, "The Corps of Commissionaires," *Royal United Services Institution. Journal* 71, no. 481 (1926).

⁸⁹ TNA WO 32/6673, Warrant and Non-Commissioned Officers: General Improvement in Position and Emoluments of Non-Commissioned Officers. Institution of a Class of Warrant Officers, (1880–1881). See also

received added deference from other ranks being entitled to be addressed as ‘sir’, a term previously reserved only for officers, and this increase in status satisfied many waiting for the rare opportunity to become an ‘honorary officer’.

With this change the relationship between the regimental officers and senior NCOs also shifted, reflecting the importance of the ‘other ranks’ chain of authority. Steps, in the Edwardian era, such as making access to a warrant officer and senior NCO’s disciplinary record privileged to the Commanding Officer (CO), and no other regimental officer, cemented their status as senior members of the regimental hierarchy.⁹⁰ This was not the same as being part of the officer elite. Deference to all gentlemen-officers was still paramount, and warrant officers remained excluded from the officers’ mess.

The NCO did not operate in an entirely homo-social world because many were married, a likelihood that increased proportionate to their seniority, and their marriages and families were institutionally and culturally part of the army. Army wives have been marginal to the historiography of the army, yet in the late nineteenth century they ‘served’ alongside their husbands, even on colonial service. Soldiers could marry in the British army for most of the nineteenth century, but it was discouraged. Most could rarely afford to support a wife unless they were taken on the strength of the regiment.⁹¹ Wives on the strength of the regiment could travel and live with the regiment at home and on foreign service. Some were employed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as ‘sutlers’, who furnished provisions for the troops. Only 6 per cent of soldiers could marry ‘on the strength’; permission had to be sought from the commanding officer, and this depended on the suitability of the wife and the allowed quota not

French, *Military Identities*, p. 21. The grade of Warrant Officer (WO) was differentiated in 1913 by the creation of WO class 1 and 2. The reforms were undertaken by Hugh Childers, Secretary of State for War in 1881, a continuation of the earlier Cardwell reforms.

⁹⁰ War Office, *The King’s Regulations and Orders for the Army* (London: HMSO, 1908).

⁹¹ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 53.

being exceeded.⁹² Being on the strength conferred a special status on the army wife who was expected to sew, wash for the regiment, help with nursing and midwifery, and be a moral, steady influence. In return, they were provided with food, lodging, accommodation, and the cost of their travel with the regiment to colonial outposts.

There was a cost attributed to army wives. The Cardwell reforms had hoped to avoid this, believing the short service system would allow young men to enlist for a short time and leave before contemplating marriage.⁹³ The consequence of this system was that many good soldiers perceived to be good NCO material left the army.⁹⁴ In 1881, as an inducement to stay on, the War Office offered extra marriage privileges to particularly well behaved senior NCOs.⁹⁵ The children of marriages ‘on the strength’ lived in the confines of the garrison in Britain or on colonial service overseas and had to attend army school until they were 14 years of age. At 15 years, many of these children would then join the army as boy soldiers. The net effect of these changes was to produce a second and sometimes third generation of army families who were inextricably linked to the regiments. The extent of this is made clear by 7,574 recruits to the army in 1913 having been born in India; clearly the progeny of army families.⁹⁶ This is significant in informing our understanding of the identity of senior NCOs who were forming a dynastic presence in the higher echelons of the ranks of the army.

⁹² See: Edward M. Spiers, *Late Victorian Army*; Myna Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁹³ The Cardwell Reforms were reforms of the British army undertaken by Edward Cardwell, the Secretary of State for War, in the period 1868 and 1874.

⁹⁴ French, *Military Identities*, p. 129.

⁹⁵ It was decided that provided they were over the age of 24, all staff sergeants, colour sergeants and half of all sergeants could marry on the strength. For the rank and file, provided they were over the age of 26, 12 per cent could marry on the strength. The provisions were highly selective in that they men had to be of proven good conduct shown by at least seven years ‘service, two good conduct badges and considered someone to whom it was desirable to offer special inducements to remain in the Service. TNA WO 33/38 Report of the Committee on Married Establishments of the Army, 1882. See: Brereton, *The British Soldier*, p. 120.

⁹⁶ War Office, *The General Annual Report on the British Army for the Year Ending 30th September 1913*, (London: HMSO, 1914).

An important factor that had a major bearing on the professionalisation and development of the NCO was access to education and training. Regimental Army Schools were established in 1812. The army established a Corps of Army Schoolmasters in 1845; made up of senior NCOs, it was intended to produce more literate soldiers capable of meeting the growing technical demands of soldiering.⁹⁷ In 1859, the corps became responsible for libraries and schools for the families of serving soldiers. Later, army schoolmistresses were appointed to provide infant and girls' education. The development of the army school system meant that the children of serving soldiers had better access to free education than their counterparts outside the army.⁹⁸ The purpose of these family provisions was to relieve the soldier of civilian responsibilities but also to 'raise from their offspring a succession of loyal subjects, brave soldiers and good Christians.'⁹⁹ Schoolmasters and schoolmistresses were later assisted by selected NCOs who had come through the ranks and could become supervised teachers, called soldier assistants.¹⁰⁰ In addition to regimental provisions, military schools for orphans of soldiers, The Duke of York's Military School and the Royal Hibernian School produced over 100 annual entrants to the army, mostly as boy soldiers, aged 14 years. By 1900 boy soldiers were receiving enhanced pay and educational support, on a fast track to NCO status.¹⁰¹

The essential service to older recruits provided by schoolmasters in the army was to steer them through the three certificates of education that were prerequisites for various stages of NCO progression, with the highest level, a first-class certificate, being essential if a soldier was to be considered for a commission or to be a warrant officer. The necessity of progressing through

⁹⁷ Hew Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy: The Reform of the British Army, 1830-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 96. Schoolmasters were trained for two years at the Royal Military Asylum, Chelsea and had to teach a very broad curriculum. They qualified as non-combatant sergeants.

⁹⁸ A. C. T. White, *The Story of Army Education, 1643-1963* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1963).

⁹⁹ Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army*, p. 97.

¹⁰⁰ Brereton, *The British Soldier*, p. 121.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 122-23.

all three was frustrating to participants with a high level of attainment on entry.¹⁰² In 1913, 11 per cent of the other ranks held the first-class certificate and about two thirds of these were warrant officers.¹⁰³ These certificates of education were complimented by specific regimentally based training. For example, in the artillery there were courses in range finding, firing the latest 'quick fire' artillery, map reading, and more. The importance of technical training of the ranks was emphasised in the leading army journals.¹⁰⁴ The low educational attainment of soldiers before enlistment was partly the result of lack of access to education. An increasing need for a more educated working class to participate in the industrial workforce produced a series of reforms culminating in the 1902 Education Act (Balfour Act).

The access to universal elementary education and the restructuring of secondary education from 1870 meant that army entrants from the lower classes after that date had a much broader education. A few could sit the examination in general and military subjects required for a commission. For example: John Dimmer, a pre-war commissioned ranker from a decidedly working-class background, attended Rutlish Science School, Merton from 13 years of age. His school was one of many established that gave working-class children access to a scientific secondary education through charitable bursaries.¹⁰⁵ Thus educational opportunity to meet demands for professionalisation in the pre-war army were placing pressure on the traditional barriers to social mobility and class.

¹⁰² Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰³ Major General G. Bonham-Carter, "Recent Developments in Education in the Army," *The Army Quarterly* (1931).

¹⁰⁴ H. C. C. D. Simpson, "The Education of the Soldier," *Royal United Services Institution. Journal* 51, no. 348 (1907).

¹⁰⁵ The Education (Administrative Provisions) Act 1907 required all grant-aided secondary schools to provide at offer 25 per cent of their places as free scholarships awarded by examination to students from public elementary schools. Dimmer was a beneficiary of this scheme. See <http://www.rutlish.merton.sch.uk/History/> accessed 2 February 2017.

However, the army was conflicted in its commitment to the development of NCOs. Officers since the Duke of Wellington had expressed concerns about the risks of having educated soldiers, fearing they would be more challenging and a threat to the established order.¹⁰⁶ The promotional opportunity for NCOs and warrant officers was firmly located within individual regiments. The corresponding access to learning was dependant on the attitude within individual regiments, and varied across the army. The Royal Horse Guards, an elite regiment who usually recruited well educated cavalrymen, believed it ‘inconsistent with the habits of this country to raise private soldiers to so close an equality with their officers’.¹⁰⁷ The effect of this inconsistency was to generate demand for an NCO training curriculum and for NCO schools, corresponding to those for officers in the Edwardian era. Such a concept had been proposed in 1799 when Colonel John Gaspard Le Marchant included a facility that never materialised as part of the proposals for the Royal Military College at Sandhurst.¹⁰⁸

In 1903, following reports to the Elgin Commission, there was a strong lobby to introduce ‘non-commissioned officers’ training colleges’.¹⁰⁹ In 1904, an NCO School was opened at Salisbury.¹¹⁰ It was hurriedly closed in 1906 for ‘cost saving’ despite having excellent reviews.¹¹¹ The practical impact on regiments of seconding NCOs for training was cited as another reason for closure, reflecting how mistrustful regimental officers were of any activities

¹⁰⁶ Richard L. Blanco, "Education Reforms for the Enlisted Man in the Army of Victorian England," *History of Education Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1966); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2005) p. 284.

¹⁰⁷ Brereton, *The British Soldier*, p. 53.

¹⁰⁸ Byron Farwell, *For Queen and Country: A Social History of the Victorian and Edwardian Army* (London: Allen Lane, 1981); Brereton, *The British Soldier*, p. 53.

¹⁰⁹ Leo Amery reported on the comments of Generals Colville and Hildyard, Sir Archibald Hunter and Major General Sir Bruce Hamilton, who all advised the Elgin Commission that better training for NCOs was essential for the development of the Army. The Elgin Commission was a Royal Commission on the War in South Africa appointed in 1902 and named after its Chairman the Earl of Elgin. The Committee scrutinised planning, reserve and manpower system, stores and supplies and the organisation of the War Office. See L. S. Amery, *The Problem of the Army* (London: E. Arnold, 1903), pp. 192-94.

¹¹⁰ TNA WO 163/9, Précis No. 31, Proposed School for Non-Commissioned Officers at Salisbury Plain, (1904). The proposal was put forward by Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood: ‘the object of the school was to improve the education of the men in both scholastic and military matters, and it was proposed to take the students from young lance-corporals or selected privates’.

¹¹¹ TNA WO/163/12, Army Council Minutes, (1906), pp. 73-4.

outside the locus of their control. There was a reluctance to invest in any institution or army-wide training curriculum reflecting a fear of NCOs continuing to grow their own professional identity and status. However, educational improvement on a measured basis had to be allowed because of the increasing complexity of the work of NCOs, reflecting a tension between professional and cultural demands within the army.

Thus, the British army had an emergent elite within its ‘other ranks’ before the war. This was poorly reflected in the wider public representations of the army until shortly before the war, when films and newspapers, influenced by the War Office, promoted army careers in a more positive light, including the production of a film in January 1914 called *The British Army Film*.¹¹² The role of the NCO in this period deserves more discussion than it has hitherto received in the historiography. The paucity of discussion about the ranks of the Edwardian Army has been attributed to ‘the poor educational background of recruits’, meaning that there are few written experiential accounts, a type of source that military historians have become particularly dependent upon and which has framed their analysis.¹¹³

This has obscured the understanding of the professional development of NCOs that threatened the pre-eminence of the gentleman-officer. In 1914, changes in military tactics necessitated that officers and NCOs trained together.¹¹⁵ The more contested issue, a ‘rubicon’ that could not be crossed, rested on whether they could assume responsibility for ‘leading’ in the war because of the powerful prevailing idea that only gentlemen-officers had the character and capacity to lead. The question of how the identity of the NCO was translated into autonomy and authority on the First World War battlefield, particularly compared to the German army, is a subject of

¹¹² Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, P. 175.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 41.

¹¹⁵ TNA WO 339/65720 Thomas Brooks Lawrence. Lawrence a senior NCO, attended a course in February 1914: ‘A course of instruction for officers and senior NCOs, under Major-General Julian Byng, called Map Reading and Military Tactics.

great interest to military historians.¹¹⁶ This focus is mainly on combat and the obsession with junior infantry officer roles and continues to neglect the wider contribution of NCOs maintaining the internal cohesion of the whole army; as one temporary officer in the war pithily observed ‘The officers were far too privileged — a pattern transferred from pre-war attitudes; to each a servant, posh quarters (except in trenches), officers’ clubs everywhere, excellent food. Very often it was the NCOs especially the sergeants who kept the machine working; the officer supplied mystique and an indefinable thing called “leadership”. If they lacked that they were just ornamental drones.’¹¹⁷

This background serves to illustrate an important point; that the army had a highly competent professional elite of NCOs before the war. The structure of the other ranks had developed into a hierarchy that was primarily engaged in maintaining the internal cohesion and domestic world of the ‘other ranks’. The more senior NCOs had families who were part of an internal milieu of growing respectability and aspiration. Their technical knowledge, reflecting the army’s complexity, increasing reliance on technology in arms such as the artillery, and in deploying new tactical approaches, enhanced their status. However, beliefs about the limitations of their moral character, how they were represented, and the consequent cultural distinctions were crucial to maintaining the exclusivity of the gentleman-officer class.¹¹⁸ Despite the extensive evidence of a large functional overlap between NCOs and officers, the hegemony of the British elite, and particularly the officer class, depended on the idea of leadership as being a form of moral authority, arising from their class, education and being the prerogative of the gentleman.

¹¹⁶ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 140; M. A. Ramsay, *Command and Cohesion: The Citizen Soldier and Minor Tactics in the British Army, 1870-1918* (London: Praeger, 2002), p. 64; Martin Samuels, *Command or Control?: Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 66.

¹¹⁷ Hedley Warr, *Memoirs*, (Cheltenham: Neville Warr, 1979), p. 48.

¹¹⁸ Lieutenant R. H. Beadon, Army Service Corps, "How Can Moral Qualities Best Be Developed During the Preparation of the Officer and Man for the Duties Each Will Carry out in War?", Second Military Prize Essay, 1913," *Royal United Services Institution. Journal* 59, no. 437 (1914).

3) Honorary Officers; the emergence and legitimacy of other types of Officer and the Relationship to the ‘Ideal’.

One product of the tensions between the social, cultural and professional identities within the army, running along the axis between the officer and the ‘other ranks’, was the emergence of ‘other’ types of officer that populated the pre-war army, known as ‘honorary officers’. Consideration of these officers is important in this thesis because they reflect how the army had traditionally solved the tensions between social, cultural, and professional identities. The roles of honorary officers were created as a functional expedience, and their identity was culturally constructed to be sufficiently different for them to be unthreatening to the officer class. One impact of these officers is that, drawing on the evidence of the research undertaken into pre-war commissions from the ranks in this thesis, many of them were aspirational for their sons to become unconditional, commissioned officers. A high proportion of those commissioned from the ranks before, and during the war, were sons of honorary officers.

The route to this type of commission was long service, often more than 21 years, and exemplary conduct. There had been a long-standing army tradition of appointing senior non-commissioned officers to posts that required seniority and allowed a frequent interface with commissioned officers. For selected NCOs, this represented the opportunity of promotion to the rank of ‘honorary’ officer. Honorary officers had ‘conditional’ status, they were not commissioned by the sovereign, rather ‘appointed’ by the War Office. The ‘honorary’ rank of officers was usually prefixed with a title indicating a profession or function, and they did not have the same degree of subordination and authority as a ‘commissioned’ officer.¹¹⁹ Thus a quartermaster’s rank would be indicated as ‘quartermaster and honorary lieutenant’. This satisfied the ambition of many soldiers in providing for enhanced pay, the opportunity to wear

¹¹⁹ T. H. McGuffie, "Bibliographical Aids to Research: 14—the Significance of Military Rank in the British Army between 1790 and 1820," *Historical Research* 30, no. 82 (1957).

an officer's uniform, and to be differentiated from the ranks. It did not confer the ability of the holder of the rank to claim that they were a 'gentleman'.

The deferring of certain functions to honorary roles came from a tradition of tradesmen supporting the army, and a reluctance of gentlemen to have any part in trade or mercantile business.¹²⁰ In the Edwardian army, it also reflected a situation in which officers were 'content to be gentleman', to leave the technical questions to 'those who were not gentleman', and for them to retain a purity of approach that came from being generalists and not specialists.¹²¹ Honorary officers held extensive technical knowledge, especially in some arms, such as the artillery. The officer class had compromised its exclusivity by admitting officers from commercial and business families' years before, but despite this, the cultural and social value placed on the functions of 'honorary' officers remained low.¹²² The most common 'honorary' officers in the infantry and cavalry were quartermasters and ridingmasters, roles that had traditionally been filled by senior NCOs. The role of adjutant had also once been the preserve of the NCO, with the status of honorary officer, as it continued to be in the French Army.¹²³

The quartermaster was appointed by the Military Secretary and War Office at the recommendation of the regimental commanding officer and responsible for a wide breadth of responsibilities concerned with quartering and supplies. The quartermaster would be appointed as a lieutenant and could slowly progress to a major and exceptionally a lieutenant-colonel.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Wilkinson, *The Prefects*, P. 17; Rupert Wilkinson, *Gentlemanly Power: British Leadership and the Public School Tradition; a Comparative Study in the Making of Rulers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); Richard Holmes, *Redcoat: The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), p. 113.

¹²¹ Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society*, p. 102; Wilkinson, *The Prefects*, p. 71.

¹²² See Otley, "Militarism and Militarization in the Public Schools."

¹²³ Adjutant comes from the Latin 'adjutans', meaning to assist, and in the case of the British army this meant to assist the commanding officer. By 1914, the adjutants would have been responsible for the administration and discipline of a unit with special responsibility for issuing daily orders. Many ranker officers were to ultimately fulfil this function because it required a depth of knowledge about military law and practices.

¹²⁴ The posts provided the opportunity for extension of service until 50 or 55 years of age.

The progression through the officer ranks did not mean that their substantive role or status changed. It was for the purposes of pay. They were addressed as ‘sir’ by the ranks although not by commissioned officers junior in rank. The military historiography has tended to ignore the roles of honorary officers, dismissing them as ‘dead end’ appointments, ‘largely clerical in nature’.¹²⁵ This is a question of perspective; viewed from the ranks they were exalted posts achieved after years of good conduct, examination, and assessment, and represented the highest possible rank achievable. They, and a subsystem of warrant officers and NCOs, were responsible for the domestic life of the army. The public representation of the army officer sought to depict the masculine heroic soldier, and hence these other types of officers are omitted from popular school boy stories about soldiering.¹²⁶

Honorary officers were functionally important. For instance, the quartermaster was a key member of the regimental staff and worked closely with the commanding officer, second-in-command and adjutant of a battalion, crucially involved with the constant relocation and refitting of the army on home or colonial garrison duties. Their role was pivotal in peacetime, and where they are referenced, they are shown to have played important war-time roles.¹²⁷ They led a specific team organising supply and equipment that included a regimental quartermaster sergeant (RQMS), company quartermaster sergeants (CQMS), and staff. They were usually excellent administrators and professionally well educated. They had an important identity within the culture of the ranks, as the regimental historian of the Worcestershire Regiment observed after the loss of their quartermaster: ‘Ever since the days in which he had been instrumental in winning the battalion its high place in musketry, as colour-sergeant,

¹²⁵ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 29.

¹²⁶ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, pp 259-281.

¹²⁷ J. C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1919* (London: Abacus, 1987), p. x1vi. Dunn references and includes contributions from Quartermaster and Hon. Lt. H. Yates MC, who served continuously with the 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers in the First World War, landing at Rouen on 10 August and re-embarking in May 1919.

sergeant-major and quartermaster he has been a constant inspiration to the young soldiers; and all ranks missed his presence and his encouragement in the months that followed.¹²⁸

An important feature of all honorary officers' posts was that they were non-combatant and forbidden from leading soldiers in combat. The Edwardian gentlemen-officers regarded themselves as uniquely equipped with the 'character' to lead, and it was a responsibility they closely guarded in the army. The gentlemen-officers saw professional expertise embedded in honorary roles as a form of potentially competing authority, and hence it was important to subjugate the status of honorary officers. The ideal of gentlemanly masculinity was exclusively reserved for the officer and many of the honorary roles, primarily concerned with the 'domestic' sphere of the army, were gendered and feminised.¹²⁹ The glamorous, hegemonic masculinity of the gentleman-officer rendered the honorary officers as effeminate, crucially making them unable to lead in combat since they lacked the necessary character, and this was compounded by their responsibility for the 'domestic' in the army.¹³⁰

Quartermasters were the most common form of honorary officer before the war; in early 1914, there were 539 quartermasters in the army, a ratio of approximately one to every 12 commissioned officers.¹³¹ Their political influence was even less than this ratio implies, because although the quartermaster was a key appointment in each of the infantry battalions, artillery batteries, and corresponding units of the army, they were literally on their own,

¹²⁸ Edwin Astill, *A Quartermaster at the Front: The Diary of Lt. Col. Allen Whitty, Worcestershire Regiment 1914-1919* (Eastbourne: Reveille Press, 2011), p. 165.

¹²⁹ Michael Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man since 1945* (Oxford: Open University Press, 1994); Peter M. Lewis, "Mummy, Matron and the Maids: Feminine Presence and Absence in Male Institutions, 1934–63," in *Manful Assertions. Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, eds., Michael Roper & John Tosh (London: Routledge, 1991). For gendered space, see Quintin Colville, "Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity: Royal Naval Officers and Their Shipboard Homes, 1918–39," *Gender & History* 21, no. 3 (2009): pp 511-12.

¹³⁰ Frank J. Barrett, "The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy," *Gender, Work & Organization* 3, no. 3 (1996); Stephen Atherton, "The Geographies of Military Inculcation and Domesticity: Reconceptualising Masculinities in the Home," in *Masculinities and Place*, eds., P. Hopkins & A. Gorman-Murray (Surrey: Asgate, 2014).

¹³¹ War Office, *The Quarterly Army List for the Quarter Ending 31 July 1914* (London: HMSO, 1914).

isolated in the mess. Their rank, usually lieutenant relative to other regular officers, was incongruous with their age, an average of 42 years, with their adult lives spent in the army, latterly as a warrant officer. Two quartermasters in the 1914 list, William Robertson and Frank Kirby had been awarded the Victoria Cross, gallantry or distinguished service awards were not a prerequisite, but increased the chances of an honorary commission.¹³² The appointment of quartermasters was highly competitive, requiring an exemplary service record. The expansion of the army in the autumn in 1914 saw a large increase in quartermasters, with 145 regular officer appointments made in August 1914 and several times that number appointed on a temporary basis.¹³³

The prime focus of this chapter is the pre-war army; however, it is worth noting how the liminal impact of the war threw many honorary officers into extended roles that would not have been accessible in peacetime. Henry George Clay and Sydney Thomas Boast, were both from army families and commissioned before the war as honorary quartermasters in infantry regiments.¹³⁴ They had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) in South Africa. Clay, commissioned as quartermaster in the East Surrey Regiment in 1903, aged 31 years, became a recruiting officer in London in 1911. With the outbreak of war and mass recruitment, his responsibilities and rank grew with appointment to the War Office. He was awarded a CBE and became an honorary colonel in 1936. His son was a ranker officer, commissioned into the

¹³² Lieutenant-Colonel William Robertson, VC, CBE was awarded the Victoria Cross for an action at Elandslaagte, South Africa on 21 October 1899. He was commissioned an honorary captain and quartermaster in the Gordon Highlanders in May 1900. “Obituary of Grp. Capt. F.H. Kirby VC,” *The Times*, 9 July 1956.

¹³³ TNA WO 339/24215 William John Saunders. Experienced senior regimental NCOs were commissioned into new service battalions at their formation to bring experience and knowledge to these new formations.

¹³⁴ Colonel Henry George Clay, CBE, DCM. See <http://redwoodlodge3411.wordpress.com/2013/12/01/colonel-henry-george-clay-cbe/>. Accessed March 20, 2017.

The London Gazette, 28487 of 21.4.1911, p. 3094, “The Prince of Wales’s Own Volunteers (South Lancashire Regiment). Serjeant-Major Sydney Thomas Boast to be Quartermaster with the honorary rank of Lieutenant. Dated 22nd April, 1911.” Awarded the DCM, *The London Gazette*, 27359 of 27.9.1901 page 6327, 1989 “Quartermaster-Sergeant, 3rd Battn. The Prince of Wales’s Own Volunteers (South Lancashire Regiment).”

same regiment in 1916 and killed that year.¹³⁵ Boast, commissioned in 1911, aged 42 years, served throughout the war with the South Lancashire Regiment, was awarded the Military Cross (MC), and retired an honorary major in 1923. He also had three sons who became ranker officers in the same regiment.¹³⁶ The strong familial-regimental links are common to many generations of honorary and ranker officers, such as the Boast family.

Similarly, the war also challenged the non-combatant status of honorary officers. In his diary of 21 July 1916, Allen Whitty wrote ‘I was offered by General Bainbridge the post of 2nd in Command of the Wilts. Said that I would be glad to take on the job but only if I could be regularly gazetted to substantive field rank. He quite saw the prudence on my part, of the condition and he said that he would do all he could to push it through.’¹³⁷ In this instance, an honorary officer was being asked to take on a combatant role but would not do so without recognition through a change in status. In extremis quartermasters took on active combatant roles, Honorary Lieutenant and Quartermaster, W. J. Saunders took command of the 10th Hampshire Regiment in a faltering attack at Gallipoli and thereafter became adjutant.¹³⁸ The boundaries of the roles of honorary officers were culturally constructed, and permeability was another destabilising consequence of the war.

¹³⁵ Henry George Walter Clay, Second Lieutenant, 1st Bn., East Surrey Regiment, Died 29.7.1916 aged 21 years, *Officers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919*, (London: HMSO, 1919). See CWGC register.

¹³⁶ Captain John Boast, M.C., killed in action March 1918, Lieutenant Frederick Boast murdered in Belfast in Dublin in 1921 and Major Sydney William Boast MC, who served into the Second World War. Frederick Boast TNA WO 374/7336. For the murder of Frederick Boast see: “Officer Murdered,” *The Times*, 29 December 1919. For Captain John Boast See: *Officers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919*, (London: HMSO, 1919), also CWGC Register. Sydney William Boast: *The London Gazette* 29816 of 7.11.1916 page 10822, “Commissioned 2nd Lt. S. Lan. R.—Serjt. Sydney William Boast. 11th Oct. 1916.”

¹³⁷ Astill, *A Quartermaster at the Front*, p. 116.

¹³⁸ Michael Hickey, *Gallipoli* (London: John Murray, 1995). Hickey wrote ‘the formidable and Captain-and-Quartermaster Saunders took control, steadied the younger soldiers and held on.’ TNA WO 339/24215 William John Saunders. He enlisted in 1892 and was a sergeant-major before being commissioned a quarter-master and honorary lieutenant.

The riding-master, an officer with special responsibility for training in equestrian skills, was added to the regimental list of officers after Waterloo.¹³⁹ There were 40 riding-masters in the *Army List* before the war, with several ranked as majors.¹⁴⁰ Present in all the regiments that demanded high equitation skills, particularly the cavalry and artillery, a key role was the training and certifying the competency of officers.¹⁴¹ In its early incarnation, the role included instructors without any military background and provided an opportunity for impoverished officers from the traditional officer class.¹⁴² The riding-master was almost exclusively the preserve of the promoted ranker by the time of the war. They were usually promoted 'rough riders', senior NCO's responsible for breaking in and training new horses. It was the relationship to other officers, whom they trained and examined, and the high status of equestrianism in the canon of sporting requirements of the gentleman-officer that necessitated the riding-master being afforded 'conditional' officer status.¹⁴³ This overcame some of the problems inherent in a discourse where there was a difference in the social status of the teacher and the pupil. Some situations still caused 'embarrassment' because of class distinctions, as when Riding-master Brown of the 16th Hussars was teaching the 16-year-old Prince of Wales, in July 1858, he 'felt' unable to speak to the Prince directly, so criticised his equerry, Colonel Keppel, for his mistakes.¹⁴⁴

Exemplars of the role, and the family traditions were two brothers commissioned as artillery riding-masters in the pre-war era, Robert and Francis Wark. They illustrate the strength of

¹³⁹ Holmes, *Redcoat*, p. 127.

¹⁴⁰ War Office, *The Quarterly Army List for the Quarter Ending 31 July 1914*.

¹⁴¹ J. H. Stocqueler, *The British Officer: His Position, Duties, Emoluments, and Privileges, Etc* (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1851), p. 68.

¹⁴² Army Correspondent, "The Army," *Dublin Evening Mail*, 20 May 1840. Menzies Charles Robinson Lang (1858–1913) is an example of a King's commissioned officer resigning and ascending to a more affordable honorary commission through the ranks.

¹⁴³ Eliza Riedi, "Brains or Polo? Equestrian Sport, Army Reform and the 'Gentlemanly Officer Tradition', 1900–1914," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Volume 84, No 339, Autumn 2006.

¹⁴⁴ Holmes, *Redcoat*, p. 127.

family presence and influence in a regiment.¹⁴⁵ They had two more brothers Alfred, a battery-sergeant-major (BSM), commissioned a ranker officer in October 1914, and Hector, a sergeant-major in the Experimental School of Gunnery at Shoeburyness.¹⁴⁶ They were all born in India, the sons of a BSM, Robert John Wark.¹⁴⁷ The quartermaster and riding-master are the most commonly recognised forms of honorary officer, but there was a multiplicity of other honorary officer roles that had evolved to satisfy the increasing complexity of the army. There were directors of music, chief inspectors of mechanical transport, mechanical transport officers, commissaries of ordnance, chief inspectors of ordnance, inspectors of schools, paymaster staff, and commissaries in the Indian army.¹⁴⁸ These posts all carried a responsibility for the logistical support of the army, and its complex enterprises in Britain and the colonies. This vast enterprise usually operated outside the regimental enclave. For honorary officers within it, examination of their access to the officers' mess provides insight into how the officer without gentlemanly status would be admitted.

The regimental mess, the epicentre of gentlemanly officer collective identity, allowed entry to honorary officers with special conditions. Mess committees generally restricted their membership to 'honorary', and the degree of participation was decided by each regiment. Mess expenses and dinners, distributed across participating officers, were levied at a reduced rate for

¹⁴⁵ Robert George Wark—*The London Gazette*, 28400 of 26.7.1910 page 5397, “Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery Serjeant-Major Robert George Wark to be Riding-Master with the honorary rank of Lieutenant. Dated 27th July, 1910.” Francis Wark—*The London Gazette*, 28758 of 23.9.1913 page 6694 records Frank Wark being gazetted “Riding-Master with the hon. rank of Lt. in the R. H. & R.F.A.”

¹⁴⁶ Alfred John Wark – *The London Gazette*, 28949 of 23.10.1914 page 8515, “Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery. The undermentioned to be Second Lieutenants for service in the Field, Dated 1st October, 1914.” Battery Serjeant-Major Alfred John Wark. Hector Wark was recorded in the 1911 census as Experimental Staff Sergeant of Gunnery R.A., at Shoeburyness.

¹⁴⁷ *The London Gazette*, 25963 of 9.8.1889 page 4318, “Royal Artillery, Coast Brigade, Sergeant-Major Robert Wark to be Lieutenant. Dated 10th August, 1889.”

¹⁴⁸ The directors of music had an oversight for the bandmasters who were senior NCOs in cavalry and infantry regiments. Military music was considered an important part of military tradition and culture. Commissaries and conductors were responsible for transportation of equipment and ordnance and had a long history. The commissariat was originally a civil organisation but, in the Crimean War after logistical problems, it was incorporated into the army. The commissary was integrated into the Army Service Corps in 1888 although the title commissary was retained until the 1920s when it was replaced with executive officer.

honorary officers to make participation affordable. This was particularly important in regiments with a reputation for lavish dinners, such as the Royal Artillery mess at Woolwich where it was reported that ‘the cost of the 1895 dinner was charged level to all, except riding and quartermasters, who paid ten shillings each.’¹⁴⁹ Honorary officers were not allowed to be always present; exclusion was regimentally determined, for instance the 2nd Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, allowing them to ‘dine in’ only on Fridays.¹⁵⁰

Junior regimental officers did not show the same deference to honorary officers as they shared between themselves. A second-lieutenant and graduate of Haileybury College, a gentleman officer, commissioned into the Northumberland Fusiliers in 1914, on first being appointed and naïve as to differing status, reported saluting ‘an enormous, resplendent gentleman with medals’ every morning following joining his regiment. An officer asked him what he was saluting that ‘old bugger’ for?¹⁵¹ He explained he thought he was someone important, and the other officer remarked ‘he’s nobody important.’ He had been saluting the quartermaster, something it was deemed neither necessary nor appropriate for him to do. This illustrates the formal difference in status, and the use of the term ‘old bugger’ suggests informally there was also contempt.

Pitcairn’s *Unwritten Laws* used a story to illustrate the ‘courtly manners’ of a mess, in its approach to an honorary officer, thereby illustrating the problem for the honorary officer in adapting to gentlemanly table manners:

The sergeant-major of a regiment was promoted to the rank of quartermaster and on receiving his commission was asked to dinner. During the first course ice was handed round and came to him first, as the guest of the evening. With a despairing look around the table he selected a large lump and dropped it into his soup; the colonel saw this and promptly did the same. Sir Charles Grandison could not have beaten this for ready and skilful civility.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Burne, *The Royal Artillery Mess*, p. 153.

¹⁵⁰ Frank Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 50.

¹⁵¹ IWMSA, 9752 interview with Norman Margrave Dillon.

¹⁵² Pitcairn, *Unwritten Laws and Ideals*, p. 117.

The quartermaster in this story is, through his lack of table etiquette, presented as an outsider in the officers' mess. Drawing a likeness between the colonel and Sir Charles Grandison is an allusion to a character noted for his chivalry, restraint and good manners.¹⁵³ The counterpoint to the quartermaster's unmannerliness shown in this vignette, is the manners, or the 'ready and skilful civility' of the colonel and the other gentlemen-officers in the mess, who spared the quartermaster embarrassment. Good manners were essential evidence of gentlemanly status. In defining the difference in cultural status between the honorary officer and the gentleman-officer the story makes it clear that the participation of honorary officers in the mess was conditional.

This consideration of the honorary officer is another illustration of the emergence of an elite social and professional stratum from within the ranks that, from functional necessity, the gentleman-officer accommodated while culturally delineating their difference. The cultural identity of honorary officers was constructed and negotiated to manage any threat to the perceived authority of the officer class. From an external perspective, these crucial distinctions appeared arbitrary, and by 1914, there were calls to 'abolish the meaningless title of "honorary captain for ridingmasters and quartermasters" and, at least in title, see them properly integrated'.¹⁵⁴ However, these calls were from outside the army, and the designation of these officers would be maintained for a long time, ensuring that they were kept at sufficient distance and sufficiently different, not to represent a threat to the identity of regular officers.

¹⁵³ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison. In a Series of Letters Published from the Originals, by the Editor of Pamela and Clarissa. In Seven Volumes* (London: printed for S. Richardson; and sold by C. Hitch and L. Hawes; by J. and J. Rivington; by Andrew Millar; by R. and J. Dodsley; and by J. Leake, at Bath, 1753); See also: Carol Houlihan Flynn, *Samuel Richardson: A Man of Letters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

¹⁵⁴ Hansard, H.C. Deb, 19 March 1913, vol. 50 C.C.1066–181, see 1166. The suggestion was made by Captain Herbert Jessel, later 1st Baron Jessel, Liberal Unionist MP for St Pancras South (1886–1906 and 1910–1918).

Conclusion

The cultural background of gentlemen-officers percolated through the cultures and hierarchies that governed army life. The regimental mess was at the heart of this cultural identity, creating traditions, unwritten laws, and a complex hierarchy of demeanours and manners which worked to exclude along boundaries of class and culture. The supply of young officers, particularly from militarised public schools, maintained a cohesive homogenous identity. This identity was formed in the public school, a masculine reconstituted home, that through a ‘peculiarly British relationship’ was reproduced at military college and finally within the mess itself. Patrick Joyce has observed that this accounts for the extraordinary power of these institutions; in this case, the officer class of the army and more generally their power over British life.¹⁵⁵

The military value of the NCO had grown with the tactical, technological, and logistical evolution of the army. This continued to the extent that, in 1914, the Secretary of State for war observed ‘the standard of education is now so high among many of the non-commissioned officers that I am advised by those whom I have specially consulted in this matter, that there are many whose standard of education is considerably higher than that of the officers who pass in from the special reserve.’¹⁵⁶ This was threatening to the identity of the gentleman-officer, determined to sustain the gentlemanly ideal of officering. The tradition of having honorary officers had placed day-to-day responsibility for domestic care of the army in feminised ‘subaltern’ roles that were distinguished from the combatant masculine, gentleman officer. This represented a safe compromise; however, commissions from the ranks afforded no such alternatives, if they shared combatant responsibility for the leadership of men in war.

¹⁵⁵ P. Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ Hansard H.C. Deb, 19 March 1913, vol. 50, C.C.1066–181, see 1099.

The decline in commissions from the ranks at the beginning of the twentieth century is perplexing, given the improvement in the calibre and education of NCOs. What lay behind this paradox, illustrated in this chapter, was the cultural alignment of the army officer class, the public-school system, and the evolution of the gentlemanly ideal that evolved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The young man who progressed through a public - school education and cadetship experienced a dense form of socio-cultural learning – a semiotic process where participation in socially mediated activities equipped them to participate in the officers' mess. Learning these rules of gentlemanly conduct had greater import than professional learning. In the next chapter, the pre-war tensions evoked by commissions from the ranks will be considered alongside case studies of the experiences of officers' commissions from the ranks. This is contextualised within the growing public pressure to modernise, improve the efficiency, and democratise the officer class in the early twentieth century before the war.

Chapter Two

The Pre-War Officer Class, Pressure for Change, and Resistance

The idea of commissions from the ranks had a popular, public appeal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It satisfied a public narrative of meritocracy and social mobility, exemplified by Hector MacDonald and, later, William Robertson.¹ MacDonald was a heroic figure of the late Victorian era, described as ‘one of only a few British Army Generals who rose from the ranks on his own merit and professionalism.’² The attribution of their success to virtuous self-achievement persists today and is a legacy from the idea of ‘self-made’ individuals making fortunes based on their own endeavours. This was underpinned by a wider set of Victorian cultural values of ‘thrift, responsibility and self-reliance’.³ Yet, officers commissioned from the ranks had never formed a major source of British army officer recruitment after the Napoleonic Wars. The first part of this chapter examines why this wider rhetoric persisted and its inconsistency with ideas of gentlemanliness and the army officer in the late Victorian era.

The calls for army reform to improve its performance and a more challenging political context after the Anglo-Boer War created an antagonism between the political aspirations of the government and the army that remained a culturally conservative institution.⁴ This chapter considers how the ideas of what the army represented and the demands for efficiency and professionalism, articulated with the idea of commissions from the ranks. In the last two years

¹ Major-General Sir Hector Archibald MacDonald (1853–1903), Field Marshal Sir William Robert Robertson (1860–1933); Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshall* (London: Constable, 1921).

² H. E. Raugh, *The Victorians at War, 1815–1914: An Encyclopedia of British Military History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), p.213.

³ D. Loftus, “The Self-Made Man: Businessmen and Their Autobiographies in Nineteenth Century Britain,” *Business Archives* 80 (2000); Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁴ Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society*, Studies in Social History (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 269–81.

before the outbreak of war, the government took a more vigorous approach to enabling commissions from the ranks. The structural responses to this initiative, leading to the planning of more training opportunities, are examined, as is the cultural resistance of gentlemen-officers to changes that would threaten their exclusive identity. The last section deals with the pre-war army crisis and will show how the debate surrounding army reform began with concerns about transparency, performance, and efficiency and concluded with a widely held public view that the officer class had undermined its legitimacy to lead the army. It has been observed that ‘for organised labour, if not perhaps for the entire working class, the army remained a partisan instrument of class conflict’ after the Curragh mutiny.⁵ This chapter provides evidence that pressures to promote more commissions from the ranks contributed to those tensions, an issue not previously reflected in the historiography.

1) Becoming an Officer through the Ranks in the Late Victorian era

In the last chapter, the professional and cultural evolution of the gentleman-officer and NCO was discussed, and this informs our understanding of the difficult context in which commissions from the ranks took place, since personal rather than professional criteria were a measure of suitability. In the nineteenth century, the officer commissioned from the ranks was increasingly an aspirant ‘gentleman’, financially challenged or unable to pass examinations, who undertook service in the ranks as a route to a commission. More pragmatically, from the army’s perspective, commissioning from the ranks was used as a means of replacing lost officers with experienced soldiers on campaigns, and this frequently coincided with rewarding acts of gallantry. This section will look at how these processes worked and the impact on the gentlemanly identity of the officer class.

⁵ Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 182.

The route to a commission through Woolwich or Sandhurst was not obligatory. For those aspirants with lesser means, aptitude, or gentlemanly status, the route through the special reserve or militia (from 1908, the territorial force) remained the ‘back door’.⁶ It was taken by such military luminaries as Henry Wilson and John French.⁷ Entrance into the militia was by negotiation and influence, but transfer into the regular army was by examination. Unlike the newly established ‘university’ based officer training corps (OTC) route, there was no formal course of instruction aimed at passing the exam, but rather on-the-job training in military matters.⁸ The breadth of knowledge examined was reduced to military subjects after 1904 and here, as well as with other entrance and promotion exams, special tutors or ‘crammers’, such as Dr T. Miller McGuire were available.⁹ Since the militia regarded its class base as even more inextricably linked to the landed classes, it was inconceivable that any one from a lower social class could use this route.¹⁰ Technical demands meant that the artillery militia had received a small number of experienced warrant officers, commissioned as ‘district officers’, as a hybrid King’s commission for many years, but the infantry Militia would not consider anyone from a lower social class entering as an officer.¹¹

In the eighteenth century, commissions from the ranks of the army were more common, although commissions themselves were a commodity and could be bought and sold. Impoverished officers often sold their commissions and returned to the ranks, and the boundary

⁶ Keith Simpson, “The Officers,” in *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 64.

⁷ Field Marshal John French (1852–1925) and Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson (1864–1922). Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 21.

⁸ Ernest M. Teagarden, “Lord Haldane and the Origins of Officer Training Corps,” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 45 (1967). The Officer Training Corps (OTC) was formed in 1908 following Army Order 160 of July 1908. The OTC was divided into two sections: one located in public schools and the other in universities. It was intended to address the shortage of officers, particularly in the part-time and reserve forces.

⁹ Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2009), p. 44.

¹⁰ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 114.

¹¹ *The Norfolk Commission; Evidence into the Auxiliary Force*, May 1904, vol. 1, p. 164. The suggestion that promoting regular warrant officers would solve the problem of officer shortage in the militia was rejected by a colonel on the basis ‘I do not think the men would like it’.

Referenced in Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 114.

between officers and the ranks seemed more permeable.¹² This changed at the start of the nineteenth century with Wellington's antagonism towards officers commissioned from the ranks. Wellington saw the issue in terms of class not performance, and reflected this in public pronouncements.¹³ The enemy, or the 'other', was revolutionary France, who had been defeated at Waterloo and for whom commissions from the ranks were important practically and politically.¹⁴ The British establishment henceforth regarded institutional, routine commissions from the ranks as having a 'revolutionary' pedigree. In 1832, the French military service law of Loi Soult was passed, based on the 1818 order of Gouvion-Saint-Cyr, and it demanded that one third of new officers should come from the ranks.¹⁵ British regiments were already developing a discriminating attitude towards officers commissioned from the ranks based on the reputational harm of their presence in their mess.¹⁶ In 1836, a British officer commissioned from the ranks suggested a similar scheme to the French model should operate in Britain, although there was clearly little appetite for it.¹⁷

Commissions from the ranks 'in the field' were pragmatic decisions based on the needs of expeditionary force commanders. They were also symbolic, providing an opportunity to reward exceptional service and 'gallant' acts. These commissions reflected favourably on the officer

¹² J. A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715–1795* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), p. 105; Richard Holmes, *Redcoat: The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), pp. 166–73.

¹³ *Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons*, (London: HMSO, 1836), xx–xxi.

¹⁴ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Aspects Historiques du Recrutement 'Corps de Troupe' Les Ecoles D'Armes: <http://www.promotionnarvik.fr/histo/historique/histoemia/emiahisto02.htm>. Accessed February 1, 2016. The French army in the era of Napoleon III had two thirds of its officers promoted from the ranks and many were from outside the middle and upper classes. The setting up of NCO officer preparation schools in the 1880s created divergent views regarding the scholastic requirements of officers in the military and altered the social balance of the officer class. See William Serman, *Les Origines Des Officiers Francais, 1848–1870* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1979); William Serman, *Les Officiers Francais Dans La Nation: 1848–1914*, vol. 18 (Paris: Editions Aubier, 1982).

¹⁶ Wellington's Sharpes: British Army Officers Ranker Officers 1793–1815, <http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/Great Britain/c Wellington'sSharpes.html>. Accessed February 1, 2017. The author notes that officers commissioned from the ranks were only successful in Irish or Scots regiments and from 1808–1815, few managed to serve on.

¹⁷ Holmes, *Redcoat*, p.172.

class, ‘heroism’ was largely understood as an attribute of the gentleman officer and rewarding acts perceived to be ‘heroic’ with a commission, reinforced the status of the officer class.¹⁸ Commissions in the field were also immediate and free from the constraints of purchase before it was abolished in 1871. The opportunity for a commission for poorer gentlemen and lower class soldiers was rare but most likely to happen on military campaigns. Despite this there was a pervasive belief that meritocratic promotion from the ranks was generally possible.

In the late Victorian era, newspapers encouraged the belief that there was some ‘chance of promotion for the well behaved private.’¹⁹ This created an ‘illusion of opportunity’ to raise the quality of recruits and, assuming the men commissioned were from lower social classes, combat the criticism of radicals that the army was only interested in propping up aristocratic power.²⁰ Critical representations of aristocratic officers were followed by calls for a more meritocratic system of promotion from the ranks by commentators such as Charles Dickens.²¹ There began, particularly after the Cardwell reforms, an emerging narrative of meritocracy and mobility which sat uneasily with the realities of the army as an institution and a culture. For example, in 1882 a syndicated article described several officers recently retired or serving in senior ranks who had been commissioned from the ranks as evidence of professional mobility.²²

Research into the careers and background of these officers reveals some interesting factors that influenced their commissions. In most cases, their advancement had been achieved extra-regimentally, outside of the infantry and cavalry regiments which had been increasingly

¹⁸ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 117-166.

¹⁹ “Officers from the Ranks,” *Bury and Norwich Post*, April 25, 1882.

²⁰ Hew Strachan, *Wellington’s Legacy: The Reform of the British Army, 1830–54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 140.

²¹ Charles Dickens, “Promotion; French and English,” *Household Words*, January 24, 1857.

²² “Officers from the Ranks,” *The Birmingham Daily Post*, April 8, 1882.

reluctant to both admit and promote officers commissioned from the ranks. For example, the ascendancy of John McKay, the officer featured in the article because of his promotion, was commissioned in Hythe Musketry School, not a regiment, and had depended on the patronage of his senior officer.²³ McKay was born in Ireland, the orphaned son of a soldier, and was educated at the Duke of York's Royal Military School, a school that admitted the orphans of soldiers, before enlisting as a drummer aged 14 in the 19th Foot. He was appointed a Colour-Sergeant at Hythe School of Musketry. He had no private income and was the protégé of Lieutenant-Colonel Hay, the commanding officer. He was commissioned quartermaster and ensign in 1854. His promotion in an institution that was professionally led would have been competence based, whereas in a regimental culture, it would have been social. Eventually, having reached a senior rank, he commanded the 12th Regiment from 1871 to 1876.

Three of the officers mentioned in the article, all from working-class backgrounds, McKenzie, Handyside, and Addy, had benefited with several other NCOs from the creation of the Land Transport Corps in the Crimea.²⁴ Logistical supply had reached a crisis in the campaign and, with the creation of the new corps, officers were needed who had practical experience of supply, and these were found from promoting the most able NCOs. When the corps was replaced by the 'Military Train', officers were treated 'differently' to their regular counterparts, although there was no technical distinction. Handyside led a petition against this differentiation

²³ John McKay (1823–1887). Regarding his career Major F. C. Myatt MC wrote 'It was an astonishing achievement in the mid-Victorian era, when most promotion was by purchase and the Army was ruled by rigid social distinction; although not strictly relevant, it deserves to be recorded as an example of what could be accomplished by an outstandingly gifted soldier by sheer merit.' See F. Myatt, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of 19th Century Firearms* (London: Salamander Books, 1979).

²⁴ Colonel John Addy (Old Land Transport Corps & Adjutant of recruiting Dublin), *The London Gazette*, 21861 of 18.3.1856 page 1060, "Land Transport Corps, to be Lieutenants, Farrier-Major William Addy, from 5th Dragoon Guards", dated 6th September, 1855"; Colonel John McKenzie, *The London Gazette*, 21861 of 18.3.1856 page 1081, "Land Transport Corps, to be Lieutenants, Serjeant John Mackenzie from Royal Artillery. Dated 22nd September, 1855"; Colonel Handyside Rtd. (Coast Brigade, RA) *The London Gazette* 21764 of 17.8.1855 page 3129 "Company-Serjeant William Handyside, Royal Artillery, to be Lieutenant and Adjutant of the Royal Engineer Field Equipment. Dated 3rd May, 1855."

that was raised in Parliament.²⁵ They all later served in either the Coast Brigade of the Artillery or the recruiting office in low prestige appointments, the refuge of officers without a private income, where messing was affordable. It was these antecedents that were a factor in making the Army Service Corps, its successor, a less prestigious appointment for the gentleman-officer.²⁶ Their commission in a war was driven by competence and necessity, rather than social criteria.

Three prominent officers, Richard Wadeson, Luke O'Connor, and William McBean had been awarded the Victoria Cross (VC) before their commission.²⁷ ‘Heroism’ was regarded as such a worthy attribute, it trumped many deficiencies, but the challenge came in peacetime where promotion was slow, and many officers were placed on half pay. VC winners received an annuity of ten pounds, although it was more likely that marriage to a wife with some personal wealth or sponsorship made a career possible. The trend was established that officers commissioned from the ranks had to navigate their career through the periphery of the main regimental body of the army or have a rare and culturally transcending distinction; a VC. Newspapers, nevertheless proclaimed a meritocracy.

In the late Victorian era, the combination of examination and costs associated with studying at Sandhurst or Woolwich drove the gentleman to co-opt the route through the ranks to a commission. From 1885, there were around 20 commissions from the ranks per annum.²⁸ For

²⁵ The treatment of officers of the Land Transport Corps was raised by Lord Adolphus Vane-Tempest (1825–1864) See: “The land Transport Corps,” in Hansard, HC Deb 23 April 1858 vol. 149 cc1621–7.

²⁶ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 17.

²⁷ Luke O'Connor, VC (1832–1915). O'Connor was born in impoverished circumstances in Ireland in 1832. His parents emigrated to Canada but he returned when his parents died. See Charles Lysaght, *The Times Great Irish Lives* (London: Times Books, 2009); Richard Wadeson, VC (1826–1885). Wadeson was commissioned in the field from sergeant-major in 1857 to become a lieutenant in the 75th Regiment of Foot, Robert MacKenzie Holden, *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 58, Richard Wadeson, (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885–1900); William McBean, VC (1818–1878) See William McBean, <http://www.theargylls.co.uk/mcbeanvc.php>. Accessed February 1, 2017.

²⁸ TNA WO 163/18 Army Council Minutes; the First Report of the Committee on the Pay of Officers, 1913. This Committee was also known as the Lucas Committee.

example, in 1897, the *Bristol Times and Mirror* observed that the 2nd Dragoons or Scots Greys ‘recruit from excellent material that has given no fewer than half a dozen troopers to the commissioned ranks of the Army’ and listed six officers.²⁹ The news story was prompted by the commissioning of George Humphrey Irving Graham who had enlisted in the Scots Greys in 1891 and was commissioned into the Devonshire Regiment in 1897.³⁰ His commission was preceded by five others, during the previous 13 years. The characteristics of these commissions are highly representative of ‘peacetime’ commissions from the ranks in the closing years of the century. William Alexander Crawford Cockburn is a typical example, his obituary noted:

His father, Colonel W. G. Jackson, of the Black Watch, encouraged him to try to win a commission through the ranks when it became impossible to meet the expenses of getting into the Army in any other way. At the age of 16 he therefore enlisted in the Scots Greys, remaining in the band until he was old enough to become a private. The standard in the ranks of the Scots Greys was very high, and he did not get the chances of quick promotion he might have had in another regiment. The old Duke of Cambridge, then Commander-in-Chief, took a special interest in the boy, and once receiving him at one of his levees when he was only a corporal in the Scots Greys, complimenting him on his pluck in serving in the ranks rather than give up on being a soldier.³¹

These were the gentlemen sons of regular army officers, colonial administrators or clergymen and would be regarded as typical ‘gentleman rankers’. Cockburn’s obituary is revealing in that it throws light on both the circumstances that caused him to seek a commission through the ranks and the patronage that was necessary to obtain one. This period also marked an increasing trend by the elite regiments who, whilst offering soldiers for commissions, were increasingly reluctant to accept them themselves; no officers were commissioned from the ranks into cavalry regiments after 1902.³²

²⁹ ‘Scraps from the Evening Papers,’ *The Bristol Times and Mirror*, July 17, 1897.

³⁰ George Humphrey Irving Graham enlisted in the Scots Greys in 1891. Melville Amadeus Henry Douglas Heddle de la Caillemotte de MASSUE DE RUVIGNY, *The Roll of Honour: A Biographical Record of All Members of His Majesty’s Naval and Military Forces Who Have Fallen in the War* (London, Harrison and Sons, 1917), p. 142.

³¹ ‘Obituary, a True Soldier,’ *The Times*, 10 September 1924.

³² See Appendix 1.

In the same period, the ranker without gentlemanly credentials would only find himself commissioned in ‘the field’. For instance, in 1896, Samuel Kirk Flint and William Edward Bailey had been commissioned into the Royal Irish Regiment and East Lancashire Regiment respectively, and their commissions reported in the newspapers.³³ They were serving as senior NCOs, campaign hardened soldiers; a staff sergeant-major and a colour-sergeant in the Dongola expedition, at the time of their commission.³⁴ Bailey was aged 38 years, Flint 31 years, and they had both served substantial periods in the ranks. Bailey and Flint never served with their substantive British regiments; it would have been socially impossible, and they were serving with the Egyptian army where they would remain until the end of their careers. Bailey retired in 1903, and Flint in 1906. Flint retired after serving in operations in Bahr-el-Ghazal Province, commanding two Egyptian and Sudanese officers and 38 (native) ‘rank and file’ with 149 mules.³⁵ The best a lower-class officer could anticipate would be a commission commanding non-Europeans, in a hostile climate.

Despite these opaque public representations of commissions from the ranks, astute observers became increasingly aware that most opportunities were being afforded to the ‘gentleman ranker’ and not the soldier from the lower classes. This created concern that ‘only a few could be called rankers — nearly all having served in the militia or failed the competitive examinations.’³⁶ New regulations had been introduced in 1893 with restrictive criteria that

³³ “Promotion from the Ranks,” *York Herald*, 19 November 1896.

The London Gazette, 26795 of 17.11.1896 page 6272, The Royal Irish Rifles, Colour-Sergeant Samuel Kirk Flint, from the Dorsetshire Regiment (employed with the Egyptian Army) to be Second Lieutenant.

The London Gazette, 26795 of 17.11.1896 page 6272, The East Lancashire Regiment, Staff Sergeant-Major William Edward Bailey, from the Army Service Corps (employed with the Egyptian Army), to be Second Lieutenant. See also Hart’s Army List 1903 and 1905.

³⁴ Dongola, in the Northern Sudan was the scene of a war with the indigenous Mahdist tribes in 1896.

³⁵ This is noted in noted in the despatch of Sir Reginald Wingate where Flint is ‘mentioned’: *The London Gazette*, May 18, 1906, p. 3446.

³⁶ “Commissions from the Ranks,” *Aberdeen Evening News*, January 24, 1894.

Campbell-Bannerman claimed were more favourable to the ‘ordinary ranker’.³⁷ The impact was to close the door to the gentleman ranker, but regimental hostility towards working-class rankers led to a rapid reduction in commissions as the century closed.³⁸ Previously one quarter of commissions were into the Cavalry, but this figure collapsed to either one or less per annum from 1894 and stopped entirely in 1902.³⁹ Similarly, the figure dropped dramatically in the infantry after 1896, and apart from a brief resurgence in the Anglo-Boer War, remained in single figures until the First World War.⁴⁰

It is productive to scrutinise the careers of MacDonald and Robertson because they both came from working-class backgrounds. The simplistic assertions that self-reliance lay behind their achievements betrays the difficulties they encountered and how they circumvented gentlemanly regimental prejudices. Behind the symbolic narrative, lay the realities of promotions from the ranks. MacDonald joined the 92nd (Gordon Highlanders) in 1870.⁴¹ After reaching the rank of colour sergeant, he was awarded an immediate commission in the field during the Second Afghan War, reputedly as an alternative to a Victoria Cross.⁴² He was awarded his KCB in 1900, shortly after becoming a major-general but his career ended prematurely when he committed suicide in 1903, pre-empting a court martial following accusations of homosexual acts in India. MacDonald, the son of a crofter, made his way to high

³⁷ The new regulations required eligible candidates to be no lower than the ranks of corporal, with not less than two years’ service and a first-class certificate of education. It was considered undesirable to promote married NCOs. Campbell-Bannerman had to defend the new regulations, see: “Promotion from the Ranks,” *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, August 22, 1893. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (1836–1908). He was Prime Minister from 1905 to 1908. He was leader of the Liberal Party from 1899 to 1908. He was Secretary of State for War in 1893.

³⁸ The decline was reported with disappointment with the following statistics; 1894 (25 commissions, 1895 (20), 1896 (14) and 1897(7) by Truth, “Promotions from the Ranks,” *Edinburgh Evening News*, January 5, 1898

³⁹ See Appendix 1.

⁴⁰ See Appendix 1.

⁴¹ Thomas F. G. Coates and Sir Hector Archibald Macdonald, *Hector Macdonald: Or, the Private Who Became a General. A Highland Laddie's Life and Laurels, Etc.*, (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1900); David L. Cromb and Sir Hector Archibald Macdonald, *Hector Macdonald. The Story of His Life*, (Stirling: Eneas Mackay, 1903).

⁴² Trevor Royle, *Fighting Mac: The Downfall of Major-General Sir Hector MacDonald* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2003).

rank through long periods of service attached to the Egyptian army, where he faced less prejudice and could subsist on just his salary. His circumstances were indicative of many officers commissioned from the ranks in that he was an isolated figure. Ronald Hyam believed that his sexual transgressions would have been ‘papered over’ if he had come from the middle classes and attributed the imminent court martial that precipitated his suicide to his lack of gentlemanly credentials and being an outsider.⁴³

Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, the only man to rise from the lowest rank in the British army to the highest, was to follow MacDonald by the time of the war, as an enduring symbol of the army as a meritocracy. His commission and subsequent rise to become Chief of the Imperial General Staff were described in a memoir published in 1921.⁴⁴ This omitted to mention his humiliation and struggle in his early years. Later biographers attributed success to an ambitious wife, patronage, and staff promotion outside the regimental system. Robertson was sent to Staff College only seven years after being commissioned and it was his elevation from the regimental system that allowed him to progress, but, even in the higher echelons of the army, he was subject to class discrimination. Regarding other senior officers as a ‘pestilential circle’ and struggling with the entertainment costs associated with being a senior general, he was regarded as an outsider and difficult to work with because he was not a gentleman and had poor manners.⁴⁵ Charles Carrington, writing in 1965, described Robertson as an ‘obscure figure’. He stated ‘The stories that are still current about ‘Wully’ (Robertson) were whispered in the world of clubs and messes, not published in the press.’⁴⁶ Despite this he served in the public domain as the chimera of meritocratic progression in the army. This reveals

⁴³ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 33–4; Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 188.

⁴⁴ Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshall*.

⁴⁵ David R. Woodward, *Field Marshal Sir William Robertson: Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the Great War* (London: Praeger, 1998), pp. 30–3; Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: A Political Soldier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 78–9.

⁴⁶ Charles Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (Hutchinson, 1965), p. 72.

the antipathy towards Robertson from gentleman-officers and the power of the clubs they inhabited to undermine his reputation. The same gentlemen would nevertheless use Robertson as an exemplar of meritocratic progression.

J. E. Acland-Troyte, a gentleman ranker commissioned in 1881, wrote a memoir of his experience.⁴⁷ His account was extremely positive, he felt the experience of being led, and the discipline of being in the ranks, were of major benefit. He countenanced against the route, as the time in the ranks did not count towards future promotion.⁴⁸ This issue would continue as a dilemma and a reason why the route was disadvantageous because promotion generally was slow and based on time served, and the period spent in the ranks was not attributable.⁴⁹ Acland-Troyte was commissioned into his own regiment, and he said that he benefited from the respect and support of sergeants he once messed with. Officers commissioned from their own ranks who went on to command them were seen to be at risk of overfamiliarity, although there is little evidence to support this.

In the 1890s, there appears to have been a major cultural shift in the attitude amongst gentleman-officers towards gentlemen serving in the ranks as a route to a commission. Captain George Younghusband wrote vehemently condemning the route.⁵⁰ He said an ‘English gentleman makes an excellent officer, but a very indifferent private soldier as a rule’ and that he saw no benefit to a future officer in getting a ‘closer insight into the working of a regiment’ and an understanding of enlisted men. He presented two reasons against commissioning rankers, which he implicitly expected to be gentlemen:

⁴⁷ J. E. Acland-Troyte, *Through the Ranks to a Commission* (London: Macmillan, 1881).

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 170.

⁴⁹ There was always an ‘expectation’ that the officers would progress based on time served, demonstrated by place (precedence) on the *Army List*. Examinations and confidential reports also had a bearing, but the presumption was that every officer would progress in a timely order.

⁵⁰ Captain George John Younghusband, *The Queen’s Commission: How to Prepare for It, How to Obtain It, and How to Use It*, (London: Murray, 1891), pp. 51–7. See Chapter VI, ‘Through the Ranks to a Commission’

- (1) There is nothing in a private soldier's career which can justly be considered to qualify him to become an officer, a fact which was strongly apparent in the French Army in 1870.
- (2) Most men lose more than they gain during their term of service in the ranks: in self-reliance, in manner, in polish, — even in speech. We have known for instance, a born gentleman, who after three years in the ranks had utterly lost the proper use of the letter 'h'.⁵¹

The themes contained in these points are crucial in understanding the cultural resistance that was growing, not just towards commissions from the ranks, but towards close gentlemanly association with anyone in the ranks. The 'self-reliance, manner, polish and speech' are the crucial indicators of gentlemanliness, and the point being made is that a lifetime of being a gentleman could be forfeit after three years in the ranks. The attack was also professional; the British officer class had used the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 as an opportunity to develop a strong narrative that condemned the French army for 'pernicious spread of democratic principles among all ranks'.⁵² Military scholars blamed promotion from the ranks for weakening the quality of French army officers, comparing them unfavourably with well educated officers of 'good social status' in the German Army.⁵³ Despite the German supremacy in men and materiel during the war and a myriad of other reasons that may have contributed to the French defeat of 1870, the British officer class maintained the trope that the weakness of the 'democratised' French officer class was the 'root of all evil' that undermined the French Army as a professional justification for preserving its own exclusivity.⁵⁴

The public discourse praised and valorised the representations of the 'ordinary' soldier commissioned from the ranks. In the late Victorian era, the officer commissioned from the ranks was a rare and marginal figure, dependant on extra-regimental postings, patronage, and requiring a phenomenal degree of resilience to progress to high rank. Detailed biographical

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁵² Sisson Cooper Pratt, *Saarbruck to Paris, 1870: A Strategical Sketch*, Special Campaign Series, vol. 1 (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1904), p. 10.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 3–17.

scrutiny of the characteristics of regular commissions into the core of the British army shows that the route had been co-opted by ‘gentlemen’. However, by the end of the century, this too was faltering, as the officer class came to believe experience in the ranks was culturally contaminating. As the next chapter argues, pressure on the gentlemanly identity of officers was exacerbated by a variety of pressures to broaden the social base of officer recruitment from after the Anglo-Boer War until the outbreak of war. The analysis in the next chapter will also inform our understanding of the concentration of power at the regimental level and the resilience of regimental officers, able to use cultural benchmarks to affirm their identity.

2) The Pressure for Reform of the Officer Class

Public demand for army reform grew after the Anglo-Boer War, prompted by heavy criticism of performance and leadership on the battlefield. Particularly damaging was the comparative social status of the irregular officers and men of the Boer army who inflicted early defeat. They were largely working-class farmers. Following the disasters of ‘Black Week’, in the middle of December 1899, there was a popular view that root and branch reform of the army was necessary. Army critics sought change at every level, particularly seeking adoption of ‘business principles’ as part of a new move to ‘National Efficiency’.⁵⁵ The Secretary of State appointed in the wake of the disastrous opening of the War was Sir John Brodrick.⁵⁶ He implemented an expansion and reorganisation of the regular army announced in March 1901. The appointment of Field Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts, following the early failures of the army, led to immediate and long-term tactical reform that many military historians have seen as important

⁵⁵ G. R. Searle, “The politics of national efficiency and of war, 1900–1918.” In *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain*, Chris Wrigley (ed.) (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009); David French, “The British Armed Forces, 1900–1939,” in *Companion to Early Twentieth Century Britain*, Chris Wrigley (ed.) (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009),

⁵⁶ William St. John Freemantle Brodrick, (1856–1942), Secretary of State for War, November 1900–October 1903.

in preparing for war in 1914.⁵⁷ This included technological advances, such as equipping cavalry divisions with rapid firing rifles rather than lances.⁵⁸ The defensive use of artillery, equipping the army with fast firing artillery and the deployment of machine guns soon followed.⁵⁹ Roberts also placed improved professional training of officers and men at the forefront of reform.⁶⁰

The Liberal opposition and many others, even within the army, came to see the professional competence and indolence of the officer class as a particular problem.⁶¹ Criticism of its social composition was widespread, and one attribute of the gentlemanly outlook, the pursuit of leisure and disdain for professional application, was seen as particularly problematic.⁶² Leo Amery, an influential politician and journalist interested in military matters, promulgated ideas for radical change that included national service, commissions from the ranks, and making subsistence of newly commissioned officers affordable without dependence on additional private income.⁶³ The war in South Africa and the expansion of the army in response had stretched the limited officer class. There had been a lobby to commission from the ranks, although this was primarily to afford the opportunity for promotion to ‘gentleman rankers’.⁶⁴ Captain Cecil Norton MP repeatedly sought assurances from the Secretary of State for War that they would promote senior NCOs rather than use inexperienced subalterns and Sandhurst

⁵⁷ Spencer Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), pp. 10–16.

⁵⁸ Stephen Badsey, “The Boer War (1899–1902) and British Cavalry Doctrine: A Re-Evaluation,” *The Journal of Military History* 71, no. 1 (2007).

⁵⁹ Deborah D. Avant, “The Institutional Sources of Military Doctrine: Hegemons in Peripheral Wars,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. No. 4 (1993).

⁶⁰ Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914*, Themes in British Social History (London: Longman, 1980), p. 246.

⁶¹ Leo Amery, *The Problem of the Army* (London: E. Arnold, 1903), pp. 196–210.

⁶² William Elliot Cairnes, *An Absent-Minded War* (London: John Milne, 1900), p. 146.

⁶³ Leo Amery, *The Problem of the Army*, p. 194. (Leopold Charles Maurice Stennet Amery, 1873–1955)

⁶⁴ 1st Baron Rathcreeden, (1850–1930) M.P. for Newington West 1892–1916; Hansard, H.C. Deb. 5 March 1900, Vol. 80, C. 24; Hansard, H.C. Debate, 2 April, 1900, Vol 81, C. 935. Norton, from the landed Irish gentry, graduated from Sandhurst in 1870, into the 5th Lancers. “Obituary, Lord Rathcreedan,” *The Times*, January 8, 1930. See also Cecil William Norton Rathcreedan, Baron, *Memories of a Long Life* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1931).

cadets. Norton's interest was in the 'privates and NCOs who, prior to enlistment, passed the qualifying examination for the army, but who were not sufficiently high upon the list to enable them to gain admission at a time when the competition was abnormally severe'; in other words, gentleman rankers.⁶⁵

The ideas for change after the war were fundamentally new and different, seriously engaging with the social diversification of the officer class and challenging members' gentlemanly status. The elitist composition of the officer class and the lack of professional mobility from the ranks were serious weaknesses that constrained aspiration and representation of a 'national army.' Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal spokesperson, saw the increasing grip of the public schools over admission to the officer class as problematic because of the social class they represented.⁶⁶ Public schools were also perceived as reluctant to educate young people in science and technical subjects, increasingly important to understanding military technology.⁶⁷ Campbell-Bannerman had a long, 'quiet record of army reform', and he began a call for lasting changes in the social composition of the officer class.⁶⁸ In May 1901, he requested that the government increase the proportion of officers commissioned from the ranks:

Why should not this noble and honourable career be open in some proportion to all who serve in the Army? I know the difficulties. There are difficulties of age, difficulties of money, difficulties of expensive living, and difficulties, perhaps, of social prejudices. But, Sir, difficulties are made to be encountered and overcome, and not that we should sit down before them with a sigh. I wish the House to endeavour to realise what an improving leaven it would be in the ranks of the Army if among those who entered from other and less ambitious motives there were the same objects, the same hopes and expectations of finding an opportunity of rising to the highest distinction in the service of their country. Thus, and thus alone, will you bring all

⁶⁵ Hansard; H.C. Deb. 1 February 1900, Vol 78, C. 272.

⁶⁶ Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, (1936-1908), leader of the Liberal party from 1899-1908.

⁶⁷ The criticism of the public-school curriculum escalated into the First World War. See Thomas Pellatt, *Public School Education and the War: An Answer to the Attack Upon Eton Education* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1917).

⁶⁸ Tony Greaves, Biography of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in *Liberal Democrat History Group*, <http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/history/campbell-bannerman-sir-henry/>. Accessed February 1, 2016. In 1871, Bannerman was appointed Financial Secretary at the War Office under the army reformer Cardwell, serving until 1874. He held the same office from 1880-82 and joined the Cabinet as Secretary of State for War in 1886, and again from 1892, under first Gladstone, and then Rosebery. Greaves attributes a quiet record of army reform as one of his enduring achievements.

classes, and the best of all classes, into the ranks of the Army, and thus only, so far as it can be realised, will you nationalise and popularise the military service.⁶⁹

This was an important step for a politician to highlight the ‘social prejudices’ that were so influential in excluding officers commissioned from the ranks. It also contained a vision of a more inclusive officer class based on merit that would be popular. This prompted a government inquiry into two practical obstacles that stood in the way of change.

These were affordability of a career as an officer and promotion by merit. Two select committees, the ‘Stanley’ (1903) and ‘Akers-Douglas’ (1902) Committees, were established to look at these issues.⁷⁰ The committees found that the aristocracy and landed classes had maintained their grip on the officering of the army, following the demise of the purchase system or buying commissions by making living costs, the responsibility of the officer, expensive. Existence in the junior officer ranks was only sustainable with an additional income, described as ‘private’ and usually derived from family wealth. The Stanley Committee confirmed what was widely known, that a private income of between £100 and £150 was essential for a junior officer in an infantry regiment and between £600 and £700 in the cavalry.⁷¹ The Government were challenged to confront the dilemma of increasing pay or reducing expenses as the route to increasing accessibility. The Stanley Committee recommended a reduction in the costs attached to a commission.⁷²

⁶⁹ Hansard, H.C. Deb 13 May 1901, Vol. 93, C.C. 1483–579.

⁷⁰ Report of the committee appointed by the Secretary of State to enquire into the nature of expenses incurred by officers of the Army (Stanley Report) Cd., 1421, 1903 chaired by Lord Edward Stanley (1865–1948), Financial Secretary to the War Office 1900–1903, MP 1892–1906, and Report of the Committee appointed to consider the Education and Training of Officers of the Army (Akers-Douglas Report) Cd., 982, 1902 (also TNA CSC 3/319), chaired by Aretas Akers-Douglas, 1st Viscount Chilston (1851–1926).

⁷¹ This would make them equivalent to the following current values based on using an inflation measure (2014): a private income of between £10,000 and £15,000 per annum essential for a junior officer in an infantry regiment and between £60,000 and £70,000 per annum in the cavalry.

⁷² It proposed a ban on polo, an expensive and socially required sport, but felt unable to introduce regulations in respect of mess and uniform expenditure, relying on ‘stricter supervision.’ Several costs were recommended as being met from the exchequer; ‘charger’, saddlery, field kit and lease of furniture.

The Akers-Douglas Committee, informed by evidence from senior officers, took the view that junior officers were consciously reluctant to take a serious professional approach to officering. Making an ‘effort’ was contrary to the gentlemanly ethos. The committee resolved that promotion should be on a merit, an anathema to a peacetime British army that did not wish to see competition within the officer class. Selection by seniority had ended in 1885 when selection boards were required to consider confidential reports from commanding officers, however these tended not to be professional assessments and were usually bland, commenting on sporting and social success unless a specific act of negligence or ungentlemanly behaviour was noted.⁷³ Thus most progression was based on seniority rather than performance related.

The solutions offered by both committees challenged several ‘orthodoxies’ of the officer class. A cornerstone of the gentleman officer identity was the prerogative to maintain an expensive life style, and this was being increasingly used to differentiate more elite units. ‘Competition’ was abhorrent in that it would destabilise a culture of complacency that allowed officers to follow other interests, such as field sports. Lord Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of the army, had a first review of the committees’ reports and, following consultation with cavalry commanders, the excesses of polo, uniform, and messing costs were left to be ‘regimentally managed’.⁷⁴ It was thought that with ‘some help’ a junior

⁷³ The use of Confidential reports was criticised to the Elgin Commission; House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 1904 [Cd. 1790] Report of the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, Minutes of Evidence, p. 176, C. 4166, Wood, 29 Oct. 1902. Ian Beckett concluded Evelyn Wood’s criticism of annual confidential reports was largely justified in that inspecting officers did tend to identify only the strongest and the weakest officers. See Ian F. W. Beckett, “The Annual Confidential Report and Promotion in the Late Victorian Army,” *British Journal for Military History* 1, no. 1 (2014).

⁷⁴ It was recommended that the ‘general expenditure of officers to be made the subject of unremitting watchfulness on the parts of officers commanding’ and that co-operation between mess presidents be encouraged and a uniform system of mess accounts enforced throughout the service. Report of the Committee appointed by the Secretary of State to enquire into the nature of expenses incurred by officers of the Army (Stanley Report) Cd, 1421, 1903. Field Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts (1832-1914)

cavalry officer could ‘live’ on a private income of £300, and the efforts to provide more pay or subsidise expenses were easily vetoed because of austerity.⁷⁵

The two key planks of practical reform, promotion on merit and making officering an affordable and accessible occupation, were never realized, and, although they were regularly revisited, they were subverted and resisted. The result was that regimental COs remained in charge of the process of promotion and managing the affordability of the mess. The social world of officers and the cultural milieu that surrounded it was collectively determined by gentlemen, and the locus of power sat firmly at a regimental level where cultural determinants dictated membership and not with the army leadership or War Office. Even if there was a prospect of a commission, the affordability of becoming a junior officer and the slow promotion prospects that fettered progression to a better remunerated grade were a deterrent to any prospective officer to be commissioned from the ranks.⁷⁶

Pressure to widen access to the officer class beyond the gentlemanly elite was growing because of its inability to meet the demands made to provide new entrants. By 1905, there was an acute shortage of army officers that led to a discussion at Army Council.⁷⁷ The Council decided to shorten the Sandhurst course and enlarge their training facilities. Shortages of officers in the cavalry were again attributed by the Director of Staff Duties, Major-General H. D. Hutchinson to the high cost of living in the cavalry. He also observed the dislike of training and

⁷⁵ Ibid. The full cost of the proposals was estimated as £369,740, with an annual cost of 101,510 at home and £6,000 in India.

⁷⁶ Ian Beckett, Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The British Army in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 26-27.

⁷⁷ TNA WO 163/10 The Army Council, Precis no. 191, Deficiency of Officers in the Army, (1905), p. 236. The Council also noted that a high percentage of officers were failing the entrance examination to gain regular commissions through the militia. They decided not to expand that route particularly by lowering the entrance requirement as they expressed concern about the quality of officers entering by the route compared to those coming through Sandhurst.

examinations that deterred applicants.⁷⁸ The Adjutant General, Lieutenant-General C. W. H. Douglas suggested that commanding officers should ensure that young ‘subalterns’ could live within a cavalry regiment on a private income of £200.⁷⁹ He considered that a choice should be made between ‘money and brains’ and, if the army elected for brains, ‘the hunting and polo must go.’⁸⁰ Douglas felt that it was the responsibility of the CO of a regiment to manage expenses and that they should be removed if they were unable to achieve economies if they were asked to do so. The Army Council had little influence over the world of the regimental officer where the provision of horses for professional and leisurely pursuits and servants and other significant messing costs continued to be a normative requirement in the years before the war. The devolution of power to regimental level effectively maintained the cultural boundaries around ideas of gentlemanly officering, an intersection of culture and structure.

It is reported that Douglas had a strained relationship with H. O. Arnold-Forster, the Secretary of State for War. In December 1905, he was to form a new, more cordial relationship with the incoming Secretary of State for War, Richard Burton Haldane.⁸¹ Haldane and Douglas had a common interest; reform of the militia. Haldane was later feted as the architect of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and the Territorial Force, but much of his thinking was that of an imperialist aimed at constraining military spending, and his public-school background made him uncritical of the gentlemanly ethos and the elitism of the officer class. Haldane was also a

⁷⁸ Hutchinson was regarded indifferently because of his background in the Indian army. For a full account of the operations and general attitude and competence of the Army Council in this era, see Ian F. W. Beckett, “Selection by Disparagement”: Lord Esher, the General Staff and the Politics of Command, 1904–14,” in *The British General Staff: Reform and Innovation C1890–1939*, ed. D French and B. H. Reid (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

⁷⁹ General Sir Charles Whittingham Horsley Douglas (1850–1914) He became Adjutant-General to the British Army on 12 February 1904. Eliza Reid, “Brains or Polo? Equestrian Sport, Army Reform and the ‘Gentlemanly Officer Tradition’, 1900–1914”, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 2006, 84 (339), pp.236–253.

⁸⁰ TNA WO 163/10 The Army Council, Precis no. 191, Deficiency of Officers in the Army, (1905), p. 238.

⁸¹ Hugh Oakeley Arnold-Forster P.C. (1855–1909), known as H. O. Arnold-Forster. He served as Secretary of State for War from 1903 to 1905. He was succeeded by Richard Burdon Haldane, 1st Viscount Haldane (1856–1928). Secretary of State for War from 1905 to 1912. Haldane referred to Douglas, the Adjutant-General as ‘one of the ablest men of business who ever filled that position in this country’. See R. B. Haldane Viscount Haldane, *Before the War* (London: Cassell, 1920), p. 178.

strong supporter of the universities and public schools, and he chose to include representatives of both on his committee, looking at the supply of officers caused by shortages in the regulars and reserves.⁸² Haldane did not consider other sources of supply, stating ‘there was only one source from which we could hope to get young men of the upper middle class, who are the usual source from which this element is drawn, and that was the universities and the big public schools, like Eton and Harrow and other public schools of that character, which at present have large cadet corps’.⁸³ Haldane continued, stating that ‘the committee studied the systems of France, Germany, Russia, and Japan. France has her own way of obtaining a reserve of officers. They are officers from the non-commissioned ranks; a way which she can use, but a way which is not adapted to our necessities, since we have not the material which France gets through her compulsory system.’⁸⁴ Haldane’s position, one which influenced his position and actions up until the war was to endorse the gentlemanly ethos, oblivious to the merits of increasingly better educated army ranks.

Haldane’s solution to officer supply rested on his new system of accrediting training in public school and universities, the Officer Training Corps. However, Sir William Nicholson, the Quarter-Master-General, with Sir Edward Ward, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for War were attributed as being responsible for a proposal, whereby warrant officers and NCOs in the Army Service Corps, (A.S.C.) would study commercial classes at Aldershot.⁸⁵ They would then become ‘acting officers’ before passing into the reserve of officers as lieutenants. This was the first acknowledgement that, in at least one area of the army, NCOs would be an

⁸² Haldane was involved in the founding of Imperial College, London in 1907, and a library was dedicated to him. He was a strong advocate of developing the technical focus of universities on the German model with institutions such as Berlin Technical High School.

⁸³ R. B. Haldane, *Army Reform and Other Addresses* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1907), p.144.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 146.

⁸⁵ “Commissions from the Ranks,” *The Derby Daily Telegraph*, February 23, 1907. Ward and Nicholson were attributed with having insight into the working of the Army Service Corps, (A.S.C.) Ward had been a commissary in the Commissary and Transport Department and had an honorary commission before the A.S.C. was created in 1888 and he was given full military rank. Colonel Sir Edward Ward, (1853–1928) was Permanent Secretary at the War Office.

important source of officers in conditions of war, but not peace. This first step towards a change occurred in an arm that was concerned with commercial matters and essentially the domestic housekeeping of the army. Here, the gentlemanly tradition could be compromised for roles that carried lower esteem and meant undertaking less masculine, or potentially heroic, work.

The priority of the Liberal Party in the years before the war was the Welfare reform. This was to be paid for by curbing military spending, reorganising the militia and army, and delivering efficiency savings.⁸⁶ The idea of reforming the officer class came from unexpected quarters on the political right and left who shared a vision of a large army to defend Britain and its interests. The concerns about imperial defence and the risk of a European war manifested themselves in the views of some parts of the Edwardian Liberal Party.⁸⁷ The National Service League (NSL) had liberal adherents. It promoted compulsory military service. However, it did ‘not propose conscription, under which the poor man serves while the rich man escapes, but the universal training of all young men.’⁸⁸ This had some similarities with the emerging radical view, expressed by the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), of universal training in a ‘citizen army’.⁸⁹ These ideas, as measures intended to provide a mass army and promote citizenship, also anticipated improving the quality of the rank and file. The corollary of their views about compulsion, for both the NSL and the SDF, was the belief that the officering of the army could be constituted differently, by access to an improved pool of rankers with meritocratic progression from the ranks based on character and ability (NSL), or democratic election (SDF). This was much closer to the French model of military organisation and was seen to grant the

⁸⁶ W. N. Funnell, “Social Reform, Military Accounting and the Pursuit of Economy During the Liberal Apotheosis, 1906–1912,” *Accounting History Review* 21, no. 1 (2011).

⁸⁷ There was a diversity of opinions about military spending and ‘militarism’ but one area that attracted interest was support of the Royal Navy, and organisations such as, the Navy League were prominent in securing funding and support. See Matthew Johnson, “The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War,” *Twentieth Century British History* (2010).

⁸⁸ Matthew Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 131.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

corresponding advantages of having a larger pool of potential officers.⁹⁰ Thus commissioning from the ranks was not in itself an argument, rather a beneficial consequence of a larger army that would provide a potential pool of ‘higher quality’.

The debate about professional mobility in the army emerged as a serious political issue during and after the army reforms instituted by the Liberal Government following the landslide victory of 1906. The election brought many new Liberal and Labour radicals into Parliament who had a different vision of a reconstructed officer identity, not dependant on the class origins. These included Hugh Cecil Lea, a newspaper proprietor, and John Ward, a trade unionist.⁹¹ Lea, Ward and others like them were critical of the army reforms, but both had served in the ranks and were no longer comfortable with the assumptions that their class of men had to be led by another. Both felt the need for a greater social mix in the officer class and for the increased opportunity for able rankers to be commissioned. Ward, a navvy working on the Manchester Ship Canal had joined Wolseley’s Sudan expedition in 1885. He returned to labouring and founded the Navvies, Bricklayers’ Labourers and General Labourers Union in 1889. He had been a member of the Social Democratic Union, and, in 1906, entered Parliament as the Liberal-Labour member for Stoke-on-Trent. Lea enlisted in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in 1887.⁹² He had excelled at his exams, progressing through his education certificates and being appointed a staff clerk in the Army Pay Department by 1892. He was a lance corporal when he paid £18 to take his own discharge. He went to the USA where he was commissioned in the Illinois National Guard. Lea returned to Britain, built his own newspaper business, and, in 1906, became the member for St Pancras East. Lea and

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 90-132.

⁹¹ Hugh Cecil Lea (1869–1926), MP for St Pancras East 1906 until 1910 and John Ward, (1866–1934), Liberal-Labour Member of Parliament for Stoke-upon-Trent. In 1914, Ward was commissioned into the Middlesex Regiment. See Lieutenant-colonel John Ward, *With the Die Hards in Siberia* (London: Cassell, 1920) and TNA WO339/22796 John Ward.

⁹² TNA WO97/3272/22 Hugh Cecil Lea.

Ward had both formed a view about the army from the ‘bottom up’, recognised the worth of its NCOs, and did not acquiesce to the idea of all officers having to be gentlemen. Lea personally intervened in the case of one aspirant NCO with a working class background to secure him a commission.⁹³

The ‘Annual Army Estimates’ debate was always an opportunity for back benchers to raise questions about army numbers.⁹⁴ Haldane and others before him, when challenged about the numbers of officers commissioned from the ranks, had consistently inflated figures by including honorary officers. In 1907, in a debate that was significant for the challenges to the myth of opportunity, Lea raised doubts about the accuracy of Haldane’s response.⁹⁵ John Ward had a deep mistrust of the statistics and the ability of the War Office to bring about substantial change and wanted the government to introduce enforceable policies and quotas.⁹⁶ Conservative attitudes to the social background of officers were still prevalent. William Kenyon-Slaney, a conservative and retired army Colonel, quoting Lord Palmerston, maintained that it was ‘absolutely necessary’ to have well bred officers to maintain discipline, a claim dismissed as ‘snobbishness’ by Ward.⁹⁷

In 1909, John Ward attacked Haldane’s abysmal record stating ‘those few avenues that allowed the common soldier to rise above the ordinary non-commissioned ranks, are being gradually closed, and that the proportion of promotions during the term of his control, as Secretary for War, of the army, has gradually grown less every year,’ and chastised him, saying that ‘our

⁹³ It was common for MPs to advocate for individuals and branches of the armed forces, either through questions in the House or direct approaches to the Secretary of State. Lea became directly involved with the commissioning of a Kings Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC) ranker, John Dimmer. TNA WO 339/7051.

⁹⁴ The Annual Army Estimates Report and debate became an opportunity to debate the purpose, size, and character of the British army. See Lewis Clive, *The People’s Army* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), pp. 33–4.

⁹⁵ The original question was raised by Alexander Leslie Renton MP (1868–1947) a retired officer from the Scots Greys. Hansard, HC Deb 15 April 1907 Vol. 172 c587; Hansard, HC Deb 22 April 1907 Vol. 172 cc1405–6

⁹⁶ Hansard, HC Deb 03 June 1907 Vol. 175 cc294–6.

⁹⁷ William Slaney Kenyon-Slaney (1847–1908).

army establishment, under the control of a Liberal administration, is becoming more aristocratic instead of more democratic.⁹⁸ In July the same year, a challenge by Henry Watt MP drew Haldane to acknowledge there was a problem, and with his customary avoidance, Haldane stated ‘the number of commissions from the ranks is not subject to any fixed limit. The candidate only requires the qualifications laid down in the Royal Warrant for Pay, and the recommendation of his commanding officer and the general officer commanding.’⁹⁹ This shifted the blame to the ranks themselves, suggesting they were without ambition or aspiration.

The ferment of criticism reached its climax in 1910 when, in a debate about the shortage of officers, Haldane presented misleading figures about commissions from the ranks in response to Frederick George Kellaway, MP, again claiming there was no demand from the ranks for such opportunities.¹⁰⁰ Haldane said there had been 264 commissions from the ranks. This was based on 3,249 commissions granted during the last five years, meaning that a proportion of about one in twelve were commissions from the ranks.¹⁰¹ Haldane’s figures were misleading because they again included honorary commissions. In 1911, Kellaway continued to press for precise figures of commissions from the ranks and elicited a response from Jack Seely then the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for War.¹⁰² The figures showed the unprecedented complete collapse of commissions into the cavalry and a 40 per cent reduction in combatant commissions when comparing 1906 to 1910 with 1885 to 1889.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Hansard, H.C. Deb, 4 March 1909, Vol. 1, C.C. 1595–662

⁹⁹ Hansard, H.C. Deb, 28 July 1909, Vol 8, C.1174, Henry Watt or Harry Anderson Watt (1863–1929) was a Liberal MP.

¹⁰⁰ Hansard, H.C. Deb, 21 February 1911; Vol 21, C.C.1713–41713; Frederick George Kellaway P.C. (1870–1933), often simply called F. G. Kellaway, was a Liberal Party politician in the United Kingdom, and Member of Parliament for Bedford from December 1910 to 1922. “Obituary”, *The Times*, April 15, 1933.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Jack Seely or John Edward Bernard Seely. He had been appointed in 1911 and succeeded Haldane as Secretary of state for War in 1912.

¹⁰³ Hansard, H.C. Deb, 28 March 1911, Vol 23, C.C.1125–61125. Seely quoted 64 combatant commissions when there were only 47 commissions into infantry of the line per *Army Lists* for the period.

This provoked an attack on the government's record from Ward:

I believe the whole history of the Army shows that the supposition exists that the officers ought to be drawn from the wealthy and upper middle classes and that the common soldier should be drawn exclusively from the poor. It is almost like a religious faith; the class consciousness of the officers is almost as severe and straitlaced and ruthless in its application as the caste of the Brahmins in India.¹⁰⁴

Ward had researched his own figures on commissions from the ranks and presented these to the House:

There are nineteen generals in the Army List, none of whom have ever been in the Army except occupying commissioned positions. There are thirty-one lieutenant-generals in the official list, none of whom ever served as a ranker. There are 110 major-generals, none of whom ever served in the ranks. There are 734 colonels, of whom six, it is stated, served in the ranks. There are 1,028 lieutenant-colonels, four of whom served in the ranks. There are 2,289 majors, thirty-nine of whom, I think, served in the ranks. There are 5,854 captains, of whom 155 only served in the ranks. There are 4,963 lieutenants, of whom 130 only served in the ranks. There are 1,595 second-lieutenants—that is the lowest commissioned rank—of whom only twenty-two served in the ranks. Therefore, we may take it for granted, so far as that list is concerned, that the opportunity for a soldier to rise from the ranks to the commissioned positions in the Army is practically nil.¹⁰⁵

Ward's figures, showing a progressive decline corresponding to rank, illustrated that fewer and fewer officers had been commissioned from the ranks in the preceding years. Perhaps more telling was his reference to the caste system in India, a preoccupation in Edwardian Britain. This contextualised the problem as one of socially constructed immobility and aligned the army with practices deemed 'backward' and 'atavistic' in the ideology of British Empire.¹⁰⁶ Ward closed his remarks by saying 'If the poor ranker has to rely upon the colonel of his regiment, who is generally an aristocrat, and would not even dream of allowing him in his mess, then I say there is no possible chance for a private soldier to rise.'¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Malita Waligora, "What is Your 'Caste'? The Classification of Indian Society as Part of the British Civilising Mission", eds. H. Fischer-Tiné and M. Mann, *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (Anthem Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ Hansard, H.C. Deb, 28 March 1911, Vol 23, C.C.1125–61125.

The response from his opponents in the House was to resurrect the iconic example of William Robertson: ‘The distinguished general officer alluded to [...] is an illustration of a man who, by iron character and resolution, was able to face the difficulties. He rose from the ranks, and is one of the most brilliant soldiers in the British army to-day, and commands every respect. What he has been able to do other people could do.’¹⁰⁸ The discomfort of the government lay in a reluctance to engage with the issue of commissions from the ranks and their impotence to challenge a regimental system that regulated access to itself. Change would require a structural and cultural shift.

3) Increasing Commissions from the Ranks

The political pressure for change increased until, in March 1913, Jack Seely, now the Secretary of State, announced his intention to increase the numbers of commissions from the ranks of the army. Seely announced a package of measures for which ‘the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have been good enough to provide the necessary funds’, to cries of ‘at last’ from Ward.¹⁰⁹ The measures included specific help for ranker officers, and across the board pay awards for all officers to make subsistence on pay alone more feasible. Seely established a committee to be chaired from outside the army by Lord Lucas, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Agriculture, familiar with the War Office having been Under Secretary of State for War.¹¹⁰ Half the Committee’s membership came from outside the Army.¹¹¹ The Committee’s title was ‘Pay of Officers’ but the brief had a much more specific aim; ‘reviewing the regulations covering promotions from the ranks that should increase the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ H.C. Deb, 19 March 1913, Vol 50, C.C.1066–181. Seely estimated the cost of the changes to be £100,000–150,000 per annum. It meant an increase of two shillings and sixpence per day to the pay of a Lieutenant. It must have taken a great deal of persuasion on Seely’s part to secure this level of funding.

¹¹⁰ TNA WO 163/18, Appendix to Précis No 735.

¹¹¹ The other members were Colonel N. W. Barnardiston, Mr H. H. Fawcett, Mr H. W. W. McAnally, Major-General Sir C. F. N. Mcready and Colonel E. W. M. Norie.

numbers, proposing enhancements to pay to ensure the same on an equitable basis and to reduce the cost of living expenses of officers.' This was a step that challenged the fundamental contempt of the gentleman-officer for money, and one of the ways the 'older' true professions separated themselves from the pecuniary approach of new professions.¹¹²

The Committee decided that the third part of their investigation — limiting expenses — involved an investigation of such 'complexity and difficulty' that they decided to defer the matter for further consideration and report on the first two parts of their brief.¹¹³ Limiting expenses was still too contentious and close to the heart of cultural definitions of the gentleman-officer. Their assumptions were based on the notion that 'not more than 40 and most probably about 30 officers' would be commissioned from the ranks annually and, if more were considered, it would require that a special school should be formed. The regulations governing the process were redesigned to help aspirants without private income. The Committee warned that the scheme should be monitored to ensure that failed Sandhurst applicants with private means, gentlemen rankers, were prevented from using the route.¹¹⁴

The main technical changes were an increase in the time spent in the ranks to achieve eligibility to three years and a reduction in the maximum age to 23 years.¹¹⁵ The reduction in the age limit was intended to place the commissioned ranker on the 'same footing as the Sandhurst cadet' as it was important that the point of career embarkation was as close as possible to that of a graduate from Sandhurst.¹¹⁶ This accommodated three beliefs of the officer class. Firstly, the idea of equality in promotion opportunity or 'fair play', since this was largely related to time served. Secondly, the belief that the candidate should be sufficiently youthful to be assimilated.

¹¹² Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), p. 152.

¹¹³ TNA WO 163/18, Appendix to Précis No 735.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ TNA 163/18, Lucas Report, p. 457.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Thirdly, it would minimise the negative cultural impacts of life in the ranks. The existing requirement that candidates had to pass the entry exam was preceded with a requirement that they should give six months' notice to the commanding officer that they intended to sit the examination. This placed, in the words of the committee, an obligation that 'all necessary facilities in regimental instruction were given' including the support of schoolmasters.¹¹⁷

The degree to which these measures were owned by the Secretary of State is demonstrated through the title given to the scheme; it was called 'The Secretary of State's Scheme'.¹¹⁸ The report stated that promotions from the ranks would be recommended by the Secretary of State from those sponsored by commanding officers who met the requirements.¹¹⁹ The shift of this authority from the Military Secretary to the Secretary of State made an important statement about the significance of these commissions and the lack of confidence in the internal apparatus of the army to take the process forward. The report was forwarded before the Parliamentary summer recess at the request of Seely, to expedite implementation.

The report was extremely radical in its measures. The financial incentives, extended only to the infantry, cavalry and artillery commissions, included a special 'Secretary of State' allowance of £50 per year for three years, an increase in the uniform allowance from £100 to £150, and the removal of the low pay of second lieutenants by abolishing the rank altogether with a lieutenancy being the first point of entry for all new officers. The committee felt that the allowance of £50 per annum might be insufficient without a reduction in the expenses of junior officers, but it also felt that any differences between the pay of officers should be removed after three years to allow the 'fusion into a homogenous whole of candidates from all sources'. The report lastly considered adjustments to differentials between arms and branches of the service,

¹¹⁷ Those seeking a commission in the artillery also had to sit the entrance examination in science and mathematics.

¹¹⁸ TNA 163/18, Lucas Report.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. See paragraph h) of *The Secretary of State's Scheme*, p. 435.

as several were paid more to incentivise recruitment. In the discussions of the new regulations, the Council raised the issue of commissioned rankers transferring to branches such as the Army Service Corps, Army Pay Corps and Army Ordnance Corps, where pay had traditionally been enhanced. It was observed that not only would commissioned rankers be attracted to these departments but that ‘regiments will escape some awkwardness by parting with them.’¹²⁰ This was an acknowledgement of the fundamental dislike of ranker officers by regimental officers, and the Council sought to anticipate this excluding behaviour. It was proposed that a restriction should be placed on the number allowed to transfer to departments.¹²¹

The general thrust of the Lucas report was incorporated in the 1914 ‘pay warrant’, setting out general conditions of service in the army, and many anticipated it would herald a major change, believing that material improvements in the condition of ranker officers could secure them affordable careers.¹²² The *Dundee Courier* reported the proposals favourably: ‘It is well known that many men who have been granted commissions from the ranks in the past have been made to feel their position most keenly, and from the time that they have entered the officers’ mess may have bitterly regretted that promotion was ever granted to them.’¹²³ The newspaper, mistakenly as the evidence suggests, was conflating making access affordable with cultural integration. It was argued that the annual cost, £150,000 including the pay award and assuming 30 applicants entered the scheme, would achieve a corresponding return in the increased efficiency of the service.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² War Office, *Regulations under Which Warrant Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Regular Army May Be Promoted to Combatant Commissions as Second-Lieutenants*. (London: HMSO, 1914).

¹²³ “Special to the Courier, Promotion from the Ranks Will Be Made Less Difficult Than Hitherto, When Poverty and Snobbery Have Been Powerful Barriers,” *Dundee Courier*, March 31, 1913.

¹²⁴ London Correspondent of the Manchester Guardian, “Gossip of the Day,” *Yorkshire Evening Post*, August 12, 1913.

In January 1914, the Royal Warrant for Pay of Officers and Promotion from the Ranks was published in the form of an Army Order, signed by Seely.¹²⁵ Seely had met with the King on 16 December to discuss the warrant.¹²⁶ He had discussed whether the Household Troops and Guards should be included in the pay award ‘as there was not the same necessity’, as these officers were ‘not entirely dependent of army emoluments’.¹²⁷ Paradoxically, the King was suggesting that these regiments should be allowed to maintain their elite status by paying them less than other regiments, using an economic lever to maintain exclusivity. This was the first significant pay award to all junior officers in 100 years, intended to make it possible for a newly commissioned officer to subsist on their pay. For ranker officers, it included an £150 outfit allowance, a pay supplement of £50 per annum for three years afterwards provided the candidate had not served less than three years in the ranks, pay at the rate of a lieutenant, and that up to three years of service was to count towards ‘time served’ in calculating pay. The Army Councils’ instructions on the warrant accompanied the publication setting out the conditions that candidates would have to meet.

These structural changes were not the only measures Seely sought to introduce to secure more promotion from the ranks. In June 1913, Seely had decided to investigate the support necessary for more NCOs to be commissioned, and study the French model of formal ‘sous-officier’ training that led to a commission. He had corresponded with Arthur Williamson Alsager Pollock, an army reformer, critic and editor of the *United Services Magazine*.¹²⁸ Pollock had retired after a long army career and observed the Anglo-Boer war as *The Times* correspondent.

¹²⁵ TNA 32/8897. Pay of Officers and Special Provisions for Officers Promoted from the Ranks. This file contains details of the rushed preparation of the warrant. Lord Stamfordham, the King’s secretary sent a telegram confirming the King’s approval of the warrant on 31 December 1913.

See also MSS Mottisone 17: 17/86–111.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Lt.-Col. Arthur Williamson Alsager Pollock (1853–1923) “Obituary,” *The Times*, July 4, 1923. During the First World War, aged 61 years, he was given command of the 10th Service Battalion, KOYLI, which he commanded at Loos in September, 1915.

A colleague of Leo Amery, he was a critic of the War Office and army training methods. He had developed his own approach, designed to ‘foster each man’s sense of responsibility.’¹²⁹ He was an innovator and outsider who would not be trammelled into unworkable solutions. Seely was keenly aware that there was no investment and training for commissioned NCOs and that their promotion to the officer class could be better achieved if not left to the whims or prejudices of regiments and if organised and funded centrally. Pollock offered to go France on behalf of the Government to study the sous-officier training schools and report on how they worked.¹³⁰ Seely set this proposal before French, who reacted by saying that he felt it more appropriate if one of his own general staff carried out the study otherwise diplomatic ‘difficulties may arise.’ There was an immediate tension as to who should research a scheme; a reformer from outside the army or an insider, accountable to French.¹³¹

Seely acquiesced to French’s wish for the visit to be made by a member of the General Staff and an officer who ‘thoroughly understood the education system’; Major Maxwell Earle was briefed.¹³² This appointment gave French and army senior command a degree of control over the process since Earle would be reporting and accountable to them. He was also the archetypal regular army officer from the gentlemanly elite. Earle began his mission by questioning the basis on which he was making the visit, pointing out that existing means of training officers was sufficient and deducing that the NCO School was a response to the demands of the House of Commons.¹³³ He ‘deducted that the class of candidate catered for (in France) is practically in our army a new class.’ Initially, Seely stated the purpose of the mission was to inform a plan to provide an annual route of supplying more officers commissioned from the ranks. In July,

¹²⁹ For a more complete account of his career, see “Death of Colonel Pollock,” *The Times*, July 4, 1923.

¹³⁰ TNA WO 32/8386.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Colonel Maxwell Earle (1871–1953). Maxwell was educated at Marlborough and Sandhurst and gazetted into the Grenadier Guards in 1891. In 1921, he became Deputy Director of Staff Studies at the War Office and Lee Knowles Lecturer at Trinity College Cambridge. He retired in 1923 and died in 1953. “Obituary,” *The Times*, February 18, 1953.

¹³³ Ibid.

he wrote that the visit had ‘one purpose and a very important one. It has been decided to promote a considerably larger number of NCOs from the ranks. The scheme anticipates promoting about 50 in this coming year and may be further extended. The question is: what is the best way of giving these exceptional men further educational advantage before they take up ordinary regimental duty?’¹³⁴

The visit to the four French military sous-officier schools to access the impact of the training on the performance of officers was delayed while Earle negotiated subsistence for a servant to travel with him.¹³⁵ The visit finally took place in January 1914. Earle’s report is finely detailed about the curriculum and how aspects such as ‘morale’ were taught and their transferability. He enjoyed observing how some French commentators looked favourably towards the British system.¹³⁶ He was interested in the social origins of the French NCO recruits being trained for a commission, and he found 90 per cent of the cavalry candidates came from the ‘gentry’ whereas, in the infantry, candidates ‘came from the ‘petite bourgeoisie’ and even from the soil, with a sprinkling of the sons of old officers and the poorer gentry.’¹³⁷

Maxwell strictly observed the etiquette of accepting invitations to the homes of French commanding officers. On not being invited to the home of the Colonel commanding St Maxient, he observed ‘The colonel does not receive at home — he had been eleven years on the African frontier and Madame, I gathered, was not brought up in best society.’¹³⁸ It is a mark of how important etiquette was regarded by British army officers that Earle felt compelled to comment in a report, and it was implicitly critical. Earle made it clear that he thought it

¹³⁴ TNA WO 32/8386.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Earle made reference to a French study on officer preparation; Anonymous, “Le Recrutement Des Sciences Militaire,” *Journal des Sciences Militaires* (1913). The author was commenting on the crisis of French officer recruitment, comparing the French system unfavourably with the British.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

unnecessary to adopt this ‘foreign method’ of recruitment and training. Despite these reservations, he set out a very clear plan for an NCO school for 50 students adapted from the French model that would serve the needs of all the arms of the British army — ‘if it found it necessary to construct one.’ The proposal included the details of staffing a new school and a discussion of the options for where such a school would be based.¹³⁹ He suggested it should not be at Sandhurst, home of the Royal Military Academy, because of the adverse reaction by gentleman cadets.¹⁴⁰ Earle anticipated that the ‘gentlemanly’ identity zealously guarded by cadets, might lead to a reaction. In producing the report, it is clear he thought it a dangerous and unnecessary scheme.

French, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), confronted with a scheme, declared his objection in principle; he wrote to Seely:

Having regard to the methods by which we recruit our Army, our great military traditions, and the incalculable value of preserving the exceptionally happy relations which exist between commissioned and non-commissioned ranks, founded on the experience and work of centuries, I am very strongly of the opinion that it would be unwise and unsuitable under existing conditions to increase the proportion of officers promoted from the ranks to anything like that which obtains in France.¹⁴¹

Underlining his position with a reference to other ‘real and pressing needs’ within the army, French resisted any plan to invest resources with a suggestion that the army should be ‘cutting our coat according to our cloth’.¹⁴² The reaction of Seely was equally uncompromising; his secretary noted that the Secretary of State had seen the paper and referred to it in his Estimates

¹³⁹ The conceptual framework of the school would be reproduced in early 1916 as it provided a blueprint for the cadet officer schools introduced in 1916.

¹⁴⁰ TNA WO 32/8386.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Speech and that he would like to ‘be advised of the financial aspects.’¹⁴³ Amidst the escalating crisis with the Army in Ireland, Seely was still intent on establishing a school.

The clear tension between Seely and French about this issue contributed to a wider set of tensions between senior army figures and politicians that came together in March 1914, at the time of the Curragh Mutiny.¹⁴⁴ For many, there was a corollary between the attitude of the officer class to its obligations in Ulster and the commissioning of rankers. In a constituency speech in January 1914, Frederick Kellaway was reported as saying ‘It was said the officers of the army were going to resign and join the rebels. That would be a dangerous game for any Tory officer to play, because there were some exceedingly good men amongst the NCOs and rank and file of the army. It would be a long step forward in the principle he [Kellaway] wanted to see established of promotion from the ranks, if ever Tory officers started resigning.’¹⁴⁵ This marked a very clear politicisation of the gentlemen-officers of the army cast as Tories. This was a theme that was picked up by national centre-left newspapers as the crisis worsened. The event widely described as a mutiny has been played down as an ‘incident’ by contemporary figures and historians. Others have observed it to be ‘significant for the light it throws upon civil-military relations and the extent to which the British Army was politicised and partisan.’¹⁴⁶ Ward and Ramsay Macdonald were among many Labour and Liberal MPs to argue the hypocrisy of the army’s position of ‘limited obedience’.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ WO 32/8386, on 17 March 1914, the Under-Secretary Sir Herbert James Creedy, (1878–1973) recorded that Seely had referred to the report (Estimates Report, 10 March 1914 p. 1080) and wanted to be advised of the costs of the scheme.

¹⁴⁴ See Alfred Patrick Ryan, *Mutiny at the Curragh*. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1956); James Sir Fergusson, *The Curragh Incident* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964); Ian Beckett, *The Army and the Curragh Incident, 1914*, vol. 2 (London: The Bodley Head for the Army Records Society, 1985).

¹⁴⁵ “Mr F. Kellaway at Goldington Road School,” *Bedfordshire Times and Independent*, January 6, 1914.

¹⁴⁶ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 174. See “Home Rule,” *Daily News*, March 24, 1914.

¹⁴⁷ Mark L. Connelly, “The Army, the Press and the ‘Curragh Incident’, March 1914,” *Historical Research* 84, no. 225 (2011), p. 536.

Seely, French and Ewart (the Adjutant-General) resigned. Seely was condemned by the Conservatives for asking the army to do the unconscionable and by his own Liberal-Labour group for being seen to compromise his position and acquiesce to an elite group of officers.¹⁴⁸ A notoriously conservative army officer regarded him as a ‘dangerous creature in every way’, which may have reflected his attempts to change the membership and consequently the culture of the officer class.¹⁴⁹ Despite Seely’s departure, the new regulations remained and many, such as Ward, were keenly anticipating their impact. The regulations were still dependant on regimental commanding officer nominations and, in March 1914, Ward asked the Secretary of State for War how many had been recommended for the examination under the new regulations.¹⁵⁰ The reply was that only two candidates ‘had expressed a desire’ to attend the first examination. Ward knew that the regimental system of approval and recommendation was at the heart of a conservative regime intent on maintaining the exclusive social composition of the officer class. In April 1914, Ward’s belief about the officering of the British army was given a high profile in the newspapers.¹⁵¹ He called for half of all commissions to be given to good NCOs and for there to be a revolution in regimental culture where merit rather than wealth and social distinction determined a man’s career.¹⁵² In May 1914, the Army Council, desperate to encourage participation in the scheme, issued a new order ‘in amplification’ of that made in January widening eligibility.¹⁵³ The demand for the scheme is not clear, however candidates

¹⁴⁸ Johnson has attributed some of Seely’s difficulties to his lower military rank than Gough and Paget despite his being their political chief. Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902–1914*, p. 63.

¹⁴⁹ IWMD, 12074, Grant-Duff Diaries, 19 December 1911. See also Edward M. Spiers, The Regular Army in M. Spiers Edward, “The Regular Army,” in *A Nation in Arms: A Social History of the British Army in the First World War*, I. F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds.), Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 50.

¹⁵⁰ Hansard, HC Deb 25 March 1914 Vol. 60, c357. Seely was now embroiled in the Curragh mutiny and the question was answered by Harold Trevor Baker (1877–1960), Financial Secretary to the War Office from 1912 to 1914.

¹⁵¹ “John Ward,” Manchester Guardian, April 23, 1914.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ TNA WO 123/56 Army Order 135. This allowed those serving in the ranks before January 1914 to be considered under the old conditions increasing the maximum age to 26 (instead of 23) years of age. The maximum number that would benefit under the new conditions would be 30. To encourage candidates the normal notification period of six months was waived so that up until July they were still able to register for the October 1914 examination and a new explanatory pamphlet was produced. War Office, *Regulations under Which Warrant*

such as George Clinton Wright of the Devonshire Regiment were being advised of the potential new scheme in March 1914.¹⁵⁴

In the four months between Seely's resignation and the outbreak of war, Herbert Asquith, the Prime Minister took over the running of the War Office, advised by Haldane.¹⁵⁵ Ian Hamilton wrote to Haldane because he felt that the public reaction to the Curragh Mutiny was the opportunity to reform the basis on which officers were recruited from the ranks.¹⁵⁶ It was unlikely Haldane would have been moved to address an issue he had studiously avoided in his tenure as Secretary of State. In any event, the war broke out before any further review could take place. Later, in a self-justification for creating a small BEF, Haldane claimed that the lack of professional officers of 'high military education' prevented expansion of the officer class.¹⁵⁷ The debates we have traced show that technical proficiency through education was not the issue, the emphasis in Haldane's conceptualisation of the army officer concerned gentlemanliness and character, rather than expertise and training.

Conclusion

The officer commissioned from the ranks was uncommon in the British army in the nineteenth century. Analysis shows an 'ungentlemanly' officer would only prosper outside the regimental system or on attachment to a colonial army. A few awarded the VC were commissioned, reflecting glory on the officer class by association with their heroic actions. These, and officers who reached a high rank after being commissioned from the ranks, were imbued with 'heroic'

Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Regular Army May Be Promoted to Combatant Commissions as Second-Lieutenants. (London: HMSO, 1914). This contained syllabus guidance and reference to date and place of examination.

¹⁵⁴ TNA WO 339–11266 2. Lieutenant G. C. Wright. A letter from Lieutenant-Colonel G.S. Gathorne-Hardy, on behalf of the Director of Military Training dated 5 March 1914 sets out the opportunities in the new scheme in response to a request from Wright made on 7 January 1914.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Haldane was made a peer in 1911, he was Lord Chancellor from 1912 to 1915.

¹⁵⁶ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Hamilton 5/1/7, Hamilton to J.E.B. Seely, 27/8/1912 and Hamilton 5/1/11, Hamilton to R.B. Haldane, 6/4/1914.

¹⁵⁷ R. B. Haldane Viscount Haldane, *Before the War* (London: Cassell, 1920), p. 171.

status.¹⁵⁸ This heroism was symbolic, imputing through their strong sense of duty and moral courage that they embraced the middle-class values and were fit to be officers.¹⁵⁹

In the early twentieth century, this heroic imagery was applied to the senior generals of the army, including the depictions of Hector MacDonald and William Robertson, and the imperial soldier had emerged as the dominant model of masculinity.¹⁶⁰ Robertson has persisted as an iconic figure because of his place in the history of the First World War and his continued use as an illusory symbol of professional mobility in the army and social diversity in the officer class. This narrative of meritocracy and mobility is a myth that continues to be used as bogus evidence of a dramatic shift in army culture, such as in this quote from a lecture by Justin Saddington, at precisely the time it was becoming more conservative:

Robertson's career provides us with a window onto both the transformation of the British Army from the late Victorian period onwards and to the complex evolution of British strategy and tactics during the First World War. A common thread to these themes is that they show how the British Army was undergoing a fundamental shift away from a structure based on class and wealth towards one based on meritocracy and professionalism. This was a transformation in which Robertson was in the vanguard and indeed came to personify.¹⁶¹

These depictions may seem curious since, as this chapter has demonstrated, professional mobility in the army was a myth. Parliamentarians increasingly challenged this falsehood, obscured by misleading statistics, and it was firmly refuted by John Ward in 1910. In propagating the idea that more generalised progression of officers from the ranks was undesirable, the gentlemanly elite utilised narratives that asserted that soldiers preferred to be

¹⁵⁸ G. Cubitt, 'Introduction: Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives,' in *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, ed. G. Cubitt and A. Warren, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 121.

¹⁶⁰ See John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), Chapter 8: 'The Flight from Domesticity' and Max Jones, "What Should Historians Do with Heroes? Reflections on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain," *History Compass* 5, no. 2 (2007).

¹⁶¹ 'Cleverest Man in the Army: The Life of FM Sir William Robertson', transcript of a lecturer delivered by Justin Saddington at the National Army Museum, <http://www.nam.ac.uk/whats-on/lunchtime-lectures/video-archive/cleverest-man-army-life-fm-sir-william-robertson>. Accessed February 3, 2017.

officered by gentlemen and they had no desire to become officers. The myth of an unambitious ‘Tommy Atkins’, happy with his lot in life, illustrates the power of cultural ideas of class and social difference to resist change.¹⁶²

The parliamentary challenges discussed in this chapter, combined with arguments for a larger conscripted British army demanding more officers, was threatening to destabilise the exclusive hegemony of the gentleman-officer. The Secretary of State for War, Jack Seely was on the threshold of driving through significant changes and opportunities for commissions from the ranks and changing the social composition of the officer class. Recent scholarship has continued to neglect his modernising influence.¹⁶³ Whether his reforms would have been progressed if he had not resigned and the war intervened, are unanswered questions.

The gentlemanly elite was necessarily small to retain its cohesion and exclusivity. It resisted all these challenges and remained the dominant force in the British political world until the outbreak of war. This was because the gentlemanly, masculine elite replicated itself in the army, government and the other institutions of the liberal state and maintained influence in key intuitions.¹⁶⁴ The British elite caste derived its hegemony from being represented across all the institutions of power. The primal source of its power and resistance lay in the regimental system that meant policy changes had little impact on a process — commissioning officers — that was socio-culturally regulated by gentlemen-officers at a regimental level.

The construction of a masculine, gentlemanly identity for the officer elite in the era before the war was central to preserving their exclusivity in the face of a plethora of pressures. Here a paradox was emerging, the growth of pressures to expand the officer class, which, in the next

¹⁶² See Edward Peter Joshua Gosling, “Tommy Atkins, War Office Reform and the Social and Cultural Presence of the Late-Victorian Army in Britain, c.1868–1899”, unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Plymouth.

¹⁶³ Ian Beckett, Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The British Army in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p. 26. Here Ian Hamilton is exclusively hailed as a reformer.

¹⁶⁴ Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

chapter, we will see being overtaken by the demands of the First World War, which paradoxically, increased the number of ranker officers, while ultimately shoring up the position of the gentleman officer. As the next chapter shows, compromises had secretly been made because the anticipated war would be waged on a scale that was unmanageable for a small elite. The impact of the First World War would, as the next chapter argues, afford NCOs from before the war access to the more masculine status and preserve of the combatant officer.

Chapter Three

From the Rare to the Commonplace: Identity and Commissions from the Ranks 1903–1918

The hegemonic masculinity of the ‘officer and gentleman’ was increasingly contested in the years leading up to the First World War. Ideas of democratic representation, combined with demands for efficiency, professionalism, and pressures to embrace new military technology were undermining the fundamental tenets of officer gentlemanliness. Despite these pressures, it could be argued that by 1914, the ‘symbolic centre of Britishness’ was embedded in the identity of the gentleman-officer.¹ In its contemporary form, this identity served many purposes; class distinction, imperial domination, and, in a military context, to separate, distinguish, and elevate the officer to a position of authority over the ‘rank and file’. Crucial to preserving the privileges of power for this distinct elite was maintaining an exclusive identity for officers, and this was increasingly threatened by attempts to see wider class representation and allow progression from the ranks.

This chapter will show that in the period from 1903–1914 commissioning from the ranks necessitated candidates conforming to an expected gentlemanly identity, so that, however different their social origins, they could be culturally assimilated into the officer class. It will show how, in 1910, the stark reality of an impending technological war had demanded pragmatism and that the army had secretly identified their most capable NCOs to provide leadership as commissioned officers. Following the advent of war, this led to large-scale commissions from the ranks from 1914–1918. This chapter sets out a comparison of the

¹ Matt Houlbrook, “Soldier Heroes and Rent Boys: Homosex, Masculinities, and Britishness in the Brigade of Guards, Circa 1900–1960,” *Journal of British Studies* 42, no. 03 (2003). Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (Routledge, 2013). See Houlbrook and Dawson for a discussion of the ‘soldier hero’.

characteristics and social composition of officers commissioned from the ranks of the pre-war regular army in the ten years before the war, and those commissioned during the war.

Using a definition of pre-war service in the ranks, 7,124 officers' details were extracted from *The Army Lists* for the period from 1903 until the end of 1918. Six basic data fields were created for each officer showing names, age, date of commissions, time in the ranks, and regiment, requiring over 400,000 separate entries in two spreadsheets covering 1903-1914 and 1914-1914.² This immediately demonstrated the diametrically different age and characteristics of officers commissioned during the war compared to those before the war. To build up a picture of careers and social composition and find other data informing assessment and commissioning processes, all the available TNA files for pre-war officers were reviewed, and samples of 100 files for each of the war years were examined, a total of 600 officers' files. To remove bias, this was supplemented by creating 400 case studies, showing social background and careers of officers whose files had either been lost, destroyed, or were restricted access (P files), using *Army Lists*, *The London Gazette*, census data, and other sources. This analysis showed that the pre-war commissions were young, mostly gentlemanly officers and wartime commissions were older experienced working-class NCOs. This chapter includes more analysis and conclusions that can be drawn from this evidence. Subsequent chapters also draw on this data, particularly the implications for understanding how regiments impacted on the commissioning process.

The data establishes findings that have never been considered in the history of the British army; over 7,000 officers commissioned from pre-war ranks during the conflict were working-class, and they comprised over 40 per cent of the regular officers commissioned.³ It was this

² K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook* (Unit for Prosopographical Research, Linacre College, University of Oxford, 2007).

³ The total of 109 officers excludes bandmasters, district officers and coastal officers. The total is shown in the third column of Appendix 1. The numbers commissioned pre-war and during the war are based on names derived from *Army Lists* and information retrieved from several sources discussed in the Introduction.

deluge of officers commissioned from the ranks in the war, and the challenge it represented, that provoked the formation of the ‘ranker officer’ identity. The term ‘ranker officer’ became parsed into everyday discourse in the war, and throughout this study, the pejorative caricature that grew with it is investigated.

To properly understand the significance of the commissioning phenomenon, the chapter explores the process and nature of these transitions from being in the ranks to becoming an officer, before and during the war, and the regulations and rituals that underpinned them. This illuminates the cultural significance of this transformation. The examination of the pre-war commissioning process will show how difficult it was to be promoted from the ranks, and, moreover, the socio-cultural obstacles to being commissioned. The essential structural prerequisites of some form of patronage, an ability to financially subsist as an officer, and formally passing a searching examination, were significant hurdles. More critically, candidates had to pass through a cultural filter, being personally interviewed by a series of senior officers who judged suitability against perceptions of gentlemanliness that excluded the lower social classes. This is contrasted with the commissioning process during the war, when senior NCOs were invited to accept a commission offered based on their experience and technical competence rather than their gentlemanliness.

There remains some commonality to the transitions before and during the war; for all these officers, from 1903–1918, moving from the ranks to become an officer involved a transformation through which they left one world to become part of another. On becoming officers, they had to detach themselves from their previous existence in the ranks, all their future social contact was constrained to a small homogenous and privileged group. However, as we shall discover the officer without gentlemanly qualities was admitted on sufferance, conditional on the war, and increasingly differentiated as the ‘ranker officer’.

1) Officers Commissioned from the Ranks 1903–1914

The last chapter illustrated that by the end of the nineteenth century most officers commissioned from the ranks were those that could not meet the academic or financial requirements of the main routes taken by their contemporaries. The process, unless subject to political interference, was largely contingent on a ‘self-selection’, regimental officers supporting candidates who looked and behaved like themselves. Gentlemanly masculine traits and characteristics, important facets of their identity, were valued by army officers, and these distinguished them from other forms of masculinity, especially the ‘rank and file’.⁴ The Military Secretary was a senior military appointment who regulated and managed the process of commissioning from the ranks; however, nomination was dependent on regimental officers. Educationally the candidate had to be proficient in regimental accounting, and have passed the third, second, and first class certificates in education before they could be considered. They would then require the recommendation of the Battalion Commanding Officer, the Brigade Commander and the Commander-in-Chief, based on personal interviews.⁵

Once the Military Secretary was notified of a candidate, they would bring together the soldier’s service papers and arrange with the Director of Military Training (DMT) for an examination. Three officers from outside of the candidate’s regiment, called a ‘board’, examined the applicant for a minimum of six hours. Papers related to the commissioning of Lance-sergeant John Bercham Usher show that he was examined by a board at General Parade Ground, Quetta, India on Monday 15 June 1903.⁶ The panel consisted of Major J. L. Parker, Royal Garrison Artillery (President), Major T. R. R. Ward, 1st West Yorkshire Regiment and Captain E. F.

⁴ M. Rothery and H. French, *Making Men: The Formation of Elite Male Identities in England, c.1660–1900: A Sourcebook* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 169.

⁵ War Office, *The King’s Regulations and Orders for the Army* (London: HMSO, 1908), p. 367.

⁶ Papers held by the family of John Berchams Usher/Angus McLeod.

Twigg, 24th Baluchistan Infantry. The exam in 1903 consisted of two parts, compiled by the board from a set curriculum and based on candidates being familiar with several set texts. Surviving sources of information are limited but the papers kept by Usher and Charles Nugent, another officer commissioned from the ranks, show that it was a demanding exam.⁷

The examination would have required considerable coaching by regimental school masters. Wealthier candidates from the militia routinely employed private tutors, something the soldier in the ranks could rarely afford. Ernest Redway, commissioned into the Royal Irish Regiment from the ranks of the Rifle Brigade in 1907, had the advantage of his father being a tutor.⁸ His father assisted officers with their promotion exams and entry to staff college and styled himself ‘instructor in military art and literature.’⁹ Research into the familial background of the pre-war cohort (1903–1914), shows that at least 60 per cent of officers commissioned from the ranks came from families with an army background. This is unremarkable as ‘gentleman cadets’ admitted from Sandhurst and Woolwich also overwhelmingly came from military families.¹⁰ However, the occupations of the fathers of commissioned rankers (Table 1) shows a significant difference to the cadets, with a third of the total coming from the families of honorary officers and NCOs, and not gentlemen-officers.

⁷ Ibid; The Wardrobe; the Museum Collection of the Infantry Regiments of Berkshire and Wiltshire SBYRW:10773, Royal North Lancashire Regiment - Certificate of Education classified as a First Class award to 6800 L/Corporal C Nugent of the Royal North Lancashire Regiment and other examinations.

⁸ *The London Gazette*, 28047 of 2.8.1907 page 5298, “The Royal Irish Regiment, Corporal Ernest George Redway, from The Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort’s Own), to be Second Lieutenant.”

⁹ William George Redway was an army examination coach, “Obituary, Major G.W. Redway,” *The Times*, April 27, 1934. See also George William Redway, *Wellington and Waterloo* (London: Jack, 1913); Georgewilliam Redway, “How to ‘Pass’ in Topography: Letters to a Young Officer on Map-Reading and Map-Making for Military Purposes,” (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.,1904); George William Redway, *The Militia Officer’s Instructor. A Complete Guide to All Infantry Examinations Required by the Militia Regulations on Appointment and before Promotion* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.,1904).

¹⁰ See Edward M. Spiers, *Late Victorian Army, 1868–1902*, Manchester History of the British Army Series (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 94 and 338–9; Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army : Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902 –1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 9.

Table 1: Officers Commissioned from the Ranks 1903–1914: Fathers' Occupations

Father's Occupation	Total
Regular Army Officer	21
Honorary Officer (includes Quartermasters, Riding Masters and Conductors)	22
Ranks of Army (and Royal Marines)	15
Clergy	13
Surgeon (including 2 in RAMC)	5
Civil Service (2 in India)	3
Solicitor	2
Landowner	1
Trades and Merchants	10
Labouring and Service	4
Not known	13
Grand Total	109

These were the sons of senior NCOs who were aspiring towards their childrens' professional and social mobility. They were frequently the second or third generation of families who had served in the army.¹¹ The army's prime function before the war was imperial defence.¹² The British soldier could expect to spend half their time on the imperial service, the more senior with their families and where many of the cohort were born reflected this. For example, of the 109 officers studied, 17 per cent were born in India.¹³

These few cases demonstrate that at least some honorary officers and NCOs did not accept that their status was fixed and believed they could pass on their 'military capital' to their children with the hope of a commission. A few honorary officers and senior NCOs had accrued enough wealth to afford their sons' education in small private schools, but most began their careers at

¹¹ For instance, TNA WO 374/70299 John Berchams Usher. Usher who was commissioned in 1903 had a father, stepfather and grandfather who had been NCOs.

¹² Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, –pp. 204–05.

¹³ Places of birth were as follows: England 59, India 19, Ireland 13, Scotland 5, USA 4, Jersey 3, Canada 2, Venezuela 1, Australia 1, Not Known 12.

fifteen years of age, as boy soldiers and worked their way through the army school system.¹⁴ However, a lack of wealth and a public-school education precluded them from the educational and social advantages of a cadet school and acquiring the broader attributes of a gentleman. There was clearly more demand for social mobility than these figures indicate, and the opportunity was given to only a few. In 1919, Sir John Lindsay Keir, arguing for a ‘national army’, saw the frustration felt by many when he wrote:

In most professions, a considerable number of the second and third generation ascend the social ladder. Many public servants, for instance are able to start their sons at a higher rung than the one they commenced to climb from. The faithful and capable clerk may in time become the junior partner. But how few of our sons of our best Warrant and NCOs are able to get their well-educated sons commissions accept [sic] by going through the ranks.¹⁵

Keir was commissioned into the artillery and fought in the Anglo-Boer War. He held a corps command in the First World War and was ‘removed’ by General Allenby, his commander after the first stage of the Battle of the Somme.¹⁶ His book, published in 1919, called for “a true National army.” Keir’s comparison to clerks is a reference to the growing numbers of clerks and their perceived social mobility, and it was a reflection on his own assessment of the worth of NCOs, particularly related to his own regimental background in the artillery.

The esteem in which some honorary officers were held was the basis of the opportunity offered to their sons. Montague Harry Sherwood Willis, for example, was recommended for a commission, endorsed because of the exceptional performance of his father, Riding-Master and Honorary Major Willis of the Dragoons, in the Anglo-Boer War.¹⁷ His commission was based

¹⁴ See for example: TNA WO 339/8498 Thomas Herbert Daw.

¹⁵ John Keir, *A ‘Soldier’s-Eye View’ of Our Armies* (London: John Murray, 1919), pp. 14–15. Lieutenant General Sir John Lindesay Keir, (1856–1937). Keir was a product of the Woolwich and fought in the Anglo-Boer War. He held a corps command in the First World War but was ‘removed’ by General Allenby his commander after the first stage of the Battle of the Somme. His book, published in 1919 called for a true national army.

¹⁶ A. D. Harvey, *Collision of Empires : Britain in Three World Wars. 1793–1945* (London: Hambledon, 1993), pp. 357–8.

¹⁷ Willis was commissioned into the Suffolk Regiment from the 21st Lancers on 22 April 1903 aged 21 years after serving 3 years in the ranks. His commanding officer was Brig-General William Franklyn. He would

on his father assuring his commanding officer that he would make him a small allowance. Willis and his father had acquired the pretensions of gentlemen-officers but had no great wealth to back them up. In recommending John Berchams Usher, Lieutenant-Colonel C.R.H. Hardy, commanding 1st Cheshire Regiment told the Assistant Adjutant-General, Quetta District, India that one of the reasons to support the commission was ‘Corporal Usher’s father served in the battalion for 31 years with an excellent record and was quarter-master for seven and a half years.’¹⁸ Usher’s family again had gentlemanly pretensions for their son, who, for reasons explored later, never took up his commission.

For candidates with gentlemanly qualities, even if they failed to have professional standards, the rules could be arbitrarily waived, even against the recommendations of the Military Secretary. Hilary Maurice Cadic, a ‘gentleman ranker’ was recommended for a commission from the 16th Lancers, into the Army Service Corps (ASC).¹⁹ Cadic’s poor disciplinary record and ambition to join the ASC, caused the Military Secretary concern about his case.²⁰ However, John Cowans, the Quartermaster General advocated for him, saying; ‘The NCO (Cadic) is a gentleman and of very old family whose masters have all been in the service’. In June 1913, Hubert Gough, commanding 3rd Cavalry Brigade and Arthur Paget, Commander-in-Chief, Ireland, both soon to be embroiled in the Curragh Mutiny, endorsed his commission, the latter writing ‘I have seen this NCO and know his family. He is in every respect a gentleman.’ This

become Military Secretary. Lieutenant-Colonel M. H. S. Willis, DSO, retired 1922. His father was Major H. R. J. Willis, who was shown as an acting adjutant, honorary captain and riding-master in the 1902 *Army List*. TNA WO 374/75310 Montague Harry Sherwood Willis.

¹⁸ Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel C.R.H. Hardy, Commanding 1st Cheshire Regiment to the AAG, Quetta District, India, dated 24 February 1903, Usher/McLeod Papers. John Berchams Usher TNA WO 374/70299.

¹⁹ TNA WO 339/9399 Hilary Maurice Cadic.

²⁰ The ASC mess had lower expenses, more pay and attracted officers without a private income. TNA WO 339/9399 Hilary Maurice Cadic; Cadic had several entries in the Regimental Conduct Sheet, including three for neglect of duty.

demonstrated that a rounded gentlemanly identity and heritage, military antecedents, and patronage far outweighed professional merit.

There is a semi-auto biographical account of a gentleman commissioned from the ranks in the period that gives a first-person account. Vere Henry Fergusson, or ‘Fergie Bey’, as he later became known, was commissioned from the 8th Hussars into the Scottish Rifles in March 1913.²¹ The only son of Colonel William Fergusson, he was tutored at preparatory school.²² He was examined for the Navy by the Board of Admirals. He failed and was sent to Wellington School and then a Swiss boarding school, before going to an army ‘crammer’ to prepare for the Sandhurst entrance examination. He failed, and enlisted in the Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry in 1909. His experience is described as follows: ‘One door had been shut in his face; but there was another — a shabby looking portal, with a grubby threshold crossed by heavy, dirty boots, and showing glimpses of a rough, hard floor beyond it.’²³ This allusion to shabbiness and ‘heavy dirty boots’ sets out a representation of the coarse space and masculinity of the army ranks through which he passed.

Fergusson’s grandfather bought him out of the regiment after fifteen months, since his prospects of a commission were poor and arranged for him to enlist in a cavalry regiment where there would be more opportunity and he could exercise influence. Paradoxically, it did not provide opportunity for him to prepare for the examination. The gentlemanly culture that pervaded the cavalry, even the ranks, placed formal learning on a low status, and to prepare, he was temporarily transferred back to an infantry regiment, where he claimed he learned more

²¹ Vere Henry Fergusson, *The Story of Fergie Bey (Awaraquay): Told by Himself and Some of His Friends* (London: Macmillan, 1930). This was part written by himself and completed by friends after his death.

²² Colonel William James Smyth Fergusson, (1865–1934) First Dragoon Guards, (His Majesties Bodyguard). He served in the Sudan Expedition of 1884–5, the Nile River Column for the relief of General Gordon, in the Anglo-Anglo-Boer and on the army staff in the First World War.

²³ Fergusson, *The Story of Fergie Bey*, p. 8.

in two weeks than in the whole of his previous service. He observed that ‘everyone takes so much more interest in their work in the Infantry, than in the Cavalry.’²⁴

Fergusson ‘appreciated the usefulness of his experience in the ranks. He had the pleasant feeling of confidence engendered by knowing everything below as well as above.’²⁵ Fergusson’s struggle with maintaining his gentlemanliness, and yet behaving consistently with the cultural expectations of his rank is revealing. In India, he was lavish with gifts to his riding instructor and examiner and offered tips as rewards to NCOs who helped him, but recognised returning from leave with two polo ponies offered to him by his brother-in-law, an officer in the Royal Engineers, would be inappropriate for his status; ‘it wouldn’t do for me to be swaggering about with two ponies’.²⁶ Fergusson’s account reflects the brief passage of a gentleman ranker through the ranks, with the sole purpose of obtaining a commission that he would otherwise have had difficulty obtaining.

There are important points to note about Fergusson’s experience. His presence in the ranks made other officers who commanded him, contemporaries from his public-school days, uncomfortable.²⁷ He maintained his gentlemanliness, but was isolated from the officers’ mess and the other socio-cultural milieux that would have maintained his gentlemanly identity; he was effectively quarantined. After his commission, he wrote; ‘thank god it’s all done with at last! — just over three years in a world of my own, and now I’m back in civilisation.’²⁸ There were several sons of distinguished military families commissioned from the ranks before the war. Hugh Garbett and Patrick Graham were typical gentlemen sons of senior army officers and families with long military pedigrees.²⁹ Their poor financial situation was caused by being

²⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 25 and 19.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁹ TNA WO 339/8111 Patrick Frederic Irving Graham, TNA WO 374/26354 Hugh Garbett.

well down the inheritance hierarchy of a landed family, the early death of a parent, or by already being ‘shabby gentlemen’ at birth.

Roughly half the officers commissioned between 1903 and 1914 came from families of the landed gentry or old gentlemanly professions of officering the army or the clergy. For gentleman, these professions were interchangeable, Inglis Runcorn Monteath was the son of the Vicar of Studley, Trowbridge. He was commissioned from the ranks in 1903.³⁰ After a brief period of service with the Indian army he resigned in 1909, went to theological college, and became a minister. Despite the general opprobrium towards service in the ranks, at least one parent that thought the experience of serving in the ranks and gaining a commission was a formative, character building experience, although this could have excused a lack of finance. Roland Le Fanu, the eighth child of a civil servant and barrister in India, served as boy and able seaman in the Royal Navy before enlisting in the Coldstream Guards as part of what was described as his father’s ‘original ideas about his upbringing.’³¹ This was exceptional, since pursuing a commission through the ranks for a gentleman was hazardous without patronage and a high degree of influence.

A small number of the officers, 14 (13%), came from lower middle-class or working-class families without a military tradition. Their fathers’ occupations included a bank manager, a corn merchant, a university academic, a brewer, a rubber merchant and a chemist, and there were also some from distinctly working-class backgrounds whose fathers were a butler, a carter, a brewer’s traveller, a shoe laster, a labourer and a saddler. Stuart McBride was

³⁰ *The London Gazette* 27581 of 28.7.1903 page 4741, The Duke of Cambridge’s Own (Middlesex Regiment), “Corporal Inglis Runcord (sic) Monteath, from the Lincolnshire Regiment to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 29th July, 1903.” *The London Gazette* 28250 of 14.5.1909 page 3660, “The King has approved of the resignation of the service by the following officers of the Indian Army, Lieutenant Inglis Runcorn Monteath. Dated 25th April, 1909.” In the 1911 census, he is shown as a theological student.

³¹ Roland Le Fanu, “Navy Boy to Maj.-General,” *The Evening Telegraph*, 10 July 1939.

commissioned into the Norfolk Regiment from the 5th Lancers in 1912.³² His father was an established ‘military outfitter’ at Woolwich. Gerald Denny, commissioned into the Connaught Rangers from the Royal Fusiliers in 1907, was born Gerald Dugmore in New York, USA, the son of William Denny, a famous actor and baritone opera singer, and had performed on the stage.³³ The social origins of the cohort, as reflected in their parents’ occupational status, was much more diverse than those seeking commissions through Sandhurst, and at least half were from social classes not traditionally represented in the officer class. Crucially, although they may have not had a gentleman’s education or been culturally immersed in a middle-class lifestyle, these officers had learned the dispositions of gentlemen-officers in terms of athleticism, posture, and discourse.

There is at least one case where professional merit did outweigh other factors or at least it was given precedent after external intervention. This commission was only made possible through political advocacy and, even then, it was made on restrictive terms. In 1908, John Dimmer, an outstanding, ambitious, and intelligent soldier, pressed for a commission and was assessed by the commanding officer of the 4th Battalion, Kings Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC) as professionally *but not socially fit*, for a commission.³⁴ This was a very stark admission of the social selectivity that operated to exclude anyone not conforming to a gentlemanly identity. On 26 March, Hugh Lea, MP, advocating for Dimmer, personally pressed the case for his commission to the Secretary of State for War, and on 15 April ‘the King nominated Corporal Dimmer for a commission in the KRRC.’ There was a hidden caveat in this commission, ‘it

³² *The London Gazette* 28638 of 23.8.1912 page 6286, “The Norfolk Regiment, Corporal Stuart George McBride, from 5th (Royal Irish) Lancers, to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 24th August, 1912.” In the 1891 and 1911 census his father is shown as military outfitter born and living in Woolwich.

³³ *The London Gazette* 28003 of 12.3.1907 page 1755 “The Connaught Rangers, Corporal Gerald Arthur Edward Denny, from The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment), to be Second Lieutenant, on augmentation. Dated 13th March, 1907;” “Army Officer Drowned at Lagos,” *The Times*, 15 December 1913.

³⁴ TNA WO 339/7051 John Henry Stephen Dimmer. The line ‘but not socially’ was underlined in the record. Dimmer a scholarship student was intellectually outstanding and exceptional leader.

was arranged that he need not join or get the uniform of that corps but be posted at once to the West African Regiment.³⁵ This decision that sentenced Dimmer to serving his pre-war career in West Africa was a compromise to maintain regimental exclusivity, and the attempt to exclude Dimmer because of his lack of ‘social fitness’ demonstrates the identity requirements that underpinned the selection criteria.

Dimmer’s case proves that ‘fitness’ for a commission was judged primarily through interviews, leading to judgements about his social status. There were more objective criteria that underpinned the expected identity of the officer commissioned from the ranks; they had to be unmarried, have served a minimum of two years in the ranks, attained the rank of corporal, and have no entries in the ‘regimental defaulter’s sheet’, meaning that they had no recorded disciplinary offences.³⁶ The clean disciplinary record, evidence of self-control, was crucial to having an ‘honourable’ character and fitness to be a gentleman-officer. These criteria meant that, on average, officers commissioned from the ranks spent four years in the ranks, although in special cases, with advocacy, this could be below the minimum two years.³⁷ In addition, their average age on receiving their commission was 23 years, making them three to four years older than gentleman-cadets joining regiments from Sandhurst and Woolwich. Thomas Daw was just 20 years old when commissioned. The son of an honorary officer, he had enlisted as a boy aged 15 years, and already spent five years in the ranks.³⁸

Inherent in the approach to commissioning from the ranks was therefore some important shaping of the identity of the soldier who was considered eligible. The general approach, shown

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ This was an important requirement, for details of the ‘Defaulter Sheet’: see Edward Gunter, *Outlines of Military Law and Customs of War, Etc.* (London: Clowes & Sons, 1897), p. 79.

³⁷ It was required that candidates should have spent two years in the ranks; however as with other requirements, a special case could be made. The shortest time spent in the ranks was by Melrose Chapman, who had served for just over a year in the Royal Artillery, the longest by Benjamin Atkin, also in the Royal Artillery, who served for nearly ten years. For a special case, see TNA WO 374/77762 Cyril Younghusband.

³⁸ TNA WO 8498 Thomas Herbert Daw, TNA WO 374/18677 Thomas Daw.

by the data, was to commission those who had the potential in terms of their age and ‘gentlemanly potential’ to be assimilated in the officer class. This potential was either explicit in the case of officers with the appropriate background, or else they had to be able to assume the necessary language, manners, and expected behaviours, and most of all, appear youthful and physically attractive. The regimental officer structure was an age-related hierarchy, with an implicit assumption that second lieutenants were youthful. The prevailing expectation was that officers progressed in incremental age-related stages; the advent of a meritocracy, advantageous to able, enthusiastic officers was particularly destabilising and resisted by gentlemen-officers. It was therefore important to the internal coherence of this structure that the ranker officer was youthful, as the potential to assimilate was more important than professional experience. The typical officer commissioned from the ranks before the war was therefore characterised by Ian Hamilton’s observation in 1910 that they should be ‘smart young lance-corporals or corporals who play cricket and football; are nice looking, smart soldiers and have a good way and popularity with the men.’³⁹ The very few non-middle-class officers commissioned from the ranks had to conform to the ‘cultural authority of this masculine identity’, essentially in appearance, athleticism, and popularity, and be highly adaptive to acquiring the dispositions of gentlemen-officers.⁴⁰

The identity of the gentleman-officer and the ‘other ranks’ was clearly delineated in the era before the war. The very few officers commissioned from the ranks went through a tortuous filtering process. The benchmark of a successful transition was to appear and behave in all respects like their gentlemanly cadet counterparts on being promoted. However, the stigma of

³⁹ TNA WO 163-15, Precis No. 453, Supply of Officers on Mobilisation. The emphasis on a sporting disposition was a constant theme, although this was more traditionally hunting and polo see Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi, *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 67.

⁴⁰ Quintin Colville, “Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity: Royal Naval Officers and Their Shipboard Homes, 1918–39,” *Gender & History* 21, no. 3 (2009): p. 501; James Anthony Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2013).

their past was never far away, and as explored later, a simple mistake or the prejudices of other senior officers could lead to the early end of a career. The very few lower-class officers commissioned from the ranks were the forerunners of the ‘confidence men’ of the post-war era who would rely on their ‘youthful good looks and plausible English gentility’ to be assimilated.⁴¹

2) Officers Commissioned from the Ranks 1914–1918

In 1910, the Army Council, during escalating tension in Europe, had to consider what it would do in the context of a war.⁴² The traditional dependence on gentleman-volunteers in a crisis, whilst preserving the homogenous identity of the gentleman-officer class, also risked its reputation, since the ‘amateur’ volunteer that it had traditionally relied upon had demonstrably failed in South Africa.⁴³ Whilst concerns about the status and membership of the officer class were being publicly debated, the army leadership showed the pragmatism for which the British Imperial elite is renowned.⁴⁴ In 1910, the Army Council had concerned itself with the supply of officers on mobilisation for a war and commissioned a report from the Military Secretary, Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Wynne.⁴⁵ The final report of the committee, established under Wynne, predicted an overall deficiency of 9,698 Regular Army Officers needed to sustain a military campaign. They thought this figure ‘a maximum requirement which in practice would not arise’ and concluded that the shortage on mobilisation for war on the continent of Europe would be 3,201 and for war in India 4,468.⁴⁶ In its final recommendations as to what to do in

⁴¹ M. Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 101.

⁴² The Army Council was instituted in 1904, itself a product of reform, chaired by the Secretary of State for War and including an Imperial General Staff to administer the army. Correlli Barnett, *Britain and Her Army: A Military, Political and Social History of the British Army, 1509–1970* (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 359.

⁴³ TNA WO 108/107 Gipps Report.

⁴⁴ For instance, see Rod Thornton, “The British Army and the Origins of Its Minimum Force Philosophy,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 15, no. 1 (2004).

⁴⁵ General Sir Arthur Singleton Wynne (1846–1936) was Military Secretary from 1906 until 1911. The Military Secretary was responsible for broadly all army personnel issues. They were key to the appointment (or gazetting – publishing in the *London Gazette*), promotion and disciplining of officers.

⁴⁶ TNA, WO 163–15, Precis No. 453, Supply of Officers on Mobilisation. p. 19.

the event of additional officers being required, the committee had turned its attention to the ranks and proposed:

- a) A large number of non-commissioned officers should be commissioned on mobilisation.
- b) These non-commissioned officers should be under 35 Years of age.
- c) Regular non-commissioned officers serving with Territorial Force units should not be eligible for commissions, as the withdrawal of their services would paralyse the efficiency of the Territorial Force.
- d) A special scale of pensions should be provided to enable these officers to retire at the end of the war, as they could not afford to retain their commissions during peace.
- e) A messing allowance should be granted to officers commissioned from the ranks who serve at home.
- f) Confidential lists of eligible non-commissioned officers should be kept by Commanding Officers.
- g) Steps should be taken to ascertain the numbers of officers available from the sources suggested by Major-General Ewart.
- h) Rates of pay and conditions of service should be fixed for civilians employed to fill the deficiencies in the Royal Army Medical Corps.
- i) Non-Commissioned officers of the Territorial Force of superior birth and education should be commissioned.⁴⁷

This decision, made when attempts to commission from the ranks were being fiercely resisted, represented a realisation that a need for professional skills in a war may outweigh, albeit temporarily, the cultural hegemony of the gentlemen-officer. The resistance to the plan was evident in the discussion that preceded it. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, William Nicholson, an arch conservative, said:

Soldiers do not like being commanded by men who have risen from the ranks; if in peace the latter are rarely proficient as regimental officers, the severe test of war would make their failure more conspicuous. It would be difficult to conceal the intention to commission non-commissioned officers on mobilisation, or to avoid granting commissions to a much larger number of non-commissioned officers in peace. As the latter could not live on their pay, the expenses of regimental life would have to be reduced, or the pay of a regimental officer

⁴⁷ Ibid.

increased; if the former course were adopted, the present class of officer would not be forthcoming.⁴⁸

Nicholson also stated that ‘the sentiment of non-commissioned officers would have been outraged if those of junior rank were selected for commissions’, projecting the cultural dislike of a meritocracy, (although there always had been one in the ranks), and sensing the threat to the laissez-faire view to such competition from his gentlemanly disposition.⁴⁹ The newly appointed Adjutant-general, Ian Hamilton and the Quartermaster-general, both approved of Wynn’s proposal.⁵⁰

The Quartermaster-general, Henry Miles, challenged some of the assumptions made by the CIGS that there was evidence that officers promoted from the ranks failed in peace-time, and agreed that it would be difficult to restrict such opportunities to war-time. He thought that the opportunity of a commission might attract a better class of men to enlist in the ranks.⁵¹ The initial discussion had proposed that officers commissioned from the ranks would be left to be responsible for base depots and carry out other functions whilst the main army engaged in combat, hence retaining the more masculine, gentlemanly combatant roles for the regular army. The Financial Secretary, F. D. Acland thought posting commissioned rankers to depots during war-time, as a means of releasing other officers, was flawed because if combatant, ‘a certain number would be casualties, and only a portion need be pensioned. If the officers

⁴⁸ TNA WO 163–15, Precis No. 453, Supply of Officers on Mobilisation. Field Marshal William Gustavus Nicholson, 1st Baron Nicholson (1845 –1918). Nicholson was a notoriously elitist snob observing William Robertson’s ‘want of breeding’; see Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: A Political Soldier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 78.

⁴⁹ TNA WO 163–15.

⁵⁰ General Sir Ian Standish Monteith Hamilton (1853–1947).

⁵¹ Lieutenant-General Sir H. S. G. Miles (1850–1926).

commissioned from the ranks are confined to depots, they will live to a ripe and pensionable old age.⁵²

The decision of the meeting to accept the recommendations of the Wynne Committee was crucial to developments at the outset of the war in 1914.⁵³ Hamilton felt that the solution was a pragmatic step to address war-time mobilisation and the destabilising impact of the strategy could best be managed by keeping it secret. The principle of commissioning from the ranks was adopted as a ‘secret’ strategy to address officer shortage on mobilisation. Ian Hamilton, Adjutant-general, was tasked with compiling a confidential list of 2,000 NCOs to be kept by commanding officers.⁵⁴ Hamilton had strongly influenced this decision having written in support to Wynne’s Committee in June 1909, only a few days after becoming Adjutant-General.⁵⁵ Hamilton had foregrounded his views by noting that one ‘particular stratum, the upper middle class was faltering, because of demand, in its capacity to produce army and navy officers, clergymen and foreign office staff.’

Hamilton’s proposed, for providing a war-time reserve, that there was a need to ‘tap a new stratum’.⁵⁶ In his memorandum, he was advocating an open process that would lead to being registered as the ‘highest mark of distinction’ for a young non-commissioned officer. He warned against education being a criterion and stressed that their familiarity with discipline and ‘knowing the ways of barracks and men’ made them superior to ‘immature school boys and undergraduates.’ However, Hamilton was not looking for professional or technical

⁵² Sir Francis Dyke Acland, (1874–1939). Acland was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Richard Haldane, the Secretary of State for War, from 1906 to 1908. He was Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs under Asquith between 1911 and 1915.

⁵³ These were superseded by Kitchener’s approach to recruit even more officers to match his designs for a mass army conceived in August 1914 but implemented as part of that plan and as an immediate response to the crisis facing the BEF in 1914.

⁵⁴ TNA WO 163–15, Minutes of Proceedings of 21 March 1910

⁵⁵ TNA WO 163–15, Memorandum of 4 June 1909 p. 28

⁵⁶ TNA WO 163–15.

experience, he wanted ‘men of character and not book learning’, men who would have ‘become field-marshals under Napoleon’, and he cited examples he had witnessed in the Japanese Army in Manchuria.⁵⁷ There was still a resistance in Hamilton’s image to the professional or technical. The vision he offers draws on several themes; athleticism and physical attractive appearance, complimented by a maturity and relationship with the ranks that is dominated by their masculinity. His leanings towards the ‘practical’ image rather than the educated, studious young man, draws on the dashing, sexually attractive depictions of army officers in novels of the late nineteenth century.⁵⁸ Aware of the political pressures to commission from the ranks, Hamilton observed ‘politically, an answer would be forthcoming to those who say our army is undemocratic, and yet, in ordinary times, nothing would have changed.’⁵⁹ Hamilton’s suggestion reflected the fact that, although he saw the benefits of commissioning rankers as a contingency, he also saw the same threats to the cultural homogeneity of the officer class as expressed by Nicholson.⁶⁰ In his book, *The Soul and Body of an Army* written in 1922, Hamilton acknowledged, and took credit for, his role in the development of the contingency that proved so effective in the war.⁶¹ What he or others did not anticipate was the length and scale of the war which caused the contingency they had created to be drawn upon for longer and in greater numbers than they anticipated.

In November 1910, Edward Ward presented a report from a committee he had chaired, called *Arrangements for Departments of the War Office in the Event of War*, to the Army

⁵⁷ Ian Hamilton, *A Staff Officer’s Scrap-Book During the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905).

⁵⁸ John R. Reed, “Soldier Boy: Forming Masculinity in ‘Adam Bede,’ *Studies in the Novel* 33, no. 3 (2001). Reed discusses the shift from the aristocratic representation to a more middle class version but retaining a glamorous alluring disposition, typically belonging to a cavalry regiment.

⁵⁹ TNA WO 163–15, Precis No. 453, Supply of Officers on Mobilisation.

⁶⁰ Hamilton later corresponded with Seeley on the obstacles to a general increase in commissions from the ranks, citing the perceived threat to the ‘social life of the regiment’. LHCMA, Hamilton Papers, letter Hamilton to Seely, 27 August 1912, Hamilton to Haldane, 6 April 1914

⁶¹ Ian Hamilton, *The Soul and Body of an Army* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1921), p. 131.

Council.⁶² An important addendum was the report ‘The Supply of Officers on Mobilisation’.⁶³ The Army Council had instructed the Adjutant-general to ensure regiments prepared a confidential list of 2,000 NCOs to be commissioned, if required, following mobilisation.⁶⁴ Thus, the War Office anticipated, as far as they could, the demands a new kind of war might place on the size of the army in general and officer class. The final report did not make proposals to offer improved pensions. It is particularly important to note that as war became more likely and regiments selected their NCOs, regiments regarded the most useful NCOs to be commissioned in this context were more experienced and technically expert soldiers who were senior NCOs and warrant officers. Thus, the practical demands for immediate competence outweighed Hamilton’s vision of investing in young athletic, masculine men with at least the physical potential to be assimilated into the existent officer class.

With older NCOs, the greatest impediment to implementing the scheme was providing an incentive since many NCOs at the peak of their ‘NCO career’ would be reluctant to enter a domain that was so different, potentially hostile, and where there was no financial advantage. In imagining a situation where they wished to commission senior, rather than junior NCOs, the War Office recognised the problem of incentive to the NCO, serving out their career and being pensioned after 21 years. The differences in pay between a senior warrant officer and a second-lieutenant was marginal.⁶⁵

⁶² TNA WO 32/5694 Arrangements for Departments of the War Office in the Event of War (Report of Sir Edward Ward’s Committee).

⁶³ TNA WO 163/15 Army Council Minutes, Supply of Officers on Mobilisation, see Précis No. 453, p. 19.

⁶⁴ TNA WO 163/15 Decisions of the Army Council, p. 4. The report broadly followed the detail of the recommendations of the Military Secretary, although it raised the age limit to 30 and made no special provision for pensions.

⁶⁵ In 1914, a private in the army would have been paid one shilling per day and a senior warrant officer five shillings and entitlement to a pension after 21 years’ service. A second-lieutenant was paid only three pence more and a lieutenant a shilling more. See Charles Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army, 1914–18* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), p. 451.

The solution was the guarantee of a generous pension paid as a lump sum (gratuity) or a regular payment (annuity) over the beneficiary's lifetime. In January 1914, the War Office announced generous pension provisions for commissioned NCOs, which crucially included the option to continue serving after hostilities had ended and then retire with these benefits any time subsequently, if they chose to do so.⁶⁶ This was an incentive to accept a commission, particularly for a senior NCO anticipating a short war. The introduction of these measures in January 1914 paved the way for commissioning from the ranks after the war broke out.

In August 1914, Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War anticipated a massively expanded army was required for the war in Europe.⁶⁷ He was wary of the territorial force as a means of achieving this, after his experiences in South Africa.⁶⁸ Kitchener's dilemma lay in preparing a 'New army' constituted with volunteers and largely officered by a new and distinctive type of officer, the 'Temporary Officer,' and maintaining a small and beleaguered British Expeditionary Force where one quarter of the pre-war regular officers became casualties in the first four months of the war.⁶⁹ The plans to commission regular pre-war NCOs were implemented by Kitchener in an instruction on 9 September 1914, regarding the 'Supply of

⁶⁶ The Pay Warrant of 1914, Article 572A, anticipating a war, provided for 'the award of retired pay at the rate of eighty pounds per year OR a gratuity of one thousand pounds to officers commissioned from the ranks of the regular army who had completed fifteen years or more in the ranks when commissioned.' There was a sliding tariff of gratuities for NCOs who had served less than fifteen years: 'with 9–14 years' service, excluding service under 19 years of age, a gratuity of £400 plus £100 for every year over 9. Serving on their first engagement, £200; having extended £300. See TNA WO 123/199 Army Routine Order 177.

⁶⁷ Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener, 1st Earl Kitchener, (1850–1916). The post of Secretary of State for War had been left unfilled since Seely's resignation.

⁶⁸ There was concern about the quality of officers who volunteered for service in South Africa. See TNA WO 108/107 Gipps Report. Kitchener's army had been dependent on volunteers and he had insisted that untrained officers were sent directly to South Africa where he discovered many were unsuitable and unfit. See also William Bennett, *Absent-Minded Beggars: Volunteers in the Boer War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1999), pp. 180–1.

⁶⁹ P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914–16* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 212. At the outbreak of war there were 28,060 officers available, including 12,738 regulars, 9,563 territorials, 3,202 in the reserve of officers and 2,557 in the special reserve. In the period from 23 August to 30 November, the BEF sustained 3,627 officer casualties, most of whom were regulars from infantry battalions.

Officers' that extended powers for regular units to recommend NCOs for commissions on the Western Front and 'at home'.⁷⁰

Table 2: Commissions from the Ranks of the Pre-war Regular Army in 1914

	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Infantry	11	42	209	83	133	478
Cavalry	2	12	21	9	10	54
Royal Artillery	0	15	67	126	184	392
Royal Engineers	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army Service Corps	16	1	1	0	0	18
Other	0	28	7	0	1	36
Total	29	98	305	218	328	978

The response was that 978 officers were commissioned from the ranks of the regular army by the end of 1914. The demand was in those arms that required technical competence and where there was early attrition, the infantry and artillery, as illustrated in Table 2. The data, extrapolated from the 1914 and 1915 *Quarterly Army Lists* is an underestimate. Some commissions in the field were so brief that the NCO's commissions had not been formally announced when they were killed. Second Lieutenant Alfred Laws, reported as 'a very fine officer', was shot by a sniper on 26 October 1914, only days after his commission.⁷¹ David Condon, commissioned with him, was captured on 1 November and died a prisoner-of-war.⁷²

⁷⁰ TNA: WO 162/24. This document had two separate provisions for commissioning rankers. The first, requested that 'Each commanding officer be asked to recommend names of warrant and non-commissioned officers at home of the regulars, for promotion to commissions.' The response to Kitchener's orders was coordinated by the Adjutant Generals (AGs) in response to critical manpower and training needs in the different arms of the service. The second empowered Sir John French leading the BEF 'to promote warrant and non-commissioned Officers to commissions at his discretion, and report the names to the War Office.'

⁷¹ Harold Richard Sandilands, *The Fifth in the Great War: A History of the 1st. And 2nd. Northumberland Fusiliers, 1914–1918* (Dover: Grigg, 1938), p. 51. See also the case of an artillery NCO Gordon Mackinnon, "The Envelope in the Attic." The Western Front Association Bulletin 78 (June/July 2007), pp. 10-11.

⁷² TNA WO 339/13406 David Condon. He enlisted in 1895 and was a company sergeant-major when he was commissioned. He was captured on 1 November 1914 and died at Strohen PoW camp on 23 July 1917 aged 40 years.

In 1914, the difference between a long career and a premature death was dependent on surviving the early days of a commission, because of the high level of attrition of junior officers. The *Regimental History of the Black Watch* records:

On December 4th the first promotions from the ranks of the Battalion took place, Company Sergeant Majors J. Kennedy and W. George being promoted Second Lieutenants in the Battalion. Two men of outstanding character and ability, the fortune of war dealt unequally with them, though gloriously with both. Second Lieutenant George was killed at Neuve Chapelle shortly afterwards, while exposing himself with to post cover to some Indian soldiers who were bringing ammunition up to the front line. Kennedy served great distinction throughout the war, and commanded a battalion during the last two years of it.⁷³

The reporting of the commissions of these officers assumed the same narrative as earlier wars, where officers commissioned ‘in the field’ are glorified and commissioned as a recognition of esteem, rather than as a necessity and part of a preconceived plan. The attrition of infantry officers commissioned in 1914 was extremely high over the course of the war: ultimately 131 or 28 per cent died in the war.⁷⁴ It is important in understanding the experience of the men from the pre-war regular army, to note that, if they survived or were not significantly disabled, they would serve a long and hazardous war.

In 1910, the army council had anticipated commissioning a maximum of 2,000 officers from the ranks as a short-term measure in the event of a war. This figure was surpassed in July 1915, and there were at least another 5,015 ranker officers commissioned before the end of the war (see Table 3).⁷⁵

⁷³ Arthur Grenfell Sir Wauchope, *History of the Black Watch [Royal Highlanders] in the Great War, 1914–1918* (London: Medici Society, 1925), p. 171.

⁷⁴ The attrition of infantry ranker officers commissioned in 1914 was very high, particularly in 1915, when more than half the fatal casualties occurred. A total of 66 (14%) of infantry ranker officers commissioned in 1914 were killed in 1915. They died at the Second Battle of Ypres in April/May 1915, a defensive battle where gas was used for the first time. This was preceded by British limited offensives at Neuve Chapelle (10–12 March), and followed by Aubers Ridge (9 May), Festubert (15–27 May) and Loos (25 September–8 October).

⁷⁵ This figure is greater than the 6,713 shown in *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War, 1914–1920* and is still an under-estimate. Appendix 4 illustrates the continuing practice of commissioning from the ranks of the pre-war army throughout the war.

Table 3: Commissions from the Ranks of the Pre-War Regular Army during the First World War

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	Total
Infantry	478	761	718	1224	735	3916
Cavalry	54	51	29	23	14	171
Royal Artillery	392	843	554	573	281	2643
Royal Engineers	0	44	6	1	41	92
Army Service Corps	18	0	0	9	9	36
Other	36	3	32	64	22	157
Total	978	1702	1339	1894	1102	7015

This represents 42 per cent of the permanent commissions in the war. The figure needs to be considered alongside the 229,316 combatant commissions of all types awarded during the same period, of which it forms only 3 per cent.⁷⁶ However, it was a more significant source of regular officers than the combined output of the established military academies at Sandhurst and Woolwich during the war. Table 3 shows that officers commissioned from the ranks of the pre-war regular army were concentrated in the ‘teeth’ arms, those parts of the army most closely involved in combat, and their impact was likely to have been disproportionately high. Their cultural impact and challenge to the gentlemen-officer orthodoxy was even more disproportionate to their numeric scale. Their commission was distinguished from the commissioning of temporary officers, in that it conferred a permanent commission, as a regular

⁷⁶ This is based on adjusting the figure for the number of commissions in the regular army to 16,846 to include the higher figure of ranker officers found in this study, and assumes the figures for other sources of commissions are correct: War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War, 1914–1920*, p. 234.

officer, on the holder. With hindsight, this ‘permanence’ would prove an illusion, but to the cultural authority of the gentleman-officer in the war, it proved a deeply threatening challenge.

The officer commissioned from the ranks of the pre-war regular army during the war became known as ‘ranker officers’, a new unofficial identity with new meanings generated and attached, and henceforth this term will be employed to refer to this generation and form of officer. The genesis of the use of the term will be discussed later. What is immediately significant is their different ages and experience, compared to their pre-war predecessors. These were generally older experienced NCOs, whose average age was 34 years when the war began, falling to 29 years, by the end. One third had been Warrant Officers by the time of their commission, the most senior NCO rank, frequently denoting that they had served 21 years in the ranks. Initially, the NCOs commissioned were the most senior, although there were a range of NCOs, including sergeants and corporals that followed.

Based on the data collected for the prosopography, the oldest ranker officer was William Henry Stanley-Jones from Montgomeryshire, who had enlisted in the Seaforth Highlanders in 1885. He had completed 17 years in the ranks and 12 as a warrant officer when commissioned, aged 49 years, on 10 October 1914.⁷⁷ However, as the war progressed, some younger NCOs were commissioned, including more sons of NCOs and honorary officers, who shared the characteristics of the pre-war officers commissioned from the ranks. For example, Alan Edward Sigrist and Alfred Maurice Toye were both under 21 years of age and the sons of senior NCOs.⁷⁸ The liminal conditions of the war afforded more opportunity for young men from military families to be commissioned.

⁷⁷ TNA WO 339/15093 William Henry Stanley-Jones. Major Stanley Jones retired as the DAA & QMG Northern Command, Ireland with an OBE and having been mentioned in despatches. His son was also a commissioned ranker, Captain W.G. Stanley-Jones DCM, Middlesex Regiment.

⁷⁸ *The London Gazette* 28974 of 13.11.1914 page 9270, “Serjeant Alan Edward Sigrist, Second-Lieutenant, Dorsetshire Regiment. Dated 22nd October, 1914.” Alan Edward Sigrist was the son of a Royal Artillery warrant

However, the experienced and technically competent NCO remained the ‘ideal’ candidate for a commission, and these were usually Anglo-Boer War veterans with extensive overseas colonial service. Another distinction from their pre-war counterparts was that the majority were married: this had been a reward for their long service. The supply of NCOs for commissions was helped by the increasing availability of reservists who had been recalled after 1914.⁷⁹

Many reservists had migrated and were shipped back to Britain; Albert Walsha was serving with the South African Police and Humphrey Evatt living in New South Wales, Australia, when mobilised.⁸⁰ Reservists had travel costs to their units met by the War Office. Unfortunately, Evatt’s commission meant that he lost his entitlement to being repatriated to Australia. He wrote to the War Office, stating ‘Had I not received a commission I would have been repatriated; ability seems to be a bar to what I am justly and rightly entitled to.’⁸¹ This was one of the many unforeseen consequences of a commission, a result of the expectation that regular officers would be financially independent. Mobilised reservists could gain rapid promotion leading to a commission once they had re-established themselves. Gordon Joseph Becket enlisted in 1902 and served seven years in the ranks before joining the reserve.⁸² He was mobilised whilst living in Canada in August 1914. Within a month he was a corporal, another month a sergeant, two weeks later a colour sergeant, four months later a company sergeant-major and six months later, in September 1915, he was regimental sergeant-major. He was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal in Salonika and commissioned in October 1917.⁸³

officer. *The London Gazette* 29983 of 14.3.1917 page 2594, “The undermentioned Wt. and N.C.O.s to be 2nd Lts. For service in the field: Corp. Alfred Marice Toye, from R.E., 15th Feb. 1917.” Alfred Maurice Toye was the son of a sergeant-major and educated at the Garrison School, Aldershot. He was awarded the MC in October 1917 and the VC on 25 March 1918. See Gerald Gliddon, *Spring Offensive 1918* (Stroud: History, 2013).

⁷⁹ In August 1914, there were 247,500 soldiers in the regular army. There were two reserves; the ‘Army Reserve’ was 145,350 strong and the ‘Special Reserve’ had another 64,000 men. Mobilised reservists had made up 21 (or 1%) of the commissions in 1915, 98 (or 7%) in 1916, 201 (11%) in 1917 and 118 (11%) in 1918.

⁸⁰ TNA WO 339/61654 Humphrey Evatt. He was commissioned from the ranks of the RGA on 30 April 1916 and later awarded the MC. TNA WO 339/87973 Albert Arthur Walsha. He enlisted in the 15th Hussars in 1905 and went into the reserve in 1912 joining the South African Police. He re-joined his unit in Britain in September 1915.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² TNA WO 374/5241 Gordon Joseph Beckett.

⁸³ Ibid. He retired a Lieutenant in June 1920.

This section of the thesis is the first real collation of data and assessment of the form of officer known as the ‘ranker officer’ commissioned during the war. It highlights the dramatic difference between the identity of these officers and the officers commissioned from the ranks before the war. Ranker officers were older, more experienced soldiers, grounded in the ranks of the British army. The pre-war aspiration of gentlemen-officers to mould officers commissioned from the ranks in their own likeness was compromised by the commissioning of ranker officers, an altogether different cultural phenomenon. Moreover, there were very many of them, and their presence would seriously threaten the identity of the officer class.

3) Exchanging Identity, the Transformation from the Ranks to the Officer Class

To properly understand the meaning attached to a commission from the ranks, it is productive to examine how the transition from being an NCO to an officer was managed and the degree to which this was changed by the war. It was highly symbolic. In the pre-war era, the social and cultural gulf between the ranks and the officer class was so significant that a high degree of ritual was involved in commissioning from the ranks. The transformation involved exchanging one world and identity for the other, and, in the process, the candidate left behind his past friends and colleagues in the ranks. This continued with some modifications for the circumstances of war. The socio-cultural exclusive practices of the officer class and the mess persisted through the war, and, although boundaries became more permeable, the implications for identity and discourse with others remained the same. Ranker officers had to remove themselves from all their social connections to the ranks and embrace the socio-cultural habitat of the gentleman-officer.

The pre-war culmination of the assessment process leading up to a commission was an examination by a ‘board of officers’ and a medical examination. The day the board met, the

whole battalion would parade to mark the significance of the event.⁸⁴ If the candidate was successful, they would enter a hiatus, as Vere Fergusson observed ‘for now he was, as the old saying ran, neither fish, flesh nor good red herring.’ For the moment, he ‘belonged’ nowhere; a certain time had to elapse before he could get home,’ his problem of where to stay was solved by an invitation to say at the house of a padre.⁸⁵ The transition was highly symbolic; the candidate would no longer be able to have informal relations with anyone in the ranks. They would enter a period of ‘purdah’, and wait for their ‘gazetting’ and the Military Secretary allocating them to a new regiment. This would be a neutral space, such as a spare barrack room or they would be sent on leave. The transformation was contingent on the ‘officer’ being allocated to a new regiment. Of the 109 pre-war officers studied, all except one were located to a new regiment; the single exception was immediately seconded to serve overseas with a colonial force. Effectively, the new officer had to be removed from familiar situations or command over men they had previously served with.

This distancing was crucial to maintaining the aura of exclusivity and separateness believed essential to officer identity. The transfer to a new regiment presented considerable problems for the newly commissioned ranker. Generally, cadets from Sandhurst could find a regiment through family influence and only a few were ‘allocated’, a process that always had a degree of stigma attached.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the officer commissioned from the ranks of another regiment was regarded circumspectly because of their previous regimental affiliation in a culture of regimental competitiveness, and this is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

⁸⁴ For instance, Lance-sergeant John Bercham Usher was examined by a Board under King’s Regulations, Appendix VII at General Parade Ground, Quetta, India on Monday 15 June 1903. The panel consisted of Major J. L. Parker, Royal Garrison Artillery (President), Major T. R. R. Ward, 1st West Yorkshire Regiment and Captain E. F. Twigg, 24th Baluchistan Infantry. From the family papers of John Berchams Usher/Angus McLeod, courtesy of Richard Royston of Madison, Connecticut, USA.

⁸⁵ Fergusson, *The Story of Fergie Bey*. John Berchams Usher stayed with his step-father, a quarter-master in another regiment in India whilst he waited for details of his new Regiment; Usher/McLeod Papers.

⁸⁶ Keith Simpson, “The Officers,” in *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 66.

Any reputation or patronage he had received quickly evaporated in a new regiment, moreover he may have understood the ‘unwritten laws’, customs, and history of his old regiment, whereas in the new context he was a ‘neophyte’, bereft of this knowledge. The military secretary worked on a system of allocating no more than one officer commissioned from the ranks to a regiment every three years, illustrating the unpopularity of the officer commissioned from the ranks.⁸⁷ This process cast them as ‘outsiders’ who faced considerable challenges to their integration.

The commissions on the Western Front in early 1914 were a much different experience. Firstly, the opportunity came as a surprise to NCOs, and rather than seeking a commission, they were invited to accept one. As an encouragement to selected NCOs to take up the offer of a commission, Routine Army Orders of October 1914, reminded NCOs of the beneficial pension conditions of taking commissions, and three army orders gave long lists of NCOs that were being commissioned.⁸⁸ The final decision as to a candidate’s suitability was based on the outcome of an interview by the commander of the BEF.⁸⁹ Thomas Weatherhead, later a major in the Royal Garrison Artillery, wrote about meeting Sir John French to be offered his battlefield commission:

I was commissioned on the field 17 November 1914. I was serving as a Sergt in (35 HB RGA) having served 21 years, ten months (being allowed to continue my service after 21 years). General French sent for me while fighting at Ypres and told me I had been recommended for a commission and if granted would carry with it £1,000 at the end of the War, this was subsequently increased to £1,500 which I received.⁹⁰

The distinguishing feature of these early wartime commissions was that the selection was not based on gentlemanliness but competence, and senior NCOs were commissioned into their own

⁸⁷ See TNA WO 339/9537 Hilary Maurice Cadic, for the notes made by the Military Secretary.

⁸⁸ TNA WO 123/199 Routine Army Orders. ARO No. 173, 216 and 269. See also TNA WO 123/200 ARO 1351, showing the reissue of the Royal Warrant for Pay.

⁸⁹ Later in the war this responsibility was devolved to Brigade level. See Ernest Shephard, *A Sergeant-Major’s War* (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press, 1985), p. 137; George Ashurst, *My Bit, A Lancashire Fusilier at War 1914-1918* (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press, 1987).

⁹⁰ TNA WO339/21889 Thomas Weatherhead.

regiment, a practice precluded before the war. The commissioning of RSM Murphy, RQMS Welton and CSM Stanway into their own battalion, the 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers, on 29 October 1914, was described by a fellow officer, James Dunn. Murphy, the oldest and most senior warrant officer, served only a short time as a combatant officer, falling ill; the younger Welton and Stanway went on to command battalions with distinction. Murphy did not welcome his commission as an improvement in his professional status; for him and many older NCOs, it represented a decline:

Murphy was detailed to run the day billets at Bois Grenier when the Battalion was in the trenches. The appointment gave him more scope than he had as a platoon commander, and won for him the nickname of 'Mayor of Bois Grenier.' He was very funny sometimes, and is the hero of his own melodrama always. Bemoaning the come down from Regimental Sergeant Major to Second Lieutenant, he would exclaim, 'There was I, a thousand men at my control, the Commanding Officer was my personal friend, the Adjutant consulted me, and now I am only a bum-wart and have to hold my tongue in the Mess.'⁹¹

This is an important observation; Murphy saw the commission as a downward shift in his status, with consequences for what he could say in the officers' mess. After the war, one commentator observed 'at times it was a waste, when a good warrant officer was promoted because it meant he might well become a platoon commander and would have little of the influence he had as a Sergeant-Major,' recognising the impact Murphy alludes to.⁹² The degree to which the Army Order was adopted varied between regiments. The impact of the regimentally determined approach was criticised by Samuel Warne, a ranker officer, in 1918:

⁹¹ J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914–1919: A Chronicle of Service in France and Belgium* (London: Abacus, 1988), p. 109. Captain J. C. Dunn, DSO, MC & bar, DCM describing events with 2nd Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers on 19 January, 1915. Captain J. C. Dunn wrote a definitive account of the experiences of the war experienced by the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (RWF) based on his diary and a collection of recollections from officers and men.

⁹² General Sir Richard Nugent O'Connor (1889–1981). This and subsequent comments listed as 'Simpson Archive', were made by regular army officers responding to a research questionnaire sent by Keith Simpson in the 1970s. They are quoted courtesy of Professor Gary Sheffield and Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, Library.

These commissions were offered under conditions which differed enormously from any regulations or established ideas then in existence, and although very many commanding officers carried out the spirit of the army council instructions on the subject without delay, there are cases where good and ambitious men lost seniority through the failure of their superiors to recognise the needs of the nation. Cases also occurred where excellent warrant and non-commissioned officers lost seniority, and failed to give their services for work in a higher rank, on account of their reluctance to accept a position which was not clearly defined as regards certain points relating to the future.⁹³

This points to the likelihood of continuing prejudice towards non-gentlemanly commissions inhibiting offers of commissions, and acknowledges that some NCOs, with prescience, lacked confidence about the future of their new status, and refused.

The practice of commissioning rankers into their own regiment, assuring them of retaining regimental identity, dissipated as demand became more urgent and replacements were needed in battalions denuded of their own NCOs or to help new battalions being formed as part of the New Armies. The change of regiment became less culturally significant as the war progressed, all battalions became more regimentally heterogeneous. The regimental history of the East Kent Regiment, the Buffs, noted the following:

About this time the discovery seems to have been made that the officers could be supplied not only from civilians in England, but from highly trained, very gallant and thoroughly reliable non-commissioned officers, who were daily adding to their war experience; so Company Sergeant Majors Nesbit and Stone, Sgts Corrall, Stock and Orwin, and a little later on Company Quarter Master Sergeant Sayer and CSM Kesby, CSM Price and Sgts King, Hallam and Harris were promoted to be 2nd Lieutenants. Most of them, alas, were sent out of the regiment, which was a great blow, but of course the needs of the Army as a whole must always be the first consideration.⁹⁴

⁹³ Samuel Warne 6197 R.G.A. (S.W.), "The Ranker Officer," *Royal United Services Institution. Journal* 63, no. 451 (1918): p. 489.

⁹⁴ R. S. H. Moody, *Historical Records of the Buffs East Kent Regiment (3rd Foot) Formerly Designated the Holland Regiment and Prince George of Denmark's Regiment, 1914–1919* (Uckfield: Naval and Military Press, 2002), p. 20.

This assessment recognises that NCOs were ‘highly trained’ and ‘thoroughly reliable’ but the author R. S. Moody, again returns to the pre-war basis of a commission in the field, attributing them with being ‘very gallant’. It also suggests that commissions from the ranks was a ‘discovery’, when it was part of a plan. There was a curious reluctance to admit that commissioning NCOs was pre-determined.

The attitude of NCOs towards being offered a commission varied. The shift of identity into a new regiment was too much for some NCOs who refused a commission. For instance, cavalry regiments produced many ranker officers for infantry regiments, although it is claimed some refused a commission because of the lower status.⁹⁵ Douglas Haig, previously a cavalry officer, had a high regard for ranker officers from the cavalry; he remarked ‘approvingly’ of Edward Hilliams’, an officer with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, antecedence as a former sergeant major in the 17th Lancers.⁹⁶ This approval reflected Haig’s own background in the cavalry.

War histories of later years in the war suggested that some NCOs responded to the possibility of a commission as an incentive to perform well. Acknowledging the death in action of two NCOs their commander wrote ‘Great and unrewarded was the service that these two did that day, for neither lived to receive the commissions that had long been promised to them.’⁹⁷ Similarly, Dunn describes a ranker officer in September 1918, ‘who was killed trying to win a VC’, as motivated by ambition: ‘He was a Mons man, a Grenadier, commissioned in France, he intended to remain in the army after the war, and he knew the value the Cross would be to him.’⁹⁸ For the younger ranker officer, there was clearly an opportunity for social and

⁹⁵ The Marquess of Anglesey, *A History of British Cavalry: Volume 7: 1816–1919 the Curragh Incident and the Western Front, 1914* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1994), p. 106.

⁹⁶ G. Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London: Aurum Press Limited, 2011), p. 217. Haig’s remark came after Hilliam’s brigade captured ‘the pimple’, a stubbornly defended an outcrop on Vimy Ridge in 1917.

⁹⁷ Wauchope, *History of the Black Watch*, p. 241. Sergeants McDonald and Proudfoot were killed in Mesopotamia with the Black Watch.

⁹⁸ Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, p. 524. The officer was Francis Leonard Clarence Jones, MC, MM commissioned on 29 August 1917. He was killed in action on 1 September 1918.

professional advancement while the liminal conditions of the war persisted. The officer described by Dunn was seeking to add a distinction for gallantry to his credentials to make him eligible for a post-war career.

There were many warrant officers, who had been waiting for appointments as regimental honorary officers which were filled when a vacancy became available, for whom the war offered a quick alternative for promotion. For example, in May 1912, Lieutenant-Colonel Donald McKenzie Stuart, Royal Scots Fusiliers, strongly recommended Sergeant-Major Walter Pugh for a vacancy, when available, and he was given War Office permission to serve beyond 21 years while waiting.⁹⁹ Instead of his honorary commission, he was given a regular commission on 17 October 1914. In 1909, Major Pedley, Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment, stationed in India, wrote to the Military Secretary recommending Quarter-master Sergeant William Alderman, who had completed 16 years of exemplary service, for an honorary commission in any regiment where there may have been a vacancy. The reply said there was ‘little hope of advancement except in his own regiment’. Alderman was given a regular commission into the Royal West Kent Regiment in August 1914.¹⁰⁰ The appointment to an honorary officer’s post could prolong a career by at least a decade, and the offer of unconditional tenure of the regular post under the 1914 regulations appeared to do the same.

The way the differing qualities of officers and NCOs were understood by gentlemen-officers is precisely captured in the service files of ranker officers. It is noticeable from the records that the language used to describe the qualities of an NCO before the war was functional. The

⁹⁹ TNA WO 339/21389 Walter Pugh. He was shot through both legs and his knee badly damaged in November 1914. He served in combat intermittently but with limited mobility until he retired in 1919.

¹⁰⁰ TNA WO 339/10150 William J. Alderman. Lieutenant-Colonel W. J. Alderman was killed in action in 1917 at Cambrai commanding the 6th Battalion, Royal West Kent Regiment.

officer assessing Frank Dickerson of the KRRC for promotion in NCO rank in August 1913 reported he had been a ‘pay sergeant for about 4 years and performed his duties with zeal and efficiency, and is well qualified for much further advancement above his present rank’.¹⁰¹ ‘Efficient, enthusiastic, trustworthy, reliable, sober, diligent, hard-working’ was the language that singled out the good NCO suitable for promotion. However, when Lieutenant-Colonel John Arundel Nixon recommended Warrant Officer Wilfred Thompson for a commission in April 1916, he described him as a ‘desirable officer because of his age, appearance, manner and capability’, and he requested that he be appointed to the battalion under his command.¹⁰² Nixon, even in 1916, was still making judgements based on the relatively young Thompson’s ‘age, appearance and manner’, his proximity to the ideals of gentlemanliness, a priority over his professional claims to be an officer. This shows the ambivalence traditional gentleman-officers had in shifting from commissions recommended on social criteria and consequent cultural assimilation before the war to a hard-edged practicality or meritocratic approach during the war.

It is important to consider if the pre-war ‘rite of passage’ that marked the transition from the ranks into becoming an officer continued into the war. Here again there was some ambiguity. On the battlefield, there was a rapid transition and change of messing arrangements. When officers were commissioned from the ranks at ‘home’, in depots and barracks in Britain and Ireland, the pre-war ritualism persisted. John Lucy, a sergeant commissioned in Ireland in 1917, describes saying an emotional ‘goodbye’ to a close friend and veteran sergeant on the eve of his commission, recognising the nature of their relationship would change forever and any informal discourse would be impossible:

¹⁰¹ TNA WO 339/16708 Frank Dickerson. He had served 15 years in the ranks and was mentioned in despatches in December 1914 and badly wounded in June 1915.

¹⁰² TNA WO 374/68316 Wilfred H. Thompson.

And now I was saying good bye to Jim and my other sergeant friends. They massed drinks before me. I heel tapped. They advised and joked at me alternatively. A grave old colour sergeant from Limerick reminded me of my own traditions as an Irishman. I was to keep them among the strangers [...] I escaped from the mess with Jim, and we stood outside in the darkness. He came near to me and demonstrated his affection for the only time by pressing my upper arm with a hand that half paralysed it. I said: ‘Oh, we’ll meet again Jim,’ and releasing me he said: ‘No Johnnie, because from now on we move in different circles. Good luck.’ He stood away rigidly, cutting the line between officers and other ranks, and then saluted me and said: ‘good luck, sir.’ I laughed nervously, shyly acknowledged his salute and said: ‘Many thanks, old thing. Good luck Jim’ and I walked off to the officers’ quarters. Before mounting the steps on the opposite side of the wide barrack square I looked back, and Jim was still standing there, motionless against the lighted windows — the personification of comradeship between men, and a symbol of all his kind for me – the case hardened war-time members of the sergeant’s mess, the senior non-coms.¹⁰³

John Lucy’s description of his ‘passing out’ of the sergeants’ mess in 1917 following his commission has a religious quality. Writing this passage many years after the war, it reflected his view of where his own military identity was centred, and the masculine camaraderie he found as a senior NCO. It reflects the dramatic change in his relationship with a fellow NCO, and the social distance created between them is symbolised by Lucy ‘mounting the steps on the opposite side of the wide barrack square’. He uses the account to also address his transition from a community, predominately Irish into the ‘strangers’, the English gentlemanly elite, moving from the comradely sergeants’ mess, crossing the line into the colder more individualised and emotionally contained world of the officer.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the close control that was exerted over the identity of officers commissioned from the ranks before the war. The ability to conform to the ideal representation of the ‘officer and gentleman’ was essential to anyone commissioned from the ranks. Later chapters will look in more detail at the appearance and behaviours that were required of the

¹⁰³ John F. Lucy, *There’s a Devil in the Drum* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1993), pp. 358–9.

officer-gentleman, and how deviance from the prescribed norms was managed in everyday military life. Despite the political and public rhetoric of the pre-war period, commissions from the ranks were rare, regimentally determined, and based on assimilating candidates who could assume a gentlemanly identity. The dominant culture of the officer class, acting as its own gatekeeper, resisted forces of political change or the professional ambitions of anyone outside of the small elite group.

The elite that constituted the officer class has previously been noted for its pragmatism and the use other groups to further its imperial and political interests.¹⁰⁴ In 1910, despite the overwhelming cultural resistance of the officer class to any changes that would disrupt its exclusivity, it adopted a plan to commission from the ranks that was potentially so destabilising, it was kept secret. In the historiography, the promotion of officers from the ranks of the pre-war regular army has been limited or has been represented as part of a chaotic set of measures to recruit officers in response to attrition and growth of the army. This study presents evidence that it was a carefully planned measure implemented in 1914.¹⁰⁵

The chapter has demonstrated from that the officers commissioned who became known as ‘ranker officers’ had diametrically different characteristics from those commissioned from the ranks before the war, and were an ever-increasing presence as the war progressed. The pre-war officer commissioned from the ranks sought a commission, the ranker officer entered the war without any expectation or ambition, beyond high NCO rank, and many were induced to accept them, and others saw them as an opportunity for professional mobility. Integrating the ranker officer phenomenon required serious compromises in the expectations and beliefs of

¹⁰⁴ For example, see John Darwin, “Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion,” *The English Historical Review* 112, no. 447 (1997); Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 39–63.

¹⁰⁵ P. Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914–16* (Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 214–19.

gentleman-officers. The rituals and behaviours involved in the transition to becoming an officer and the inherent implicit beliefs about exclusivity remained a part of the gentleman-officers' outlook during the war. Although they made structural accommodations to allow ranker officers, their cultural antipathy towards them and resistance to fundamental change remained. The scale and duration of the war increasingly risked changing the identity of the officer class. To prevent this and maintain its exclusivity, it began to be more explicit about the differences between itself and the new group. The next chapter will begin to explain how culture and identity construction worked in differentiating what became known as the 'ranker officer'.

Chapter Four

The Cultural Milieu of the British Army Officer 1903–1918; the Regiment and the Mess

The identity of the ranker officer in the First World War was formed as officers promoted from the ranks came into close contact with regular army officers. This identity was primarily forged externally, constructed by gentleman-officers. This occurred within the enclosed space of the officers' mess where cultural practices determined the internal dynamics and established the status of individual members. These cultural practices were not standardised across the army and were strongly influenced by the regimental paradigm. Integral to these practices were formal and informal laws that governed officers' behaviour. The chapter considers how these practices and dynamics operated between 1903 and 1918 to maintain pre-war exclusivity, how they were modified and adapted during the war, and their cultural resilience throughout the period.

The first part of this chapter will consider the impact of regimental culture on the officer commissioned from the ranks. The regimental system has been described as the 'most significant of British military institutions, the principle vehicle of the nation's military culture'.¹ Military historians have argued about the merits of the system that took hold after 1870, identifying the generation of *esprit de corps* as its great strength.² The means to generating morale was through creating a sense of 'betterness' or 'otherness' in relation to other regiments, marked by intense competitiveness.³ Before 1914, and arguably since, this was only in a small way a competition based on efficiency, martial prowess, longevity, or

¹ John Keegan, 'Regimental Ideology,' in *War Economy and the Military Mind*, ed. G. Best and A. Wheatcroft (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p. 16

² David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, C. 1870–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 1–2.

³ General Sir John Winthrop Hackett, *The Profession of Arms* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1983), pp. 223–4.

status; it was primarily based on social exclusiveness of the officers. This section will consider the distribution of officers commissioned from the ranks in the regimental hierarchy, before and during the war. It will evaluate how the attribution of regimental identity adversely impacted on the transition to becoming an officer commissioned from the ranks. It will argue that a diminishing sense of regimental identity during the First World War affected the attitudes to ranker officers and this had beneficial, if liminal, consequences for their integration.

The second part of this discussion argues that the officers' mess was the key space that informed an officer's identity. It was a place where officers slept, ate, and lived, with a role that was as much cultural and symbolic as it was practical and domestic, and where the rituals and culture of the gentleman-officer were embodied.⁴ The mess was closely linked to regimental identity and where the regimental narrative was formed and traditions were manufactured. It was constructed as a lived space that closely resembled 'gentlemen's clubs' where officers spent time away from the regiment. It was also an autonomous space funded independently and regulated by officers themselves.⁵ Regiments had designated, relatively luxurious officers' mess buildings, adjacent to barracks and, during campaigns, they would adapt buildings, hotels, camps, and wartime trench 'dugouts' to fulfil this purpose. The mess was hierarchically organised and operated within a complex set of rules and behaviours requiring conformity to an expected set of gentlemanly behaviours. This section will consider cultural practices in the mess before the war and 'accommodations' to allow ranker officers wartime entrance to the mess.

⁴ Quintin Colville, "Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity: Royal Naval Officers and Their Shipboard Homes, 1918–39," *Gender & History* 21, no. 3 (2009). This study provides a useful framework to understand the meanings attached to the mess.

⁵ E. H. Hankin, "An Outbreak of Cholera in an Officers' Mess," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 1878 (1896). This paper from 1896 asserts the independence of the mess from governmental regulation precipitated an outbreak of Cholera.

Successful participation in the mess was dependant on knowing the informal rules governing everyday life. These were unwritten laws dictating deference, etiquette and rituals, and being able to participate in wider social discourse. They were the key to respectable, honourable gentlemanliness. For the ranker officer, new to this cultural context, these represented a challenge, and failure could lead to ostracism. The expectations on the officer as a ‘gentleman’ were enshrined formally in military law, and ‘ungentlemanly’ conduct could lead to an officer being cashiered.⁶ A significant cultural shock for ranker officers was the ‘economy of honour’, where the handling of cash was exchanged for a promise that committed an officer to honouring debt or forfeiting their honour.⁷ The final section of this chapter will consider unwritten rules of the mess, honourable behaviour, military law, and the ‘honour economy’, and their effects in the construction of a discrete ranker officer identity.

1) Regimental Identity and the Officer Commissioned from the Ranks 1903–1914

Regimental identity, a dominant feature of the British army, has been a major topic of discussion by military historians. David French surveys the question of regimental identity in the British army over a period of 130 years; he concludes that the regimental system has been over problematized and that reducing the reasons for the British army’s success and failures to a single reason is an oversimplification.⁸ The core criticism of the system was that it subverted the interests of the other army structures and the wider army to its own.⁹ The affirmation of regimental identity had reached its zenith in 1886, with the following view expressed in *The Soldier’s Pocket Book*, reprinted until 1913: ‘the soldier is a particular animal that can alone be brought to the highest efficiency by inducing him to believe that he belongs to a regiment

⁶ War Office, *Manual of Military Law, 1914* (London: HMSO, 1914).

⁷ Matt Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 27.

⁸ French, *Military Identities*, p. 352.

⁹ Ibid., p. 259.

which is infinitely superior to others around him. In their endeavours to foster this spirit, colonels are greatly aided by being able to point to some peculiarity in dress and title.¹⁰ This investment in regimental identity meant that the regiment became a locus of power, and that regimental officers had sufficient autonomy to undermine any army wide, politically led strategy of commissioning from the ranks.

David French acknowledged that ‘Regimental loyalties did not depoliticise the officer corps; on the contrary, the defence of their regimental privileges was one thing that could cause them to behave in a highly political manner.’¹¹ French noted the role of the regimental mess in generating a competition of exclusivity; ‘messes helped regiments to establish their own identity and place in the army’s pecking order’, however, he fails to recognise the powerful role this played in maintaining social exclusivity in the early twentieth century.¹² Within regiments, gentleman-officers competed in what has been described as an ‘unofficial league table of exclusivity’.¹³ This was manufactured from ‘historical precedent, close association with the royal family, ancient lineage, tradition of social exclusiveness, regional affiliation, military reputation and the distinction between regiments and corps’¹⁴ This thesis argues that a key problem with the regimental system was the competition in social exclusivity that permeated officer identity, inhibited professionalism, and worked to exclude officers commissioned from the ranks.

¹⁰ Garnet Wolseley Wolseley, *The Soldier’s Pocket-Book for Field Service* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1886), p. 4.

¹¹ French, *Military Identities*, p. 336.

¹² Ibid., pp. 125–6.

¹³ Gary D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁴ Keith Simpson, “The Officers,” in *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 66; John Keegan, “Regimental Ideology”, pp. 3–18.

The Edwardian regimental system inherently served the interests of preserving the elite identity of the officer class. Ostensibly to prevent over familiarity with the ranks, officers commissioned from the ranks were always posted to another regiment, a system that placed them in jeopardy. Regimental identity had been manufactured through the creation of a history and culture that had developed with a unique set of rules, customs, ritual practices, mascots, and names.¹⁵ An officer commissioned from the ranks of one regiment would encounter great difficulty in learning the knowledge and expected behaviours of his new regiment. The officer would be stigmatised by their previous regimental attachment and service in the ranks. This previous regimental identity would work against them; as part of his criticism of an officer commissioned from the ranks of the Gordon Highlanders, an officer observed that his regiment, the South Lancashire, had ‘better corporals as section leaders’, than the officer in question.¹⁶ He was contributing a statement to a case that would force an officer commissioned from the ranks to resign and asserting the ‘better-ness’ of his regiment over the Highlanders.

The unity of purpose within a regiment, created by this competitiveness led to attempts to teach new officers the source, and supposed utility, of a competitive attitude between regiments. When officer training was formalised after 1916, a captain lecturing at a cadet schools is attributed as stating:

When you have mastered military history, you will quickly grasp the value of *esprit de corps*. You will know *why* the Guards would scorn to be called Highlanders; *why* the Highlanders would shoot you if you put them into the Guards; *why* the K.R.R.’s want to beat the Rifle Brigade, and *why* the Rifle Brigade believe they are better than the K.R.R.’; *why* Dragoons think themselves superior to Hussars, and *why* Hussars sicken if you named them Dragoons; *why* the R.H.A. think the R.F.A. are not fit to lick their boots, and *vice versa*. Unimportant as these

¹⁵ Ian F. W. Beckett, *Discovering British Regimental Traditions*, vol. 292 (Princes Risborough: Shire Publications, 2007); French, *Military Identities*, p. 336.

¹⁶ TNA WO 339/8765 Norman George Morrison McLeod. Comments of the Lieutenant-Colonel commanding 2nd Battalion South Lancashire Regiment.

things may seem to the uninitiated, they are really the basis of good work and true fellowship. This spirit is the same as the spirit of the public schools.¹⁷

The reference to the ‘spirit of the public schools’ identifies the source of these ‘traditions’. Public school culture had developed a strong ‘school house patriotism’, an area explored by Patrick Joyce.¹⁸ Joyce has observed that the public school created the gentlemanly public servant, but also served as a model of social organisation in which the house and the housemaster became the surrogate for home.¹⁹ This homosocial world was recreated in the regimental mess, and competitiveness learned in the school also manifested itself in regimental rivalry. It accentuated difference and created a hierarchy.²⁰ This was generated principally through the idea of financial exclusivity.

Financial exclusivity was often manufactured to create an aura of wealth and privilege, particularly to elevate one regiment above others. Winston Churchill, a young officer in the 4th Hussars, led a group of officers to conspire against a new officer because they felt his private income of 500 pounds was ‘insufficient’ for him to be an officer in their cavalry regiment — ironically less than Churchill’s allowance.²¹ Senior officers were complicit in the ruse of inviting him to the sergeant’s mess to drink the health of a Crimean veteran, only to compromise him and make him vulnerable to a court-martial conviction for ‘improperly associating with non-commissioned officers’, leading to his resignation.²² The Army Council’s attempts to control the affordability of officering was largely ignored at a regimental level. The

¹⁷ R. W. Campbell, *John Brown Confessions of a New Army Cadet* (London: W & R Chambers, 1919), pp. 231–2.

¹⁸ Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 264, pp. 80–3; E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁹ Joyce, *The State of Freedom*, p. 264 and p. 89.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

²¹ Alan Bruce-Pryce was commissioned into the 4th Hussars in March 1895 and resigned in February 1896. Richard Holmes, *In the Footsteps of Churchill* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), pp. 36–7. Churchill’s leading role in the bullying and conspiracy has been explained as part of his desire to be liked, ‘after his own torments’ at public school: Norman Rose, *Churchill: An Unruly Life* (London: Tauris, 2009), p. 34.

²² *Ibid.*

decline in participation of even ‘gentleman rankers’ in the officer class of the cavalry was inexorable. Appendix 3 shows the regimental patterns of commissions in the period 1903–1914. This shows that no officers from the ranks were commissioned into the elite guards or cavalry regiments. Elite regiments had traditionally selected their officers. They admitted officers who had an established relationship through a school or family, a vetting interview by the regimental colonel, and assessment by other officers would ensure gentlemanly status.²³ These processes reproduced the admission to gentleman’s clubs.²⁴

A statistical assessment of the commissions between 1903 and 1914 (Appendix 2) compiled from the *London Gazette* entries show that one third of soldiers commissioned from the ranks, came from the Cavalry, Guards, and Royal Artillery, whilst those regiments were in receipt of none. These regiments, particularly the Cavalry and Guards attracted gentlemen who were looking for commissions, and this explains their ‘donor’ role. They themselves were resistant to accepting ranker officers. The Household Cavalry and Guards drew self-esteem from their relationship to the monarch and, from early in their history, they regarded themselves as the elite of the army.²⁵ The officers of the Life Guards had financially demanding lifestyles — thus restricting recruits to a very small elite of very rich young men to whom their army pay, as one officer remarked was ‘a mockery’.²⁶ The resistance of the Guards and Cavalry to ranker officers in peacetime was well known and became a mark of their elite status.²⁷

The concentration of officers commissioned from the ranks was in lower-status infantry regiments, partly reflecting affordability and the scope of the Military Secretary to force

²³ Simpson, “The Officers,” pp. 66–7.

²⁴ Amy Milne-Smith, “A Flight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen’s Clubs of London, 1880–1914,” *The Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 04 (2006).

²⁵ Philip Mansel, *Pillars of Monarchy: An Outline of the Political and Social History of Royal Guards, 1400–1984* (London: Quartet Books, 1984).

²⁶ R. J. T. Hills, *The Life Guards* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1971), p. 15.

²⁷ Hansard HC Deb 16 March 1925 Vol. 181 cc1937–38.

admission. Since policy meant that they had to join ‘new’ regiments, it was left to the Military Secretary to allocate a new regiment, invariably in the infantry. Regiments were required to take an officer commissioned from the ranks no more frequently than once every three years.²⁸ The West India regiment took five, the largest concentration of officers commissioned from the ranks, reflecting their lowly status.

In 1912, Haldane said he had persuaded ‘one or two’ men to take commissions, but had to find places for them in ‘Colonial regiments such as the West India Regiment’.²⁹ The West India Regiment was formed in 1795 and was different from similar colonial forces in the British Empire in that it was an integral part of the Regular British Army. The recruits, after 1816, were West Indian volunteers, officered by white British officers and senior NCOs. By 1900, there were two battalions, one stationed in Jamaica and the other in West Africa. The West India Regiment shared similar generous conditions of service with colonial garrisons such as the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), pay was higher and expenses lower.³⁰

Of the pre-war officers studied, more than half served with the WAFF, West African Rifles, (WAR), Kings African Rifles (KAR), or Egyptian army. The WAFF was created in 1900 by the Colonial Office to garrison the West African Colonies of Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Gambia, and Nigeria.³¹ Officers were seconded or ‘attached’ to the WAFF, and it attracted adventurers, financially poorer gentlemen-officers and officers commissioned from the ranks.

²⁸ See TNA WO 339/9537 Hilary Maurice Cadic, for the notes made by the Military Secretary.

²⁹ Hansard, HC Debate, 22 March 1911, Vol. 23 C. 461

³⁰ Sam C. Ukpabi, *The Origins of the Nigerian Army: A History of the West African Frontier Force 1897–1914* (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1987), p. 79. See also War Office, *Royal Warrant for the Pay, Appointment, and Non-Effective Pay of the British Army, 1900* (Article 1149) and TNA CO 96/402 Memoranda on Conditions, 21 May 1902. Each year spent in West Africa counted double for pension and other benefits. See also Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army : Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 187.

³¹ The WAFF was the creation of Frederick Lugard (1858–1945), a British Army officer and mercenary. See Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain’s Legacies in the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), pp. 287–97.

These were ‘attachments of convenience’ that removed officers commissioned from the ranks from regimental messes and provided affordable postings in places less socially competitive.

The Royal Warrant specified a minimum of two years’ regimental experience was necessary before colonial postings, but officers commissioned from the ranks found themselves attached very quickly, and in some cases, contrary to general guidelines, they even began their career as an officer on colonial attachment.³² Although a ‘voluntary step’, many officers had no choice. The caveat to John Dimmer’s commission in 1908, that he be posted at once to the West African Regiment, was likely to have been reproduced.³³ Herbert Thompson, Cecil Stuart, and others were examples of officers who began their officer careers with the WAFF and were seconded immediately, contrary to guidelines.³⁴ It was recommended WAFF and officers attached to colonial service should usually do two tours of duty, but officers commissioned from the ranks generally spent prolonged periods on attachment. Many officers such as Benjamin ‘Bertie’ Thruston served in Africa for the largest part of their careers.³⁵

Those who remained with, or returned to their regiment before the First World War could be ostracised and rejected, with many forced to prematurely resign or be dismissed. Regimental distaste for officers from the ranks was driven by protection of regimental identity and more general concerns about the impact on the gentlemanly ideal. An insight to the prejudice of the leadership of regular infantry battalions is illustrated by the case of Charles Nugent.³⁶ The son

³² War Office, *Royal Warrant for the Pay, Appointment, and Non-Effective Pay of the British Army, 1900* (Article 1149). The War Office appointed officers to the WAFF, but they were approved by the Colonial Secretary who dealt with the details of the appointment. Regulations also included that the officer should not be married on appointment and must not be less than 22 and not more than 35 years old. British officers sent to West Africa were immediately given a ‘local rank’, one grade higher than their substantive rank that would last for the duration of their tour.

³³ TNA WO 339/7051 John Henry Stephen Dimmer.

³⁴ TNA WO 339/7603 Cecil Edgar Stuart, TNA WO 339/7101 Herbert Henry Thompson.

³⁵ TNA WO 339/7752 Bertie John Thruston. Thruston went to West Africa in 1913 and served with the WAR throughout the war, and died of malaria in November 1918.

³⁶ TNA WO 339/7356 Charles Nugent.

of ‘carter’, he served in the ranks of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment and Army Veterinary Corps (AVC), until he was commissioned into the Royal Berkshire Regiment in August 1909. In June 1910, the Military Secretary received a report from his commanding officer reporting him ‘unfit for his present rank’, both in respect of ‘training and upbringing, and as unlikely to develop power of leadership’. He requested that Nugent was found extra-regimental colonial, military, or civil employment.³⁷ Implicit in his rejection is the idea that Nugent would never acquire ‘character’, the necessary quality to lead, derived from a gentlemanly home and public school.

The Military Secretary queried this request with the Adjutant-General, since it contradicted strong endorsement of his potential by the Major-General in charge of Aldershot administration, and the Principal Veterinary Officer, who described him as ‘smart, energetic, very keen, has tact and common-sense, is trustworthy and has a natural aptitude for quickly acquiring information.’³⁸ The Adjutant-General suggested ‘that the Berkshires must try and make the best not the worst, of this young officer. Practically they take exception to his class and non-sporting disposition.’ The Military Secretary wrote to the Commander-in-Chief in India rejecting the request, as it was based on ‘social not professional’ grounds and suggested they give Nugent support. Cecil Aldin, master of the South Berkshire Hunt in 1910, observed that ‘every officer of the Berkshire Regiment kept hunters’ and it is clear that not being able to hunt was a social obstacle to being an officer in the regiment.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid. The request was based on three confidential reports; the Adjutant-General noted that one of these, from Major George Holme Arbuthnot, described him as ‘in every respect desirable.’ In 1911, there were seven second lieutenants including Nugent in the 2nd Berkshires he was 27 years of age, the next oldest was 22 years of age.

³⁸ Ibid. The Adjutant-General was Lieutenant-General Sir John Spencer Ewart and the Military Secretary, General Sir Arthur Singleton Wynn. The referees for Nugent’s commission were Colonel, later Major-General Robert Pringle and Major-General Henry Merrick Lawson, in charge of administration at Aldershot Command.

³⁹ Cecil Charles Windsor Aldin, *Time I was Dead: Pages from My Autobiography* (London: C. Scribner’s & Sons, 1934), p.140. For the role of sport as a social gateway to the officer class see: Tony Mason and Eliza

Nugent's career continued to suffer, he abortively tried to join the RAF and had to appeal when he was overlooked for promotion, because of his background, until his death in November 1918.⁴⁰ His case illustrates of the conflicting attitudes of the senior command, under considerable pressure to make judgements on a professional basis, and the regimental officers who sought formal sanction to remove him because of his lack of gentlemanly qualities and the problem he created for their identity. In many regiments, local sanctions and bullying would have persuaded the officer to leave of his own accord. This case became apparent because of the attempt to involve the War Office directly in his removal on social grounds. It points up the structural schism between the regiment and the War Office and the tension between the two as to who could be a regimental officer. This explains the differences between government policy and the realities of regimental decision-making discussed earlier in this thesis.

Officers, such as Nugent, were regarded as socially unsuitable and pilloried for their inability to participate in equestrian sport.⁴¹ Despite attempts to change the emphasis, confidential reports were still based on suitability to be a gentleman-officer rather than professional qualities, and many officers who fared well outside the regimental system were immediately found at fault on return to their substantive regiment.⁴² It was later observed by Keir that 'the traditional regular officer sought his own credentials and authority from his gentlemanly style and social status *per se* rather than his professional efficiency, and this was the basis on which he made judgements of others.'⁴³

Riedi, Sport and the Military: the British Armed Forces 1880-1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 67.

⁴⁰ TNA WO 339/7356 Charles Nugent.

⁴¹ Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi, *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 52.

⁴² TNA WO 339/5924 Reginald George Holland Belcher.

⁴³ John Keir, *A 'Soldier's Eye View' of Our Armies* (London: Murray, 1919) p. 5.

2) Regimental Identity and the Problem of the Ranker Officer 1914–1918

In peacetime, the officer commissioned from the ranks had to assimilate into the gentlemanly identity of the officer class, and this was made overwhelmingly difficult by the layer of complexity created by exchanging regimental identity. In the context of war, regiments constructed a narrative of commissions being awarded as a ‘promotion’ in the field, a mark of distinction and great honour, products of war. In doing this, the achievement of the ranker was reflected in the glory of the regiment. Initially, in 1914, senior NCOs were commissioned into their own regiment. This facilitated the post-war construction in regimental narratives that accounted for regular commissions from the ranks as being rare and meritorious rather than a pragmatic step. Artillery officers were invariably commissioned into their own regiment because their artillery expertise underpinned their promotion.

Paradoxically, when considered against the pre-war regimental resistance to commissions from the ranks, Mark Connelly, in a study of one regiment, argued that ranker officers were commissioned to maintain the distinct character of the regiment.⁴⁴ This may have been the case in preference to drafts of officers from England whose professional and social qualities were unclear.⁴⁵ Commissions during the war were initially into the NCO’s substantive regiment, but this became less likely as the war progressed. In addition, vacancies and promotions meant that all officers were increasingly liable to be moved to service and territorial battalions and between regiments. The ranker officer much preferred to be commissioned into their own regiment. John Lucy, a southern Catholic from Cork, served in an Ulster regiment and when

⁴⁴ Mark Connelly, *Steady the Buffs! A Regiment, a Region, and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 20–21.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 21. Mark Connelly’s arguments are not helped by his citing Arthur Smeltzer as an example: ‘promoted to Second Lieutenant in October 1915 after nearly fifteen years in 1st Buffs’, when Smeltzer was commissioned into the Buffs from the cavalry.

he was commissioned, he was given the opportunity to join a southern Irish county regiment.

He wrote:

One of the Colonels commanding a battalion of Munster Fusiliers knew of me, and asked if I would come to his regiment. The temptation was great. The Munsters were a splendid regiment and were southerners like myself, but I learned if I did not go to them I would remain in my own regiment. This was a great honour at any time, and in war a commission in one's own regiment a distinction. I did not want to break association with the Ulster men who were my friends and whose ways I knew.⁴⁶

This example illustrates that, based in their pre-war experiences, ranker officers knew they would be better accepted in their own regiments and the narrative of honour and distinction attached to a wartime commission was clearly a powerful concept in 1917.⁴⁷ It was sufficiently strong to overcome Lucy's loyalties to southern Ireland.

The meritocratic promotion of NCOs was a feature of all 'infantry of the line' and the artillery, the reluctant early NCOs being succeeded by more ambitious younger NCOs as the war progressed. The initial pattern of commissions followed the predetermined plan of three from each regiment, but, in the field, divisional commanders often commissioned many more NCOs from one regiment to restructure others. The distribution of ranker officers on commission prepared to inform this study (Appendix 3) reveals some important and interesting evidence. Notably, contradicting the arguments for 'social levelling' frequently made about the army during the war, structurally, the cultural exclusivity of the Guards and Cavalry persisted, and only 184 or 2.6 per cent of ranker officers were commissioned into their officer class.⁴⁸ For instance, the number commissioned into the Grenadier Guards was three, and the number into the Northumberland Fusiliers, 69.

⁴⁶ John F. Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1993), p. 353.

⁴⁷ See also Ernest Shephard, *a Sergeant-Major's War* (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press, 1985), P. 141. Shepherd expresses disappointment that he is being commissioned into a territorial battalion not a regular battalion of his regiment.

⁴⁸ See Gary Sheffield for a discussion: Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 125–6.

These statistics need to be considered with caution, because the cavalry was redundant for large parts of the war, and the Guards preserved their identity by not being subject to the expansion of many infantry regiments. Harold Macmillan, in describing the process by which he joined the Guards, said ‘it was all done by influence’, and Oliver Lyttleton, another Eton boy, observed ‘they loathe having outsiders’.⁴⁹ Whilst most infantry regiments accepted the officers allotted to them by the Military Secretary, the household cavalry retained the right to refuse anyone deemed by them unsuitable, and the guards had similar autonomy.⁵⁰ This evidence and more, considered later, suggests that despite this mitigation, cultural rather than structural reasons lay behind these statistics.

The main driver behind the commissioning of the ranker officer was technical expertise and many ranker officers found themselves in the emerging technical arms of the Royal Flying Corps, Machine Gun Companies, and Tank Corps. This is best illustrated by the statistics in Appendix 3 that show 2,643 commissions into the artillery, constituting 38 per-cent of the total commissioned. There had been no pre-war commissions from the ranks in 1903–1914, and the technical aspects of artillery required regular cadets to undertake two years training before their commission.⁵¹ Table 4 shows the substantial numbers of artillery officers commissioned from the ranks. The artillery had been heavily dependent on NCOs trained to become master gunners, who themselves trained officers and new recruits. The lack of a viable alternative to finding experienced officers to staff existing and newly formed batteries placed these NCOs at a premium. The historiography of the artillery described it as the ‘decisive weapon of the Great

⁴⁹ S. J. Ball and S. N. Ball, *The Guardsmen: Harold Macmillan, Three Friends, and the World They Made* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), p. 29; H. Macmillan, *Winds of Change: 1914–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 63–4. Oliver Lyttelton (1893–1972), Eton educated conservative politician and minister. Harold McMillan (1894–1986), Eton educated, conservative politician and prime minister 1957–1963.

⁵⁰ Marquess of Anglesey, *A History of British Cavalry: Volume 7: 1816–1919 the Curragh Incident and the Western Front, 1914*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1994), p. 102. Simpson, “The Officers,” p. 66.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 64; Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army*, p. 59.

War', dominating battlefields.⁵² In contrast to the infantry, the social composition of artillery officers has never been properly studied.

Table 4: Commissions from the Ranks of the Pre-war Royal Artillery, 1914–18 including the Percentage

	Died (all causes)					Total
	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	
	386	712	552	667	226	2,593
Commissions*	(392)	(843)	(554)	(573)	(281)	(2643)
Deaths	78	47	43	54	17	239
Deceased as % of Commissions	20%	7%	8%	8%	8%	9%

*Figures shown and casualties are those recorded in Crowe & Evans, M.P., *List of Officers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, 1914–1922*, Unpublished, Courtesy of the Royal Artillery Historical Trust (RAHT), those in brackets are calculated from the *Army Lists*.

The dependence on ranker officers was never reflected in artillery regimental narratives.⁵³ Where they exist, even today, their commissions are misrepresented in an heroic narrative of promotion from the ranks. The case of Battery Sergeant-major George Dorrell and Sergeant David Nelson of the Royal Horse Artillery are illustrative. They were awarded the Victoria Cross for ‘The Affair at Nery’ on 1 September 1914.⁵⁴ Their subsequent commissions are still reported as being consequential of their gallantry, when they would almost certainly have been commissioned anyway: ‘Three men of L Battery were awarded the Victoria Cross for their services at Néry [...] Both Dorrell and Nelson were also given commissions as second lieutenants; they would later reach the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and Major respectively.’⁵⁵

⁵² Sanders Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front in the First World War: The Infantry Cannot Do with a Gun Less* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: The British Army, Weapons and Theories of War, 1904–1945* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2004); Paul Strong and Sanders Marble, *Artillery in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Limited, 2014).

⁵³ Martin Fardale, *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery: Western Front 1914–18* (London: Royal Artillery Instn, 1986).

⁵⁴ Gerald Gliddon, *VCs of the First World War: 1914* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994), p. 67.

⁵⁵ Wikipedia, Action at Nery, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_at_Néry. Accessed March 1, 2017.

Nelson's commission did not follow until sometime after the event that led to his award of the VC, and it is clear that they, along with their contemporaries, would have been commissioned because of the deficiency of officers with expertise in artillery. The way their decorations and commissions have been conjoined implies one was dependant on the other.

Examination of a few case studies of artillery ranker officers gives a good insight into their professional identity. The majority had a background in the much less prestigious but more technically proficient Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) concerned with siege or heavy artillery, an asset in trench warfare. Many immediately became instructors of gunnery; in 1914, Louis Burton and Frederick Charles Merritt were commissioned and simultaneously promoted to the rank of 'acting captain instructors of gunnery'.⁵⁶ John Churchley, a battery sergeant-major (BSM), commissioned in March 1915, was immediately appointed a captain instructor of gunnery, replacing a regular army major.⁵⁷ Some became instructors at the artillery cadet schools formed in 1916 and later.

Thomas Leonard Harris, the son of a district officer in the RGA was commissioned in November 1914.⁵⁸ He had enlisted as a 14-year-old boy and served ten years in the ranks. In 1916, he was an adjutant and, in 1917, was appointed assistant instructor at an artillery school. He later became a full instructor and captain in Fifth Army Artillery School. The value of ranker officers was appreciated by newly commissioned regular officers from Woolwich, one

⁵⁶ TNA WO 339/14028 Louis Burton. He was later posted to command D Battery, 70th Brigade, at Arras where he died of wounds on 9th June 1917. TNA WO 339/14042 Frederick Charles Merrit, appointed Captain, Instructor of Gunnery (IoG), 27 September, KIA 19 June 1917.

⁵⁷ *The London Gazette*, 29091 of 5.3.1915 page 2239, Regular Forces, "The undermentioned Warrant and Non-commissioned Officers to be Second Lieutenants: -Royal Regiment of Artillery, Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery. Dated 6th March, 1915. Battery Serjeant-Major John Churchley." *The London Gazette*, 29151 of 30.4.1915 page 4247 "Establishments, School of Instruction for Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery. Second Lieutenant J. Churchley to be Captain Instructor in Gunnery vice Major A. B. Higgon. Dated 20th April, 1915." He returned to field duty at the end of 1917.

⁵⁸ Thomas Harris Snr's commission, *The London Gazette*, 27188 of 1.5.1900 page 2757, "Royal Regiment of Artillery Sergeant-Major Instructor Thomas Harris to be Lieutenant (District Officer), on augmentation. Dated 2nd May, 1900." *The London Gazette*, 29013 of 18.12.1914 page 10896, "The undermentioned Warrant and Non-commissioned Officers to be Second Lieutenants. Dated 20th December, 1914: - Royal Garrison Artillery, Corporal Thomas Leonard Harris."

describing them as ‘very good, keen and efficient. Some, who had come from overseas, had a much better experience than myself, both world and handling men’.⁵⁹ The descriptors used here are professional; ‘good, keen and efficient’. The artillery officer, particularly working in the close contact with gunners in a battery, had to have a more intimate and practical relationship with those around him, and it is interesting that the man-handling and worldliness of ranker officers is valued in this observation, as opposed to character or leadership.

The regimental system had a profound effect on commissioning from the ranks. The customs and traditions gave each an independent identity, although the form of regimental culture and its antecedents in public schools meant that acquisition of the tools to negotiate participation was accessible to gentlemanly products of the school system. Officers commissioned from the ranks pre-war were jeopardised by having to exchange regiments on commission, and this compounded the issue of their identity. This study demonstrates that lower-status regiments, confronted with commissioning rankers during the war, reached back to a pre-war traditional narrative of commissions, particularly into the same regiment, as carrying cultural legitimacy. Pre-war elite regiments were insulated from ranker officers by retaining their financial exclusiveness and having sufficient power to gate keep their exclusiveness. This persisted throughout the war, partly because they resisted enlargement as a body and their recruitment was never compromised due to their attractiveness to gentlemen-officers.

Furthermore, as will be explored later, the erosion of regimental identity as the war progressed coincided with a rapid promotion of many ranker officers.⁶⁰ The persistence of exclusivity amongst the elite regiments underlines the presence of traditional gentlemanly values and

⁵⁹ Simpson Archive: Brigadier C. A. F. Drummond.

⁶⁰ Peter E. Hodgkinson, *British Infantry Battalion Commanders in the First World War* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, Limited, 2015), p. 67.

cultural practices that were still rooted in the resilient traditional regular officer class. These permeated all regiments and, crucial to their operation, was the officers' mess.

3) Mess Culture

The officer's mess was, on face value, the physical space where officers of a certain rank gathered to take meals, rest and socialise. However, it had a much greater symbolic and cultural meaning than this functional description implies. The cultural practices within the mess were paramount in the construction of officer-gentleman identity. The material culture of the home mess of a regiment was extremely important, and the physical attributes were set out, in 1919, by Frank Levray in a guide to mess etiquette:

The mess is not only a place where men meet for their meals, but a club, and very often a club of the most elegant description, maintaining the highest standards of excellence as to surroundings, cuisine and personnel. The establishment is furnished by the state, and comprises, at least, a dining-room, the "Mess Room," a reception room, the 'ante-room,' a billiard room, a wine cellar, and all the official apartments necessary for service. The government pays a portion of the furnishings, but all the rest, -the silver ware, the china, the glass, etc. — is the property of the Mess, and is administered by a committee of three officers. Each newly admitted officer pays, as in a club, an entrance fee and annual dues. The government provides a yearly amount for the upkeep of the Mess, the expenses of each officer are paid monthly. The fittings of the mess of certain regiments are magnificent, the furnishings very handsome the silver superb, and the wine cellars of the first quality. The Mess of the Horse Guards and of the Life Guards, of the Foot Guards, and of many other corps that I could name, are in no way inferior in elegance and perfection of style to the most exclusive and expensive clubs of any country.⁶¹

There are several points we can draw upon from this description to explain the culture of the officers' mess. It is important to note that the mess culture described by Lavray survived the war, its membership widened, but its hegemony was sufficient for its culture to persist relatively unchanged throughout the twentieth century. The mess represented a form of corporate homo-social homemaking — a substitute for and a complement to the home.⁶² Lavray makes the comparison to the best gentlemen's clubs, and the culture of the mess closely

⁶¹ Frank Levray, "Etiquette in the Mess-Rooms of the British Army," *The Lotus Magazine* 10, no. 3 (1919).

⁶² Colville, "Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity".

resembles the corporate, homosocial world of clubs described by Amy Milne Smith, consistent with masculine spaces that emerged from the late nineteenth century ‘flight from domesticity’.⁶³ Army officers, both retired and current, moved between these masculine spaces — the club and the mess — with relative ease. Some clubs had specific military membership, such as the United Services Club for senior army officers, or regimental or public school affiliations. Whilst performing military functions in association with the officers’ mess, gentlemen-officers performed within a code of gentlemanly conduct in both places.

The constituents and elegance of the mess have been observed by Quintin Colville as a space that objectifies the ideal vision that members have of themselves — broadcasting their qualities. Lavray’s reference to the officers’ mess of the Guards is an allusion to the perceived qualities of those regiments and the expectation of officers that they should have an ‘elegance and perfection of style’ equivalent to ‘the most exclusive and expensive clubs of any country’, or simply put, this mirrored the belief that they were the best officers in the world. Implicit in this assessment is that size, quality, and presentation of the mess should reflect the quality of a regiment and its officers. The ambience of the mess was a reproduction of a middle-class home; an eating, meeting, and relaxation space for officers at all times of the day.

Mess culture was also closely linked to regimental identity since, although the processes and frameworks were the similar in each mess, each regiment had its own traditions and unique behaviours that distinguished them. David French has observed that these traditions ‘served the important function of giving every officer a sense that he belonged to a special and separate institution whose very existence is hallowed by tradition.’⁶⁴ The mess was where individual

⁶³ Milne-Smith, “A Flight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen’s Clubs of London, 1880–1914.”; Amy Milne-Smith, "Club Talk: Gossip, Masculinity and Oral Communities in Late Nineteenth Century London, 1880-1914." London," *Gender & History* 21, no. 1 (2009).

⁶⁴ French, *Military Identities*, p. 128.

regimental identity could be shaped, through the physical presence of trophies and mementoes, relics, and ‘colours’.⁶⁵ Many mess rituals were standardised, such as ‘not talking shop’ at dinner, and waiting to be invited to smoke by the mess president, whereas others were regimentally specific.⁶⁶ These might relate to the dinner, a formal occasion where mess uniform and forms of toasting the monarch were ritualised and unique to each regiment. Many of these remained secrets, as along with admission, they were exclusive, socio-cultural codes on which participating in these elite worlds depended. The gatekeeping of clubs to maintain their exclusivity and the likeness of all members was essential, although here, as with the officer class, members were not from a homogenous class background as there had been an increasing infiltration of wealthy middle classes. The key lay in the process of absorbing members on their own terms, and this meant newcomers having gentlemanly credentials and adopting an aristocratic life style, creating a ‘commonality of activity, lifestyles and taste’.⁶⁷

Gatekeeping was crucial to retaining the exclusivity of clubs and messes, and, in many respects, the process of admission, operated in the case of clubs by a process of sponsorship and committee vetting, operated in the officer class and ensured only those with a shared socio-cultural identity were admitted.⁶⁸ Sponsorship of a potential member did not always succeed, as illustrated by the case of Winston Churchill who in a fit of pique resigned his club membership in 1912 when someone he had proposed was refused membership.⁶⁹ The officers’ mess before the war operated along very similar lines, in so much as it vetted members before their attachment to a regiment and once admitted either assimilated them or rejected them, forcing them to leave or resign, very similar to ‘blackballing’ that occurred in clubs.⁷⁰ Whilst

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 91.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 124–8.

⁶⁷ Amy Milne-Smith, *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late Victorian Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 37.

⁶⁸ French, *Military Identities*, p. 54.

⁶⁹ G. Woodbridge, *The Reform Club, 1836–1978: A History from the Club’s Records* (New York: Published by Members of the Reform Club in association with Clearwater Pub. Co., 1978), p. 91.

⁷⁰ Milne-Smith, *London Clubland*, p. 50.

officers came from Sandhurst and Woolwich, they could be relied upon to have public school backgrounds and be ‘gentlemen cadets’, and similarly officers absorbed from the militia would generally have the appropriate cultural antecedents.

Officers commissioned from the ranks, particularly before the war, were blind to these socio-cultural codes, and there were several instances of officers falling foul of the boundaries that were created around mess identity. Ranker officers had no lived experience of the codes in an officers’ mess but would have appreciated the sensitivities of mess space from their experience of senior NCO messing and, as in the case of John Lucy, may have even been officers’ mess servants.⁷¹ There was a hierarchy of messes, each grade of NCO having their own mess, although these were much less autonomous than those of the officers. Higher ranks could be guests in the messes of lower ranks. The boundaries between these cultural spaces was rigorously policed. Officers commissioned from the ranks were feared as having a propensity to slip back into these more familiar settings and breach the code that separated them. This fraternising with lower ranks in their messes was a charge that would be believable even if untrue and ensure an unwanted officers removal. In the pre-war era, it was a test or proof of an officer’s gentlemanliness as to whether he could operate within these boundaries.

Norman McLeod was the son of an honorary officer, a quarter-master in the ASC.⁷² He was observed as being excellent officer material before his commission into the South Lancashire Regiment in December 1912. Within a few weeks of joining his new regiment he was cautioned for familiarity with corporals at a dance. His commanding officer warned him that he should not fraternise with other ranks, and that he could never again ‘engage them as social equals’.

⁷¹ Lucy, There’s a Devil in the Drum

⁷² TNA WO 339/8765 Norman George Morrison McLeod; Library and Archives of Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 7092–10, McLeod, Norman George Morrison. McLeod had been with his new regiment only three months before he was in serious difficulty with his commanding officer who said his manners were unrefined.

He was arrested after the commanding officer's maid told the CO's wife that McLeod had been drunk at a dance in the Corporal's mess. In assembling a case against him, the evidence given was generalised to criticise his intellect and ungentlemanly manners; he was observed to be 'slow at taking instructions' and his 'manners unrefined'. He was court-martialled for drunkenness, a charge which he denied. A crucial part of McLeod's indictment was his presence in the corporals' mess. He was offered the opportunity to resign his commission or face court-martial. He resigned and went to Canada.⁷³ McLeod was clearly regarded as undesirable from early on in his arrival with his new regiment, and his assimilation was disrupted by evidence of his breaching the social boundaries of the mess.

For the officer commissioned from the ranks in the early twentieth century integration in the mess was the test of gentlemanliness. The use of messes as privileged cultural arenas for gentleman preoccupied gentlemen-officers who wrestled with the difficulties of including professional peers who were ungentlemanly. One heated controversy concerned the use of African (native officers) and their acceptability in the mess, even on a limited basis. The Governor of Sierra Leone observed that there was no 'gentleman class' from which men of a high sense of honour and duty could be found.⁷⁴ The officers' mess was also a window through which to present a regiment to the world, and implicitly had an obligation to be hospitable and welcome guests for lavish dinners. Even here there were social criteria, they were preferred to be 'clubbable', a term often used as a generic passport for a gentleman, referencing their eligibility to be a member of a gentlemen's club.⁷⁵

⁷³ Library and Archives of Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 7092–10, McLeod, Norman George Morrison.

⁷⁴ See Ukpabi, *The Origins of the Nigerian Army*, p. 82. The Conditions of Service issued in 1911 carried very detailed descriptions of mess and uniform dress that was distinctive to each regiment; Northern Nigeria, Southern Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Gambia.

⁷⁵ Captain William Elliot Cairnes, *Social Life in the British Army* (London: Long, 1900), p. 168.

The commissioning of ‘ranker officers’ in 1914, solely for professional reasons and without any pretensions to be gentlemen, had a major impact on the exclusive, homogenous space of the officers’ mess. It necessitated some practical as well as cultural adaptations. Officers’ quickly duplicated their messing arrangements at war, adapting spaces, buildings and services. In December 1914, the 2nd Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers acceded to a step that gentlemen-officers had resisted for many years and curtailed costs, to make their messing affordable:

With the coming into the Mess of officers, promotions from the ranks, and others with no income but their pay, Colonel Williams imposed a maximum subscription for extras of one and a half Francs a day, and he limited the liquor bill for junior officers by barring spirits except the rum issue.⁷⁶

Sacrificing a gentlemanly existence was not acceptable in more elite regiments and the absence of ranker officers in the Guards regiments (see Appendix 3) was made certain by continuing an affluent lifestyle. A Welsh Guards officer who joined the regiment from Sandhurst in 1917, regarding ranker officers, said:

Acceptable as long as they were good chaps i.e., Behaved well and knew their job. I remember several in the Guards Regiments who did well. But usually on being commissioned they went to other regiments where the officers had less money. Our Quarter-master staff were always considered as equals and friends.⁷⁷

This illustrates that even proficient ranker officers did not have a place in the Guards and that they were considered inferior and more threatening than honorary officers. Gentlemen-officers had a long-established conditional relationship with honorary officers whose difference was clearly understood and that allowed limited participation in the mess. The traditional regular officer class responded to the conditions of war by attempting to maintain all aspects of its gentlemanly identity. This was manifest, particularly after the war of mobility settled into

⁷⁶ James C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914–1919* (London: Abacus, 1988), p. 103.

⁷⁷ The Simpson Archive; Brigadier Sir Alexander Beville Gibbons Stanier, 2nd Baronet of Peplow Hall, DSO & Bar, MC (1899–1995). He was in receipt of a private allowance of £200 p.a. on joining the Welsh Guards.

attrition in the trenches, by the creation of more formal officers' messes, lavish dining, and the pursuit of traditional sports.⁷⁸ Receiving imported luxury food from West End of London has been described as reflecting the eating habits of the public-school boy.⁷⁹ The trappings of sporting gentlemanliness extended outside the mess; elite regiments even brought their hounds to the front.⁸⁰ The bonds between officers, based on their public-school allegiances, also continued as Etonians recognised one another, and continued maintaining their networks and meeting.⁸¹ The war generated other pressures on mess identity; the response to interpreters, French civilians given temporary military rank and attached to battalions, was confused and inconsistent.⁸²

The mess was justified in military terms as the home of the British army *esprit de corps*. Walter Nicholson, the epitome of the traditional regular British army officer from the elite, writing about his experiences of war, had no doubt that the mess had an important function: 'A regimental mess in peace serves a great end; but the mess in war is as invaluable a factor for victory. It is the nerve centre of the army. In the circle of officers gathered around the camp fire or in the farm-house kitchen, victory, stalemate or defeat is brewed with the tea.'⁸³ This representation evokes the martial masculinity that Baden Powell engendered in *Scouting for Boys* and depicts the communal camp fire as the place for recovering British martial masculinity.⁸⁴ He differentiates between the 'great use' of the mess in peacetime and its

⁷⁸ Christopher Moore-Blick, *Playing the Game; the British Junior Infantry Officer on the Western Front*, First edn. (Solihull: Helion & Company Limited, 2011), pp. 189–205.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 192.

⁸⁰ Keith Simpson, *The Old Contemptibles: A Photographic History of the British Expeditionary Force August to December 1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 122.

⁸¹ Moore-Blick, *Playing the Game*, pp. 182–3.

⁸² Franziska Heimburger, "Mapping Allied Space in the Franco-British Coalition on the Western Front," paper presented at First World War Studies Conference, Innsbruck, 2011.

⁸³ Walter Norris Nicholson, *Behind the Lines* (London: Cape, 1939), p. 102.

⁸⁴ R. Baden-Powell, "Scouting for Boys. London: Windsor House," (London: CA Pearson, 1908); John Tosh, "What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," *History Workshop*, no. 38 (1994).

victorious martial function — provided the ‘brew’ or socio-cultural mix is right. In his memoir, he devoted a whole chapter to a discussion of the merits, social diversity, and quality of food and humour in the various messes he visited. He dwells on the inclusiveness of the mess, including the French interpreter, until he considers the last member:

Lastly, our ordnance officer, promoted from warrant rank on the outbreak of war. A man of sterling worth, but the only one who could never feel quite at home with us. There is a wide difference in the mentality between the Regular officer and the Regular soldier who has risen to warrant rank. But they have been bred in the same school; they have an understanding of one another and a mutual respect.⁸⁵

This was the dominant perspective of the gentleman; it is the ranker officer who is not at ‘home’, unable to fit into the domestic space of the mess. The use of the terms ‘home’ and ‘kitchen’ reflect that the mess was a masculinised domestic space.⁸⁶ Built into his message is a respect for the ranker officers martial prowess, his ‘sterling worth’, that makes his presence, at least temporarily, tolerable. The paradox of how ranker officers were valued for military competence and disregarded for their lack of gentlemanly status is a recurring theme. Lieutenant-colonel H. S. Thuillier, DSO served with the Royal Artillery during the First World War and observed with hindsight, regarding ranker officers: ‘I think they had a difficult job of adjusting to what amounted to the snobbery of regular officers. They were invariably excellent officers.’⁸⁷

Post-war, some officers with Scottish and Irish regiments claimed they were inclusive. Lieutenant Colonel J. D. Milne, who had been a lieutenant in the Royal Scots, observed ‘We had a certain number of ranker officers who had been commissioned for gallantry in the field and the greater numbers were “natural gentlemen”. I may be wrong but I feel that in a Scottish Regiment, one assesses a man’s worth by what he is and not by his accent and social

⁸⁵ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 105.

⁸⁶ Colville, “Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity”.

⁸⁷ Simpson Archive: Lieutenant-Colonel H. S. Thuillier.

background.⁸⁸ Colonel E. A. G. Dalziel, of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, was assertive about the treatment of ranker officers: ‘Ours was a regiment with a highly regarded reputation extending back over the years. The officers were gentlemen and proud of it, they behaved and were required to behave as such. Had I been so remiss as to regard “ranker” officers in any way differently, I should be in very severe trouble. Our regiment did not make such inexcusable distinctions.’⁸⁹ Both comments articulate around ideas of gentlemanliness. Milne used a tool often employed to qualify ranker officers as ‘natural gentlemen’, earned by their gallant acts — ‘commissions for gallantry’, whilst the other thought it a gentlemanly quality not to differentiate the ranker officer. Highland regimental officers claimed that they were ‘too well mannered’ to contemplate excluding ranker officers.⁹⁰

With the gift of hindsight, one officer recognised how difficult approaching the mess was for a ranker officer and qualified regiments who recognised this as good, again describing the mess as a ‘home’. Brigadier I. M. Stewart from another Scottish regiment, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders wrote ‘Rankers were selected men of proven quality, usually with war experience, and admired as such. In the field, there was no social or other difference. In the UK, in a period of class stratification, it was a big social change. [...] for a ranker of humble origin to come, perhaps alone, to an officers’ mess. In any good regiment this was realised and everyone made a point of making him feel at home.’⁹¹ There are two important points to note. Firstly, the paradox that martial prowess of ranker officers was valued in war but their ‘humble origin’ and the culture of the mess were incompatible. Secondly, making the ranker officer ‘feel at home’

⁸⁸ Simpson Archive: Lieutenant-Colonel J..D. Milne. He served through to the Second World War where he was Assistant Adjutant & Quartermaster-General (AA&QMG) to the 15th Scottish Infantry Division.

⁸⁹ Simpson Archive: Colonel E. A. G. Dalziel.

⁹⁰ Diana Mary Henderson, “A Social and Domestic History of the Kilted and Highland Based Regiments of Foot, 1820 –1920,” PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1986), p. 205.

⁹¹ Simpson Archive: Brigadier I.M. Stewart. He served through to the Second World War. See Brig. I. M. Stewart, *History of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders 2nd Battalion (the Thin Red Line) Malayan Campaign, 1941–42* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1947).

involved the ranker officer adapting to the gentlemanly cultural norms of the mess; traditions would be maintained and new participants inducted into them.

Ranker officers commissioned in formal regimental messes at home encountered the full weight of these expectations and traditions, and the ranker officer was ‘helped’ to learn them. In his autobiography, John Lucy reported his first experience of the officers’ mess thus: ‘I sat at the right-hand side of the commanding officer, who was very gracious and astonishingly chatty. I noticed at once that in the officers’ mess talk was like family talk. [...] The subjects of religion, politics and women were taboo. An out of date method of dropping visitors’ cards (paying calls) had to be read up and practised.’⁹² He observed, with irony, the situation he found himself in: ‘I was dined into the officers’ mess at a table I had helped to clean and lay in a menial capacity five years before. My reception was openly warm. Men who had officered me in peace and war rose to meet me and bring me in. My late title of sergeant evaporated in the first breath of an atmosphere easier and more congenial, though not as openly intimate as that of the troops.’⁹³ Lucy, after observing a very highly ‘choreographed’ event reflected ‘Alone in my room I saw these matters against the background of the war, and laughed at the incongruity.’⁹⁴

There are three important points that can be extrapolated from Lucy’s account. First, the transformation from ‘servant to master’ and the fact that he was messing with officers who he knew from before the war who would not have countenanced his presence other than as a servant then. Secondly, he contrasts the homely and ‘easier, congenial’ atmosphere of the officers’ mess with the more open intimacy of the sergeants’ mess, highlighting the differing forms of masculinity on display, emotional restraint being an important of gentlemanly

⁹² Lucy, *There’s a Devil in the Drum*, pp. 353–4.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

behaviours. Lastly, it shows the resilience of the cultural milieu in the officers' mess after three years of war when these events occurred. This is also demonstrated through the decision to provide guides to mess etiquette and include it in the training of new temporary officers, representing a structural, more formal response to maintaining mess traditions as participation widened.⁹⁵ The progressive decline in numbers of new temporary officers with gentlemanly qualifications meant that lower social classes were increasingly being encountered in the mess as the war progressed.

The traditional officer-gentlemen showed resilience in maintaining the cultural milieu of the mess throughout the war, and this was achieved because the presence of ranker officers and temporary officers from lower social classes never overwhelmed the cultural hegemony of the gentleman. In part, this was because some ranker officers were willing to embrace gentlemanly behaviours or imitate them, but crucially they were a minority in the mess. The paradox that affected many gentlemen officers — admiration for martial, professional prowess of ranker officers and acute anxiety that mess culture, and in turn the gentlemanly status of the army officer would be threatened by an increasing concentration of ranker officers — surfaces in this observation, made regarding messing by Colonel Lionel Henry Mountifort Westropp:

In the 1st Devons there was an ex-Essex Regiment Corporal who had been given a commission. He was a great friend of mine; he died of Spanish flu in 1918. It all depended on the ranker if he was popular or not. After the war it was all rather different. Individual rankers were popular. The main point was that there must not be too many of them in one battalion. This sounds snobbish but in those days when there were far fewer staff and extra regimental jobs for officers, and when battalions stayed in one station for much longer than today. (e.g., in 8 years the 2nd Devons were only in two stations in India). One did not want to spend one's life in a barrack room atmosphere. Others who may criticise this statement did not have to do so.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Basil Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies* (London: Constable & Co., 1918); E. G. Lieutenant-Colonel R. A. F. Mackenzie, *Notes on Mess Etiquette, Etc* (London: Heath Cranton, 1918).

⁹⁶ Simpson Archive: Colonel Lionel Henry Mountifort Westropp, Devonshire Regiment. Westropp, born in 1896. See also Lionel Henry Mountifort Westropp, *The Memoirs of Colonel L. H. M. Westropp, D. L. Being His Experiences in World Wars I and 2, Together with Some Other Matters. For the Westropp Family Records* (London: printed and bound privately for the author by Regency Press, 1970). Westropp's 'great friend' was an ex-Essex Regiment corporal, Rudolph Oscar Schuh, commissioned from the Essex Regiment into the Devonshire Regiment in August 1916, only a few months after Westropp. He was the son of a German tailor who had served over eleven years in the ranks.

Context appears to be everything for Westropp, who allowed himself a close friendship with an officer who was not a gentleman during the war, and after the end of the war that coincided with the death of his friend, it was ‘all rather different’. His prejudices concerned the concentration of non-gentlemanly officers and the risk of overwhelming the gentlemanly cultural milieu of the mess.

This evidence illustrates how officers commissioned from the ranks had to be ‘gentlemanly’ to be allowed into the regimental officers’ messes before the war. This was a well circumscribed space, a place of masculine domesticity, with a gentlemanly culture regulating behaviour. The problem of the ranker officer, for the gentleman-officer, was not martial or professional, it was sociocultural and grounded in the strategic importance of maintaining a gentlemanly identity. Membership of the mess often corresponded to a club, with gentleman officers moving between these familiar homosocial worlds; military officer status did not convey the same transferrable qualification on ranker officers, and there is evidence that at least one officers club, KRRC Officers’ Club (The Celer Et Audax) refused membership to ranker officers.⁹⁷ The officers’ mess retained its core values throughout the war despite the widening social participation. The mess was culturally constructed and its operation was governed by a nexus of formal and informal regulations and codes that were employed as a form of governance and to manage inclusion and exclusion, discussed in the next section.

4) Tools of Exclusion and the Honour Economy

The idiosyncratic socio-cultural rules operating within mess space governed how officers behaved and presented, and placed expectations that they understood the cultural context

⁹⁷ Commissioned from the ranks in WW1, Great War Forum, ID 55: <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/86405-commissioned-from-the-ranks-in-ww1/&page=3#comment-1066459>. Accessed March 1, 2017.

around them. Each regiment had its own identity, manufactured traditions, uniforms, and rituals that were another layer of mysticism to the outsider. Attached to a gentlemanly identity was a code of honourable behaviour that dictated corporate and individual conduct. Policing gentlemanly conduct and managing infringements or imposters was a corporate or collective responsibility. This created a ‘fraternity’ that was regarded as an important emotional coping strategy in the war.⁹⁸ It was more saliently understood, particularly outside of war, as a way of policing social-cultural boundaries — including and excluding membership. This could manifest itself through ostracism and bullying, as in the case of Francis Friend, commissioned from the ranks in 1907, who was constantly tormented by fellow officers because of his origins in the ranks.⁹⁹ When investigating Friend’s behaviour, Major-General Sir H. Rawlinson described Friend as having been ‘severely provoked’ and as having ‘the fact of his being commissioned from the ranks continually being brought up against him’.¹⁰⁰ Ostracism and bullying was usually aimed at young officers without gentlemanly status or who failed to meet the minimum qualifications of wealth as regiments strove to maintain or improve their status in the regimental hierarchy; as Sir Garnet Wolseley observed of his own days as a junior officer ‘the evenings at our mess often ended in an attack on the quarters of one or other of four lately joined subalterns who had practically had no pretensions to the rank of gentlemen’.¹⁰¹

Ostracism and bullying was one means of maintaining culturally exclusivity, another was the use of formal socio-legal sanction because an officer’s honour was regulated and had to be maintained in military law. A key part of his gentlemanly make-up was also formally governed by military law and dishonourable behaviour could lead to an officer being in serious

⁹⁸ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁹⁹ TNA WO 339/6913 Francis Temple Lancelot Friend.

¹⁰⁰ Major-General Sir H. Rawlinson (1864–1925), then commander of 2nd Infantry Brigade.

¹⁰¹ Garnet Sir Wolseley, *The Story of a Soldier’s Life* (London: Constable, 1903), vol. 1, p. 226. Field Marshal Garnet Joseph Wolseley, (1833–1913). Wolseley condoned group pressure in his memoir, describing how he had helped bully new Ensigns out of his Regiment in the 1850’s.

jeopardy.¹⁰² Officers' behaviour was covered by military law that explicitly linked their conduct to that of a gentleman in that it had a provision for 'disgraceful conduct' described as 'behaving in a scandalous manner, unbecoming the character of an officer and a gentleman.'¹⁰³ Whereas other infringements of military law by officers could carry a range of sentences according to the circumstances, disgraceful conduct had only one outcome — being cashiered.¹⁰⁴ This carried out, or 'promulgated' in military language, meant a wider loss of gentlemanly status. The club membership of a cashiered officer was forfeit, credit was refused and you would be excluded from gentlemanly society.

Cashiering involved a ritual humiliation involving removal of epaulets and insignia in front of other officers, and loss of their honour meant that they could never 'serve the crown again'.¹⁰⁵ They could never serve in any of the armed services or be employed as a civil servant, police officer, or postman. Cashiered, removed, and dismissed officers or those forced to resign were all kept on a 'blacklist' held by the Military Secretary, prohibiting any future service. The threat of conviction could be used to lever a resignation. The implications for ungentlemanly officers, particularly commissioned from the ranks, was that they were always on the cusp of ungentlemanly behaviour and being excluded.

It was simple task to manufacture evidence when an officer did not meet the gentlemanly requirements of a regiment. The threat of cashiering led to the resignation of Richard Phillips,

¹⁰² For a description, see Arthur N. Gilbert, "Law and Honour among Eighteenth-Century British Army Officers," *The Historical Journal* 19, no. 01 (1976). See also; War Office, *Manual of Military Law* (London: HMSO, 1907).

¹⁰³ Part I, section 16 of the Army Act Stipulates that an officer would be chaired for disgraceful conduct a scandalous manner, unbecoming the character of an officer and a gentleman."

¹⁰⁴ The term 'cashiered' originated when British army officers purchased commissions. It meant that the money or cash paid for the commission was forfeit, as they could not "sell-out". The commission purchase price was a cash bond for gentlemanly behaviour, forfeited to the army's cashiers (accountants) in the event of cowardice, desertion or ungentlemanly conduct. Richard Holmes, *Redcoat: The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket* (London: Harper Collins, 2001) p. 159.

¹⁰⁵ For a description of an officer being cashiered, see S. Gibbs and R. Devonald-Lewis, *From the Somme to the Armistice: The Memoirs of Captain Stormont Gibbs, MC* (London: Kimber, 1986).

returning from three years serving in West Africa. Phillips was commissioned into the Connaught Rangers from the Northumberland Fusiliers in 1906. He served with the WAFF from 1909 until May 1912. In August, he was accused of being drunk on duty, based on the evidence of two NCOs, although a medical officer who saw him said that he was not drunk when examined. Phillips was ‘allowed’ to resign his commission.¹⁰⁶

It was the ‘honour economy’, that functioned in the mess and more broadly through purchases of uniform, equipment, and personal expenses that placed officer commissioned from the ranks most at risk. A cheque was a matter of honour; the signatory ‘promised’ to pay the bearer, and cheques had to be ‘honoured’. A single ‘bounced’ cheque that could not be honoured could lead to an officer being cashiered. The framework in which this operated was what Matt Houlbrook has described as the ‘patrician culture of credit based on deference and trust’.¹⁰⁷ This economy, based on deference and trust, shaped by the codes of gentlemanliness, appearance and behaviour, was staunchly defended before the war, to the extent that a dishonoured cheque was one of the most serious breaches of the honour code.

The officer commissioned from the ranks, on becoming a gentleman, had to address the social and financial demands of regimental life and entered a new world of personal finance, requiring them to use an ‘army agent’, one of the most successful being Cox and Co.¹⁰⁸ Payment by cheque demanded officers keep their own records but the system depended on funds being available to ‘honour’ cheques and credit being allowed by some suppliers. When John Lucy attended his first mess dinner, he was immediately given suggestions for tailors: ‘They each

¹⁰⁶ TNA WO 339/6671 Richard Graham Phillips.

¹⁰⁷ Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁸ Cox & Co was founded in 1758 to manage bank accounts of army officers. It had offices in India, Egypt and Burma. The London Charing Cross office was open continuously during the war, ‘cashing cheques around the clock for officers returning from the Front.’ The London branch had around 250,000 officers on its books. At the height of the conflict 50,000 cheques a day were cleared. See: <http://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/Our-Group/our-heritage/our-history/lloyds-bank/coxs--kings-army-agents/>. Accessed March 1, 2017.

recommended my own tailors — good tailors, who would let you run a long account.’¹⁰⁹

Managing this credit was crucial and difficult because an officer was also bearing their share of the overall mess cost, over which they would have had limited control.

Examples from the pre-war era illustrate the vulnerability of the officer commissioned from the ranks to being excluded. John Birkby, the son of an NCO, was commissioned from the Cheshire Regiment into the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry in 1910.¹¹⁰ His father had been a sergeant-major in the Cheshire Regiment and instrumental in helping his son’s career. In early 1914, while stationed in India he had three cheques written for his mess bills returned. He was immediately arrested because of all forms of financial impropriety — not paying mess bills was regarded as the worst. He escaped arrest, but this was added to the list of charges for which he was later court-martialled. In June 1914, he was cleared of the charges related to the cheques. He was, however, found guilty of conduct unbecoming of a gentleman because of his escape. His father pleaded that if he was found guilty, he should be allowed to resign rather than face the ignominy of being cashiered. The court-martial recommended leniency; however, the Commander in Chief of India where he was stationed said that he ‘had to be made an example of’,¹¹¹

Ambrose Gaye enlisted in the East Yorkshire Regiment in 1900 and was commissioned into the West Riding Regiment in 1903. While serving in India with his regiment, he cashed five cheques that he had insufficient funds to cover. When under arrest, he also attempted to escape. He was found guilty of ‘scandalous conduct unbecoming of an officer and gentleman’ at a court-martial in Calcutta and was cashiered.¹¹² James Carroll was commissioned into the

¹⁰⁹ Lucy, *There’s a Devil in the Drum*, p. 35.

¹¹⁰ TNA WO 339/7657 John Spearman D’Hautville Birkby.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² TNA WO 339/6316 Ambrose Gaye.

Connaught Rangers from the South Lancashire Regiment in 1906 but after only a few months was ‘removed for absence without leave’.¹¹³ Caroll became a *cause célèbre* when it was revealed that he had re-enlisted in the ranks of the Royal Irish Rifles, had been discovered, and discharged.¹¹⁴ Interviewed by the press, Carroll’s main complaint was that he had not been commissioned into the ASC, where messing would have been affordable, and that the Army Council refused to countenance a return to the ranks. Carroll said ‘I have no moneyed or influential relations that I could appeal to. All I can do is go to America and join the army there.’¹¹⁵

Other pre-war officers commissioned from the ranks went absent from duty, avoiding the ignominy of cashiering, and were ‘removed from the service’ because they could no longer afford their mess bill and were in debt. Clement Archie Ridley, for example, lieutenant and adjutant in the Hampshire Regiment in 1911, suddenly disappeared five years after his commission with unpaid bills.¹¹⁶ He emigrated to Canada. Lewis Charles Howard, the son of a retired quarter-master sergeant from the East Lancashire Regiment, spent nearly eight years in the ranks of the Royal Field Artillery before he was commissioned into the Berkshire Regiment in 1903.¹¹⁷ 18 months later, he was ‘removed from the service for absence without leave.’ He travelled to the USA and became a successful actor. Others without explanation ‘resigned’: Henry Joseph Dundas, commissioned into the Norfolk Regiment in 1903, had served three tours in West Africa and faced the prospect of a return to his Regiment in 1912.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ TNA WO 339/6475 James Carroll.

¹¹⁴ “No Longer Required,” *Lancashire Evening Post*, November 9, 1906.

¹¹⁵ It is not known whether Carroll went to the USA. On the outbreak of war, Carroll enlisted in the Kings Liverpool Regiment on 4 August 1914 and was still serving as 3757972 Sergeant James Caroll in 1924.

¹¹⁶ WO 339/6626 Clement Archie Ridley & Library and Archives of Canada; Ridley, Archie, RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 8271–39.

¹¹⁷ Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis Charles Howard, see: http://www.amounderness.co.uk/lieutenant-colonel_lewis_charles_howard,_december_1915.html. Accessed March 1, 2017. He returned to Britain in 1914 and was commissioned into the York and Lancaster Regiment.

¹¹⁸ TNA WO 339/6135 Henry Joseph Dundas.

He resigned ‘for financial reasons.’ Two ranker officers, George Bush and George Nelson resigned their commissions while in India and took up civil employment.¹¹⁹ Robert Parkinson gave up his commission after two years and became a surveyor in Venezuela.¹²⁰

Gentlemen-officers, particularly those from the poorer gentry could also fall foul of the honour economy. Patrick Graham was the son of a major-general from the Indian army, commissioned into the Essex Regiment from the Worcestershire Regiment in 1912.¹²¹ Graham’s Regiment was serving in India, and he was cashiered in March 1913, convicted of desertion and embezzlement, barely a year after joining them. Graham left for Canada and joined the North West Mounted Police. Gentlemen-officers were less at risk generally because they belonged to socio-economic groups allowed credit and able to help one another. A well-known example was Douglas Haig who, in 1899, loaned £2,000 to John French when he had financial difficulties.¹²²

The social consequences of being cashiered were profound and most disgraced officers commissioned from the ranks pre-war, emigrated to the USA, British colonies, and other countries where they could reconstruct their identity.¹²³ For instance, William Archer Douglas resigned his commission one year after being commissioned from the ranks in 1906 and emigrated to the USA where he became an author, newspaper correspondent, film actor and director.¹²⁴ The use of military law against ranker officers was rare during the war. The practicalities of living within the ‘honour economy’ would have been made possible by the

¹¹⁹ TNA WO 374/11310 George Bush and TNA WO 339/7543 George Chedley Nelson.

¹²⁰ TNA WO 374/52297 Robert Herwald Parkinson.

¹²¹ TNA WO 339/8111 Patrick Frederick Irving Graham.

¹²² Walter Reid, *Architect of Victory: Douglas Haig* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2011), p. 91.

¹²³ Anne M. Windholz, “An Emigrant and a Gentleman: Imperial Masculinity, British Magazines, and the Colony That Got Away,” *Victorian Studies* 42, no. 4 (1999).

¹²⁴ TNA WO 339/6447 William Archer Douglas. He was commissioned into the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers from the South Lancashire Regiment in 1906. See William Archer Sholto Douglas, *Long John Murray: A Novel of Northern Ireland* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1936); Robert Joseph Casey and William Archer Sholto Douglas, *Pioneer Railroad: The Story of the Chicago and North Western System* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1948).

presence of ranker officers in lower-status regiments where, generally, messing costs were managed and additional allowances paid. The context of war may also have made policing infringements less rigorous because, as analysed later, the incidence of ranker officers being forced to resign or cashiered rose after the war. This suggests that use of ungentlemanly conduct in military law was both socio-legal and cultural in regulating the exclusion of officers commissioned from the ranks.

As late as 1955, the House of Commons was debating the clause in the Army Act that caused officers to be cashiered, for scandalous and ‘ungentlemanly’ conduct. Brigadier Prior-Palmer MP defended the clause and the use of idea of a ‘gentleman’ to determine the appropriate conduct of an officer:

For many years, I, as an officer, suffered from the attempts of Socialist Members in this House and others outside it to do everything in their power to reduce the authority of officers. I am now suggesting that of all the inverted snobberies of which I have ever heard, this one — of the Socialist Party now championing the case of an officer, and trying to reduce the disgrace of his sentence, when he commits crimes which are not, and ought not to be, tolerated by an officer in the British Army — is the most object humbug I have ever listened to.¹²⁵

The persistence of professional identity being safeguarded by an ideal was an affirmation that the officer still had to be a gentleman. Being cashiered during the war was regarded as a more of a disgrace and deterrent than a lengthy prison sentence.¹²⁶ For the ranker officer it was also a sentence with catastrophic economic consequences, the loss of a pension.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how cultural rituals governing regimental and mess participation shaped the experiences of officers commissioned from the ranks; where they were commissioned, how they were treated, the possibility of belonging, and coping with the

¹²⁵ HC Deb 09 February 1955 vol 536 cc1992–2017. The motion to remove the clause was defeated.

¹²⁶ Ian Beckett, Timothy Bowman, Mark Connelly, *The British Army in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p. 82.

challenges of military life. The regimental system, with culturally manufactured traditions, promoted competition through a hierarchy of exclusiveness in which Guards and Cavalry regiments were pre-eminent. Using economic privilege and ostentatiousness, they remained exclusive and resistant to officers commissioned from the ranks, even during the war. For the ordinary infantry regiments and artillery, ranker officers were to become essential to maintaining professional and military cohesion. The dissonance this created with cultural attitudes within the officer class required that a secretly pre-planned approach was explained as a spontaneous response to gallantry, heroic status qualifying rankers to become officers — at least in the context of war. Structural changes supported this narrative, particularly commissioning into their own regiment and making messing affordable for the ranker officer.

The cultural practices of the mess maintained the gentlemanly identity of the officer. This homosocial world was one of several domestic spaces in institutions that gentlemen created and occupied and that shared practices and claims to exclusivity. Institutions, such as public schools, gentlemen's clubs, and senior common rooms, were architecturally and culturally gendered places that gentlemen could seamlessly navigate.¹²⁷ These gendered spaces were also political places that 'routinely engage in exclusionary practices' that helped members accumulate 'personal power and social capital that is unavailable to outsiders'.¹²⁸ The ranker officer, and later lower-class temporary officers, had to adapt to gentlemanly mess culture that remained resilient throughout the war. The ranker officer was only present in the mess on sufferance of their martial and professional skills — a short-term expedient — and as ranker officers consolidated their presence and other types of officers became more commonplace,

¹²⁷ Mary Costello, "Adolf Loos's Kärtner Bar: Reception, Reinvention, Reproduction," in *The Viennese Café and Fin-De-Siecle Culture*, ed. Charlotte Ashby, Tag Gronberg, and Simon Shaw-Miller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), p. 142.

¹²⁸ D. E. Kendall, *Members Only: Elite Clubs and the Process of Exclusion* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

the discomfort of the traditional officer class increased. In the next chapter, we will see the response to this and how the ranker office became caricatured.

Chapter Five

Presentation of the Ranker Officer

This chapter reviews the development of a distinct and discrete ranker officer identity created by gentlemen-officers, as it emerged during and after the First World War. It contrasts the necessity of the few officers commissioned from the ranks before the war to conform to a gentlemanly identity with the way ‘difference’ from that identity caused a new form of officer to be represented: the ranker officer. The officers’ mess encapsulated the social world of the British army in microcosm and, through examining it, the way social and cultural differences were maintained becomes clear. These differences had more weight than military effectiveness in shaping identity and hence they are addressed here first. The commissioning of officers from the ranks of the pre-war regular army disrupted the way the officer class imagined itself, which as we have seen, was well developed and resistant to change. A large part of the identity of the gentleman-officer rested on ‘appearance’, a component neglected by historians, although ‘bodily self-control and the appearance of command have represented some of the most fundamental components of class.’¹ The ability of gentlemen-officers to regulate their exclusive identity was compromised in the war by the need for military competence; reluctantly it had to shift from an emphasis on ‘appearances’, a sudden reversal of a trend that had escalated through the Victorian era.

These appearances were a broad set of performances in which class and military status were located and concerned uniform, demeanour, mannerism, posture, movement, accent, and speech, all things we might understand as front or facade. The genesis of this was the emphasis

¹ Simon Gunn, “Translating Bourdieu: Cultural Capital and the English Middle Class in Historical Perspective,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 56, no. 1 (2005).

on self-control as integral to ideas of Victorian and pre-war manliness. Appearances had taken on a major symbolic value, ‘a person’s external image, had constituted evidence of his or her internal spirit and was an essential proof of gentility.² Confronted by the invasion of officers from different social backgrounds, the officer-gentleman began accentuating the differences between the expected, normative performance and appearances, and those exhibited by this alternative type of officer. This led to a new and ‘lesser’ form of officer identity, the ranker officer, being formed.

Much of this shaping of identity happened within the officers’ mess, a cultural milieu where identities were moulded, and, in the case of officers commissioned from the ranks, relegated them into the ‘ranker officer’ identity. A picture of how this was achieved is made possible through looking at the characteristics of officers commissioned from the ranks before the war, and how these enabled them to be assimilated into a gentlemanly identity. This assimilation involved those without the prerequisite attributes that could be learned or bought quickly acquiring them, particularly uniform, demeanour, speech, and posture. This can be contrasted with the less pliable attributes of ‘ranker officers’ that conflicted with their assimilation, for instance, their age, allowing them to be differentiated and given an alternative status to regular officers as the war progressed. This ‘othering’ of ranker officers during and in the years following the end of the war was a culturally determined process that ensured the dominance and resilience of the public-school educated subaltern identity.

Studies of masculinity have sharpened our understanding of changing middle- and upper-class masculinities in an industrialising and urbanising Britain in the nineteenth century.³ John Tosh

² Linda Young, *Middle Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia, and Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2003), p. 112.

³ John Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914,” *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2012).

notes ‘In an economy committed to the free market, the work ethic, the cultivation of the domestic sphere, and the curtailment of interpersonal violence, all had their place.’⁴ These shifts in masculinity were not uniform. The army, performing an imperial function, was a domain where ‘redundant masculinities could flourish, both in fantasy and in actual experience’ and the pressures that were moulding bourgeois masculinity could be avoided.⁵ The character of the soldier’s manliness lay in what Tosh has described as ‘its early modern origins as an external code of conduct, policed by one’s peers. Its core attributes were physical vigour, energy and resolution, courage, and straightforwardness.’ This form of manliness was permitted to exist through the imperial commitment, ‘an unequivocal avowal of “hard” masculinity, a means of evading the charge of failed manhood. The highly gendered military enterprise ‘reinforced a man’s sense of his own masculinity, not only in his own estimation, but more importantly in the eyes of others.’⁶

Tosh’s martial masculinity is generalised, and, at its intersection with class, there appears several possible variants, the most dominant of which is the gentleman-officer. The army officer identity incorporated Tosh’s attributes of ‘manliness’ but subsumed them in a variant: ‘gentle-manliness’. The evidence discussed about the identity of the NCO conforms to the model of resolution, courage, and straightforwardness, qualities that had earned them promotion to senior NCO rank. This chapter will argue that the ranker officer was respected for his ‘manliness’ but deficient in the attributes that affirmed gentility.

This chapter will look at the culturally determined ‘presentation of the self’ expected of gentleman-officers in respect of youthfulness, physique, sexuality, and uniform, extending the

⁴ Ibid. p. 342.

⁵ Ibid. Tosh states that ‘the appeal of empire to men might be summed up by saying that it represented an unequivocal assertion of masculinity, a place where autonomy could be achieved without constant negotiation with the opposite sex. As a powerful rhetorical reinforcement of “difference,” its appeal was particularly strong when conditions for the attainment of masculinity in Britain became problematic.’ p. 342.

⁶ Ibid. p. 342.

idea of Quintin Colville, in his work on the Royal Navy, that these attributes including the material culture of uniform, serve a function of ‘defining and communicating particular understandings of class and masculinity’.⁷ In addition to these material components, other characteristics such as accent, mannerism, demeanour, coolness, and emotional detachment were distinguishing behaviours that differentiated gentlemanly masculinity from that of the NCO. The attributes concentrated on in this chapter are primarily physical appearance and speech because these were the principal means by which traditional regular officers came to differentiate themselves from ranker officers because external facade was understood to reflect inner character and self-control. These qualities are the most regularly remarked upon in written contemporary, and subsequent narratives, about what differentiated a ranker officer. They are, therefore, derived from analysing the narratives and not an analytical model. They may not completely capture every nuance of what constituted the ranker officer identity as it emerged. The problem of language and discourse is considered in depth, as it was employed to represent a coarser, ungentlemanly masculinity, caricatured as a ranker officer, and in the ‘cultural confusion’ of the war remained an important arbiter of binary class difference between the gentleman and the rest. One of the principle routes to achieving this was to mock him.

1) Presentation as an officer

Gerald de Groot has observed ‘Beautiful manners and impeccable dress symbolised moral virtue and “clean” soul, or, in the case of a soldier, an impressively appointed uniform suggests courage, honour, self-sacrifice and, again, loyalty [...].’⁸ Hence, one of the most important and complex tasks confronting any new officer, and particularly an officer commissioned from

⁷ Quintin Colville, “Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer: The Role of Uniform in Shaping the Class- and Gender-Related Identities of British Naval Personnel, 1930–1939,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Sixth Series)*, 13 (2003). The term ‘presentation of self’ is used to convey the performance aspect of being an officer; youthfulness, physique, sexuality and uniform being choreographed.

⁸ Gerard J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (Harlow: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1996), p. 35.

the ranks coming from outside the cultural milieu of the mess, was to dress properly. The accoutrements of a newly commissioned officer were extensive. The uniform had evolved into attire that served limited practical use; it was designed to flaunt masculinity and status and to symbolise honour and regimental affiliation. Military outfitters supplied tailored made-to-measure uniforms for officers. Military tailors, such as Messers. Hawkes and Co were in Piccadilly or Savile Row, London and offered their services to gentlemen, acquiring extra esteem if they had royal patronage for provision of military uniforms.⁹ Acquisition of the uniform was a demanding personal experience, being measured and fitted by an experienced and knowledgeable tailor; ‘kitting out’ an officer was a ritualised process, and a tailor would be close to his officer both in dressing him and keeping his personal measurements. Books and pamphlets advised officers on their needs, and a typical list for an infantry officer might read as ‘Scarlet tunic, mess jacket and waist coat, blue patrol jacket, gold laced dress trousers, underdress trousers (two pairs), great coat and can, full dress sash, underdress sash, full dress sword belt, undress sword belt, helmet, forage cap, sword (with full-dress and undress knots), gloves (two pairs), and waterproof cloak.’¹⁰ The cavalry officer had to provide for a ‘saddle, and horse furniture’, and there were variations in this list, according to arm of the service or regiment. For instance, Highland regiments would include a Claymore and bag, dirk, skean dhu, brooch, shoe buckles Kilt, shawl, and so forth.¹¹ The newly commissioned officer had also to purchase a range of military books, bedding, valises, and even furniture from specialist

⁹ In 1912, Hawkes and Co. moved to Savile Row. In 1972, they merged with Gieves, a specialist Naval outfitter and continue to provide military uniforms. See <http://www.gievesandhawkes.com>. Accessed October 1, 2016. See also a V&A commissioned article: ‘London: Home of Menswear; The History and Heritage’. See <http://fashion.telegraph.co.uk/news-features/TMG10110698/London-the-original-menswear-capital.html>. Accessed March 5, 2017.

¹⁰ Captain George John Younghusband, *The Queen’s Commission: How to Prepare for It, How to Obtain It, and How to Use It* (London: Murray, 1891), p. 195. The broad outline of clothing and equipment described in this book was relevant through to the First World War.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

suppliers.¹² The uniform and accoutrements with it only had a use when in Britain or India as active service demanded more utilitarian dress, and regarding the recommended uniform cadets were advised by George Younghusband:

These are all peace uniforms. The moment he goes on service, the British officer discards all, or nearly all, these garments and provides himself with a ‘field service kit.’ This is not an expensive outfit, and is best procured on the spot, especially if the campaign is in India, from the master tailor of the regiment, or from local shops. Belts of the required pattern are also obtainable locally as a rule, as well as agent, camp bed, and other campaigning necessities.¹³

Thus, the ‘uniform’ had only limited practical purposes, and was a costume that drew in historical meanings, references, and implied status. To be accepted into the officer class, having the appropriate uniform was essential. Being able to afford a uniform, equipment, and living expenses in the pre-war era was often tested by commanding officers considering anyone for a commission, although it was deemed not a formal requirement. As with William Robertson, who had his father make his uniform in the nineteenth century, paternal support was often necessary for the officer commissioned from the ranks.¹⁴ William Batchelor, a retired honorary officer spent £150 on uniform for his son and had his own sword re-hilted to meet new regulations, when his son was commissioned from the ranks in 1906.¹⁵ The war relieved some of the financial pressure, since field uniform was not as expensive and there were not the demands for extensive mess dress. However, conformity, particularly qualitative, was essential. Samuel Bassett, commissioned from the ranks in 1915, reported that he was told to buy at specialist outfitters aligned to his regiment and was told ‘The important thing is that you don’t look different from the other officers. Buy your sword at Wilkinson’s, and have your

¹² See, for example, Thomas White & Son <http://www.housefraserarchive.ac.uk/company/?id=c1612>. Accessed October 17, 2016.

¹³ Younghusband, *The Queen’s Commission: How to Prepare for It, How to Obtain It, and How to Use It*, p. 200.

¹⁴ John Terraine, “‘Wully’ Field Marshal Sir William Robertson Bart,” in *1914–1918 Essays on Leadership and War*, ed. Ann Clayton (Berkshire: The Western Front Association, 1998).

¹⁵ TNA WO 339/6538 Valentine Batchelor.

boots hand-made.¹⁶ The dress sword carried by most officers on parade or at mess functions had an entirely ceremonial function. Symbolising an officers' honour, it represented the legacy of legislation from King Charles restoration in 1662 that 'effectively transferred exclusive control of the power of the sword to the country gentry'. It was this legacy that meant it remained a symbol of a gentleman's 'right to bear arms' and synonymous with the gentleman's identity in uniform.¹⁷ The sword carried by the infantry officer was largely redundant as weapon by 1914 since its reflection on the battlefield in the Anglo-Boer war caused many officers to be identified as such and shot.¹⁸

Ranker officers commissioned in the war, particularly those already in the various theatres of war, were spared the immediate necessity of having full mess dress, but it was implicit that they should acquire it and dress appropriately when stationed in Britain at depots or garrisons. Mess dress decorum was still expected in 1917, as the war progressed there was no letting up on standards. John Lucy, on becoming a ranker officer, observed the following about regimental mess uniform: 'Uniform had to be meticulously correct, and cranks in the form of senior officers, watched on narrowly for faults in dress. As a young officer one felt accused of something like murder when the condemning finger of a senior pointed to the necktie, slightly to the wrong shade.'¹⁹ This example shows how the smallest breaches in sartorial code were obsessively policed.

The core officers' mess uniform without its adornments mirrored the middle-class civilian suit that had become standardised in the late eighteenth century. The officers' dress suit worn in

¹⁶ Samuel John Bassett was commissioned into the Royal Marines on the 25 August 1915. Samuel John Woodruff Bassett, *Royal Marine. The Autobiography of Colonel Sam Bassett*, (London: Peter Davies, 1962), p. 40.

¹⁷ J. L. Malcolm, *To Keep and Bear Arms: The Origins of an Anglo-American Right* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 57–76.

¹⁸ Anthony Clayton, *The British Officer: Leading the Army from 1660 to the Present* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2006), p. 147.

¹⁹ John F. Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1993), p. 354.

the army mess was a dress form reproduced in a range of other upper-middle-class institutional habitats. Colville, looking at the Navy, in the inter-war period observes ‘the suit (in its many forms) was also the building block of a sartorial code to which men who occupied positions of power and prestige in British society during this period invariably conformed, whether members of parliament or consultant physicians.²⁰ This interpretation is clearly applicable to the army officer’s mess dress in the early twentieth century. This form of address was a key representation of ‘upper-middle-class qualities of leadership ability, self-discipline and restraint’, and it also allowed gentlemen to move between clubs, messes and other places where gentlemen congregated and wanted reassurance that they were with equals.²¹

It is clear many officers commissioned from the ranks of the regular army could afford their uniforms from gentlemen’s outfitters during the war through the system of uniform grants, but the war heralded a wider range of uniform qualities and prices, creating cheaper alternatives. Many of the pre-war field uniform adornments were sacrificed since they identified officers who were priority targets for snipers. However, even the quality and cut of an officer’s field uniform denoted his financial and class status. This quote from a private soldier in September, 1918 is illustrative:

We, the Oxfords, took over Junction Post from the Glosters, and I clearly remember walking around and finding the bodies of two officers whose records I took out of their pockets. One was Captain Eric Harvey and the other was Lieutenant Jackson. Harvey was dressed in that fine greenish khaki commonly worn by officers, but Jackson’s uniform was comparatively new and his tunic was of that inferior cloth (a kind of brownish serge) often worn by officers promoted from the ranks and not very well off.²²

²⁰ Colville, “Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer” p. 110.

²¹ Ibid. p.110.

²² Arthur S. Bullock, *Gloucestershire between the Wars: A Memoir* (History Press Limited, 2009), p. 75. Jackson had been commissioned from the Essex Regiment in March 1918 and was a New Army recruit rather than pre-war regular.

This observation shows that there were variety of officer's uniforms, and an officer's class could be determined from what they wore. The cut, colour, and cloth were important in denoting status and, in this example, it shows how it was used by the ranks to distinguish a poorer, lower-class officer. The officer could add to his wardrobe if he could afford it. The trench coat is an example of an optional item of dress, privately purchased by officers and prohibited to other ranks.²³

The cessation of war saw the demands for uniform etiquette return; this meant that officers would have to have a large wardrobe of uniforms for the field, parades, and the mess. As the war ended, the implications of uniform costs returned for ranker officers. In 1918, Samuel Warne expressed concern at the advent of peacetime messing, and thought it would be difficult for artillery ranker officers to meet the cost of full-dress uniform in the mess.²⁴ The ranker officer subsisting just on their salary would have difficulty meeting the requirements of the material culture the peacetime officer. It was clear to Warne that by 1918 the social and cultural standards expected of officers were undiminished and cessation of the war would see expectations rigorously policed.

The army officer had multiple uniforms and each contained discrete cultural meanings. The masculine-gentlemanly interpretation of mess dress was shared with 'suits' in similar settings, but lavish parade uniforms were of great importance to the elite regiments of the army. These uniforms served to enhance men's masculine appearance, devices such as epaulets widening the shoulders, hats and pin stripes raising their height.²⁵ In addition, mounted officers were 'elevated', and their uniforms displayed above everyone as they were all expected to be

²³ Peter Doyle, *The First World War in 100 Objects* (Stroud: History Press, 2014).

²⁴ Samuel Warne 6197 R.G.A. (S.W.), "The Ranker Officer," *Royal United Services Institution Journal* 63, no. 451 (1918).

²⁵ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 128.

competent horsemen and would ride horses on parade. Whilst functioning ‘as an active component in the creation’ of the gentleman-officer in the internal institutional sphere, the officers’ uniform, much more than that of the navy, reflected and consolidated the linkage of the institution to far wider socio-cultural worlds.²⁶ The parade uniform of British officers in the British and Indian armies was conspicuous at the Delhi Durbar, a mass assembly at Coronation Park, Delhi, to proclaim George V and Queen Mary as emperor and empress of India.²⁷ The concentration of 26,000 Indian and British soldiers for the Durbar, only three years before the outbreak of the war in Europe, reflects the power of parading an army to convey institutional and Imperial dominance.²⁸

Stepping into a uniform transformed identity both in terms of how the gentleman-officer appeared to others, and how he appeared to himself. The uniform was a symbolic statement of power, prestige, and belonging. Harking back to his early days as a newly commissioned officer at Woolwich, Joseph Maria Gordon wrote:

Straight away from the strict discipline of the ‘Shop,’ the young officer found himself — or at least considered himself — quite a gentleman at large. In his own opinion he had become a person of very considerable importance, and the orders he gave had to be implicitly obeyed. His uniform was a source of extreme pleasure to him. He was allotted a whole ‘Tommy’ to himself as a soldier servant. He rejoiced in the possession of quite a big room for his quarters. And there was the Mess.²⁹

This quote conveys several meanings. His commission confirms his gentlemanly status, his importance and his authority; he expects to be ‘implicitly obeyed’. The uniform informed his self-belief and from where he derived his sense of moral authority. His uniform was a key part of the ‘militarisation’ of gentlemanliness. The soldier-servant was effectively his ‘valet’:

²⁶ Colville, “Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer”, p. 106.

²⁷ John William Fortescue, *Narrative of the Visit to India of Their Majesties, King George V. And Queen Mary: And of the Coronation Durbar Held at Delhi, 12th December, 1911* (London: Macmillan, 1912).

²⁸ Stephen Bottomore, “‘An Amazing Quarter Mile of Moving Gold, Gems and Genealogy’: Filming India’s 1902/03 Delhi Durbar,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 4 (1995).

²⁹ Joseph Maria Gordon, *The Chronicles of a Gay Gordon* (London: Cassell & Co., 1921), p.62.

allocated to each officer, they were primarily concerned with caring for his uniform, cleaning his boots, helping him shave and bathe. Thus, Quintin Colville has observed ‘Social position was consequently expressed not only in the form of clothing but in the relationship to clothing.’³⁰

The uniform was a gendered identity that implied prowess. A pre-war regular ‘colonel’, coaching new officers in the war, is attributed as saying:

We were very pretty in those days. I rejoiced in my figure, which, as with all fashionable officers, was kept in order by common or garden corsets. When we went out in review order we were a sight for the girls and ‘the mob.’ The men were just as smart. Indeed, a battalion looked like a thousand dandies out of a cutter’s window. I have an affection for that aspect of the past. It is no crime to be a well-dressed man. Even today it is most important that an officer should look the picture of a clean, alert, and well-groomed gentleman.³¹

The uniform described in this way is part of what has been described as a ‘near fetishistic reverence’ for appearance, exemplified by reference to a military corset that continued to be fashionable at the beginning of the twentieth century.³² High collars and other aspects of uniforms that exaggerated a slim profile still outweighed the practicalities of comfort and everyday use. The manly esteem derived from looking attractive had been explicitly noted in *The Soldiers Pocket Book for Field Service*: ‘The Duke of Wellington said of his officers in Spain, that many of his best men were the greatest dandies. The better you dress a soldier, the more highly he will be thought of by women, and consequently by himself.’³³ The ‘dandy’ was a mid-Victorian model of masculine identity, a form of manliness that featured theatricality,

³⁰ Colville, “Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer”, p. 113.

³¹ R. W. Campbell, *John Brown: Confessions of a New Army Cadet* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1919), pp. 134–5. This was attributed to the ‘Dear Old Commandant’ of a New Army Cadet Officer Training School, sometime during the First World War. A ‘cutter’ works with a tailor, measures clients, advises on fashion, and cuts cloth.

³² Matt Houlbrook, “Soldier Heroes and Rent Boys: Homosex, Masculinities, and Britishness in the Brigade of Guards, Circa 1900–1960,” *Journal of British Studies* 42, no. 03 (2003); D. Kunzle, *Fashion and Fetishism* (History Press, 2006). See Chapter 4: Kunzel describes the military ‘as the last bastion of the corset’.

³³ Garnet Wolseley, *The Soldier’s Pocket-Book for Field Service* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1886), p. 4.

dress, and language and noted for ‘charismatic self-presentation’.³⁴ It became unfashionable partly because it conflicted with the lack of self-consciousness expected of the ideal gentleman, and an association with effeminacy.³⁵ An affinity between the gentleman-officer and dandyism clearly existed for the ‘colonel’ who still felt there was an important issue of presentation of the officer, who should look a ‘picture’, but in his new incarnation, as a ‘clean, alert, and well-groomed gentleman’.

The symbolic power of the uniform was important to individual, regimental, and army identity. When political forces overruled the refusal of the commanding colonel of the elitist King’s Royal Rifle Corps to commission John Dimmer from the ranks, his commission was allowed, provided arrangements were made ‘that did not mean he would wear the uniform’ of the regiment.³⁶ The removal of officers from regiments was explicitly to prevent them wearing the regimental uniform, and hence they were dispatched to colonial service such as the WAFF. In the navy, uniform was ‘deeply implicated in a process that differentiated between officers and ratings’ and implied authority.³⁷ In the army, the uniform performed that function but also embodied the regiment, differentiating it from others. The investment in the uniform’s relative status was closely linked to selflessness, putting the regiments needs above those of the individual.³⁸ The uniform was invested with tradition: the KRRC had, as other regiments a unique uniform, their ‘green jacket’ as a symbol of status and authority.³⁹ Policing who wore it was essential to maintaining their authority of the ranks and also their military and public status.

³⁴ James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995).

³⁵ Ibid., p. 186.

³⁶ TNA WO 339/7052 John Henry Stephen Dimmer.

³⁷ Colville, “Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer”, p. 106.

³⁸ Lewis Butler, *The Annals of the King’s Royal Rifle Corps* (London: J. Murray, 1913).

³⁹ Lewis Butler, *The Annals of the King’s Royal Rifle Corps: Vol 2 ‘the Green Jacket’* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2013).

The power embedded in an officer's uniform is demonstrable through the importance attached to it when an officer was cashiered and subject to a 'degradation' ceremony.⁴⁰ Before the First World War, these were ceremonies carried out in front of the regiment, central to which was the disruption of their uniform, with the destruction of the symbols of officer status — epaulettes, badges, and insignia torn off and finally their sword would be broken. The symbolic reverence of the uniform is illustrated as recently as 2004, when General Sir Michael Jackson in discussing an accusation against British soldiers, observed 'If proven, the perpetrators are not fit to wear the Queen's uniform. They have besmirched the good name of the Army and its honour.'⁴¹ The uniform and sword of an officer represented the honour of an officer, and an attack on an officer's honour could take the form of an attack on his uniform. Francis Friend, an officer commissioned from the ranks into the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in 1907, was constantly harangued by his junior officers policing the social boundaries of the regiment, concerned about his past in the ranks. His riposte, that effectively ended his career, was to destroy the uniform and break the sword of an officer who had been his main tormentor.⁴²

The uniform and physique combined to assert a physical presence. The identity of a young officer was built around this combination, and it is clear from Ian Hamilton's view in 1910 that conformity to this ideal informed selection from the ranks, when he said he was looking for 'smart young lance-corporals or corporals who play cricket and football; nice looking, smart soldiers'.⁴³ Hamilton anticipated that this model of NCO would have begun to have their 'character', necessary for leadership, formed through their participation in sport.⁴⁴ 'Smart',

⁴⁰ S. Gibbs and R. Devonald-Lewis, *From the Somme to the Armistice: The Memoirs of Captain Stormont Gibbs* (Norwich, Norfolk: Gliddon, 1992). Gibbs describes an officer being cashiered in front of other officers assembled in a room during the First World War. The adjutant cuts off his badges of rank.

⁴¹ *The Telegraph*, 1 May, 2004. Quote in response to photographs of men who appeared to be British soldiers beating and humiliating a bound and hooded Iraqi man.

⁴² TNA WO 339/6913 Francis Temple Lancelot Friend.

⁴³ TNA WO 163–15, Precis No. 453, Supply of Officers on Mobilisation. Memorandum of 4 June 1909, p. 28.

⁴⁴ James Anthony Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, vol. 2 (Routledge, 2013).

youthful individuals defined characteristics that the pre-war officers commissioned from the ranks had to conform to, as reflected in this recommendation by the CO of 1st Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry in 1910, who wrote

I have known this NCO throughout his service in both the 2nd and 1st battalions. He is a fine lad, well spoken, smart in appearance, good at his work and a conscientious worker. I have been in communication with Major-General Sir John Moody who knew his father, late quartermaster, RMLI, who knows his mother whom he describes as a capable woman who has brought up her children well. Corporal Bush has satisfied me that he would be able to receive sufficient allowance to maintain his position as an officer, if, as he wishes, he eventually obtains appointment to the Indian Army.⁴⁵

The fact that Corporal Bush is a ‘fine lad, well-spoken and smart in appearance’, takes precedence over his other qualities. This reference serves to map out both the past and the future of George Bush. Primarily, he can present as an officer, his parental antecedents are not gentrified, but known and approved – he has a military identity and a good mother, he has ‘sufficient’ income in addition to his pay to buy his uniform, and his intention is to go to India where messing will be affordable.

There is no mention of Bush’s leadership qualities because these are implicit in the judgements this commanding officer has made about his appearance. The possibility of his becoming an officer lay in his ability to adopt the uniform, demeanour, mannerism, posture, movement, accent, and speech expected of a gentleman-officer. The First World War shifted the dependency on this identity characterised by youth and physique into more meritocratic considerations, but lurking beneath the surface was the residual idea that appearance was paramount. Appearance or smartness continued to carry powerful connotations of character

⁴⁵ TNA WO 374/11310 George Bush.

and class. Even as late in the war as 1918, regimental sergeant-majors were being recommended because they were ‘a smart looking warrant officer.’⁴⁶

The one physical facet of their appearance that ranker officers could not change was their age. They were much older, and in 1914, the remarkable age difference between ranker officers commissioned who were 30 or 40 years old and their counterparts of a similar rank, still in their early twenties, would have made them noticeable. The officer commissioned from the ranks before the war was on average aged 22 years. The average age of a ranker officer in the war was 31 years, making it harder to assimilate into the bodily expectations of the young army officer. It was possible to learn the demeanour of an officer and demonstrate authority and belonging through uniform, once the hurdle of affordability had been overcome. This was much more difficult for the older ranker officer. Even supposing he could emulate the uniform, age and appearance were different, as one commentator, Alfred Burrage, author of a bestselling book after the war, observed ‘You could always tell them — vulgar beasts who waxed their moustaches, men with thick apoplectic necks, bulging eyes and a deplorable lack of aspirates.’⁴⁷

The basis of Burrage’s attack is discussed later, but it is important to note that he observed ‘you could always tell them’, and makes a point of featuring a facial caricature. The waxed moustache reference, a characteristic ascribed to ‘vulgar beasts’, is a particular reference to the ‘military moustache’ or ‘imperial moustache’ that had been a symbol of military masculinity derived from the ‘Hussar style’, imported in the early nineteenth century from Europe by elite cavalry regiments.⁴⁸ Facial hair and moustaches were widely adopted by civilians in the last

⁴⁶ TNA WO 374/45448 Richard Mabbutt. He was commissioned into the Royal Fusiliers on 6 April 1918. He was an acting captain 20 days later. He was awarded the MC.

⁴⁷ Alfred McLelland Burrage, *War Is War* (London: V. Gollancz Limited, 1930), p. 71.

⁴⁸ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Military Moustache,’ <http://blog.wellcomelibrary.org/2015/11/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-military-moustache/>. Accessed March 11, 2017.

half of the nineteenth century and in the military they arrived as the name ‘Hussars’ and ‘new-fangled firs, feathers and moustaches’ were being adopted.⁴⁹ By 1914 it had taken on a very precise style that can be recognised in the pictures of Gordon, Wolseley and Kitchener.⁵⁰ It was prescribed in Army Orders that men should have an unshaven upper lip.⁵¹ Fashions were in flux by 1913, and while many traditionalists felt and expected their soldiers and officers to wear moustaches, Nevil Macready attempted and failed to have the compulsion lifted since a few officers were choosing to ignore the regulation.⁵² The influx of temporary officers in 1915, who were resistant to being ‘facially militarised’, brought the matter to a head, when two officers who shaved before going on leave were told not to return unless they regrew their moustache, and finally in 1916 when an officer, complaining that any residual marks would damage his acting career when he returned to civil life, was court-martialled.⁵³ Found guilty of ‘conduct unbecoming’, he was sentenced to be cashiered. The adjutant-general, again Macready, would not confirm the court’s decision, and the Army order was amended.⁵⁴

The book, *War is War*, was written in 1930 when waxed moustaches had become unfashionable. Alfred Burrage was using his description of the ‘vulgar beasts who waxed their moustaches’, which ranker officers often did because of their pre-war background, to portray them as an unfashionable anachronism. It also sets them apart from the temporary officers of the war, whom Burrage wished to represent heroically. Frequently overlooked in the historiography of the moustache is the revelation by Macready in his autobiography that the

⁴⁹ Ibid. See also: Alun Withey, “Beards in the Crimean”, Guest Post at Florence Nightingale Museum: <http://www.florence-nightingale.co.uk/2017/01/13/guest-post-dr-alun-withey-beards-in-the-crimean/?v=79cba1185463> accessed 18 April 2017.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid. KR amended to 1 Aug 1914. para.1696 applying to all ranks:

‘The hair of the head will be kept short. The chin and under lip will be shaved, but not the upper lip. Whiskers, if worn, will be of moderate length.’

⁵² Ibid. General Sir Cecil Frederick Nevil Macready (1862–1946). He was then Director of Personal Services (personnel) at the War Office.

⁵³ Nevil Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, vol. 1 (Hutchinson & Company, 1924), pp. 258–9.

⁵⁴ Army Order, AO of 6 Oct 1916. Macready was by then adjutant-general with the British Expeditionary Force.

King only approved the 1916 order with a caveat he would only do so provided ‘Charlie Chaplin’ type moustaches were forbidden.⁵⁵ The ‘toothbrush’ moustache was a late-nineteenth century fashion in the USA, symbolizing modernity, uniformity and technology, the antithesis of the imperial moustache. This flags up how the monarch shaped ‘tradition’ and the presentation of the British army officer, and, again, that differences were important in identifying class, status, and military identity.⁵⁶

The gentleman acquired a manner of ‘dress and walk that symbolised their authority’ through their socialisation in public school and when they were militarised this was further enhanced through the symbolic status of uniform and dress.⁵⁷ By 1914 this had culminated in a very precise performance by the British regimental officer. It was possible for the officer commissioned from the ranks, familiar with seeing this performance and having a military bearing of their own inculcated through drill, to attempt to reproduce this. Yet there were some major obstacles to replicate the expected appearance and performance of the gentleman-officer, the first being economic, particularly before the war. During the war, the pragmatic assertion of professional competence over ‘smartness’ created a dissonance with this performance. The physical dissimilarity, particularly age, made assimilation difficult and allowed the ranker officer to be set apart and caricatured, enabling the policing of social boundaries.

A reoccurring and crucial criticism of ranker officers was for their ‘a deplorable lack of aspirates’, the failure to use the sound of the letter ‘h’ in pronunciation, another crucial piece of evidence as to the class and status of the officer.⁵⁸ The next section will demonstrate that the

⁵⁵ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, 1, p. 259.

⁵⁶ David Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual; The British Monarchy and the Invention of Tradition”, c. 1820-1977,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, (eds.) Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁷ James A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Edwardian Public School* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 174.

⁵⁸ Burrage, *War Is War*, p. 71.

language and discourse of the ranker officer was a key signifier of class and status, and, when incongruous in the mess, had even greater implications that became the focus of differentiation.

2) Sounding like an officer

In reviewing source material from middle- and upper-middle-class British officers, the established class of the gentleman-officer, it is noticeable that condemning and ridiculing speech was one of the most important ways in which they distinguished their class and status, and marked ranker officers as different. This was because codes of gentility were embedded in speech.⁵⁹ Whilst some characteristics of the gentleman, such as manners and etiquette could be learned, speech was a much more challenging obstacle and, for the ranker officer, difficult to imitate. The importance of this in relation to defining class was paramount:

By the early nineteenth century, then, correct pronunciation was an issue of class. And the identification of a ‘best’ pronunciation with a particular social class is given institutional expression by the development of fee paying public school system. In these schools, a pronunciation that may be described as codified grew up, or was cultivated and taught. The desiderata of scholars could at last be put into practice in controlled conditions. But the recipients of this privilege have always been only a tiny minority, a minority drawn primarily from the wealthy and powerful groups in English society. In no other country in the world are pronunciation and social class so closely and clearly linked.⁶⁰

The ‘controlled conditions’ of the public school were replicated in the officers’ mess and inform another cultural indicator of class and membership. The mode of speech of a person had become an increasingly important part of their identity that defined them regionally and in terms of social class.⁶¹ By 1914, a strong regional accent was incongruous with being an officer, a cockney accent being an anathema. The exception was Scotland, where an accent was acceptable but had become anglicised. Regional accent was, on the one hand, a marker of

⁵⁹ Gunn, “Translating Bourdieu”.

⁶⁰ Dick Leith, *A Social History of English* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), p. 55.

⁶¹ The exception was Scotland where an accent was acceptable but had become Anglicised. Speaking Gaelic was not allowed. See Diana Mary Henderson, “A Social and Domestic History of the Kilted and Highland Based Regiments of Foot, 1820–1920” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1986).

working-class status and, on the other, the use of ‘received standard English’ or ‘received pronunciation’ was indicative of the social elite in Britain. Described as a ‘middle-class triumph’, received pronunciation was previously described as ‘public school pronunciation’, its title giving a clear indication of its origins and where it was taught. The public schools had strived to develop and teach a standard form of English that had become a central pillar of the social exclusivity of the gentleman, and that had been achieved by the end of the nineteenth century.⁶² As a code, it served to both act as a symbol of group inclusion and correspondingly, a tool of exclusion.⁶³ Alfred Leach, a linguist and educator, observed its use as a means of discriminating a gentleman from someone who appears to be one, with specific reference to an officer:

I remarked upon this to an English gentleman, an officer, who replied — ‘it’s the greatest blessing in the world, a sure protection against cads. You meet a fellow who is well dressed, behaves himself decently enough, and yet you don’t know exactly what to make of him: but get him talking, and if he trips upon his H’s that settles the question. He’s a chap you’d better be shy of.’⁶⁴

This quote indicates how gentlemen-officers were obsessively benchmarking others regarding their qualities and the growing socio-cultural significance of speech. Alfred Leach had written a book in 1880 that focussed in the use of the letter ‘h’ configuring all ‘good’ speakers as ‘h’ full (the non-localised form) and all ‘bad’ ones as ‘h’— less, affirming a popular binary that translated into class.⁶⁵ The use of ‘h’ that had declined by the nineteenth century was revived by Leach and others who, in the spirit of the revival of ‘Englishness’, saw a line of transmission

⁶² Lynda Mugglestone, *Talking Proper: The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 212–58.

⁶³ P. J. Waller, “Democracy and Dialect, Speech and Class,” ed, P.J.Waller, *Patterns and Social Change in Modern Britain* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987): pp. 16–17. Waller describes speech as a means of ‘communication and ex-communication’.

⁶⁴ Mugglestone, *Talking Proper*, p. 67.

⁶⁵ Alfred Leach, *The Letter H Past, Present, and Future: A Treatise, with Rules for the Silent H Based on Modern Usage, and Notes on Wh* (London: Griffith & Farran, 1880).

from Ancient Greek. This line had been crushed by French language that dominated after the conquest, and ‘when the language of the vanquished began to overcome that of the conqueror, the Aspirate must have entered upon a new era, and H’s again have prevailed in the land.’⁶⁶ This had taken hold in the gentleman-officer class and was recognised as a key indicator that separated them from the ranks. In 1891, Captain Younghusband had advised that three years in the ranks would lead a ‘born gentleman’ to lose the ability to properly use the letter ‘h’ in their speech, with devastating consequences.⁶⁷ Speech was thus a socio-cultural indicator that could define the class and status that was innate to the gentleman but that could also be lost by association with the ranks. Its use as a measure of class origins was particularly acute in the first half of the twentieth century and has continued, emphasising the enduring influence of markers of gentility.

‘Good’ speech was therefore an absolute requirement and constituent of a British army officer’s identity by the outbreak of war. The commissioning of ranker officers in September and October 1914 created a new phenomenon, the accented officer. An early incident in the war illustrates the incongruity of accented officers and what it meant in terms of qualification as an officer and a gentleman. Thomas Butterworth had enlisted in the Royal Engineers in 1912 having two years’ experience in the Territorial Force.⁶⁸ He was well educated (First Class Education Certificate) and was noted in his records for having the ‘capability to be a foreman or supervisor’. He arrived in France on 15 August 1914 and was commissioned into the 4th Battalion Royal Fusiliers on 30 October 1914. At 21 years of age, he was relatively young for a ranker officer, many of those being commissioned at this stage of the war were more seasoned, and therefore looked the part of a second lieutenant. He did not sound like a

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

⁶⁷ Younghusband, *The Queen’s Commission*, p. 52.

⁶⁸ TNA WO339/13825, Thomas Butterworth. He was severely ill after this incident and invalided to England. He was described as a case of traumatic neurasthenia and mental stupor (delusional). Butterworth never recovered and was retired with an 80 per cent disability because of his psychological state.

gentleman-officer; he had been a fitter before enlistment and had a strong ‘northern’ accent, from Manchester. Ten days after his commission, during the first Battle of Ypres, Butterworth, shellshocked and confused, became detached from his company and was found with about 50 ‘stragglers’ on the Menin Road, Ypres. The Provost Marshal, a regular officer acting as a military policeman, took Butterworth back to his unit and observed he ‘had a strong accent and did not speak like an educated gentleman.’ At this early stage of the war, Butterworth’s accent coming from an officer, encountered by a traditional regular officer of the Gloucestershire Regiment with expectations that all officers should speak received pronunciation, implied he was not a gentleman or educated, and even someone masquerading as an officer. He was hospitalised after this incident and concerns about his performance raised questions about his suitability to be an officer that were investigated. As late as January 1916, commanding officers were singling him out because of his strong North Country accent.⁶⁹

The socio-cultural expectations of an officer’s speech presented a dilemma when traditional regular officers needed a competent officer and were attracted to an NCO, but they were unable to speak ‘properly’. The case of David Samuel Jillings’ commission in December 1914 is illustrative of this dilemma.⁷⁰ He had the distinction of being the first British soldier wounded in the First World War when he was shot flying as an observer in an aeroplane over Belgium, on 22 August 1914. He had the appearance and a suitable military pedigree for a commission, having been a six-foot-tall guardsman who transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in 1912 as a senior NCO to introduce military ‘discipline and smartness’ to the ranks. He had been born and raised in Essex. Suffering from the after effects of his wounds, it was suggested he might be commissioned and take up the squadron’s adjutancy. In an informal conversation between two senior officers, Major D. Powell and Major W. Warner of the Directorate of Military

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ TNA WO 339/16075 David Samuel Jillings.

Aeronautics (both longstanding regular army officers), Powell, a Cambridge graduate, when asked about Jillings' suitability remarked that 'his lack of literary ability might stand in his way.'⁷¹ Later, panicked that his remarks might prejudice Jillings' appointment and recognising that, in the 'new context' of the war, he might be suitable, Powell wrote to Warner revising his opinion saying 'that though a little ungrammatical, it scarcely creeps at all into his speech.'⁷² The implication behind Powell's remark is that if Jillings' speech had been more ungrammatical and extended beyond his written work, it may have been more problematic and impeded his commission.

These examples illustrate just how difficult it was for regular gentlemen-officers to accept accented officers, and the importance that codified language carried in the officer class. They also demonstrate how difficult it was to compromise the gentlemanly standards expected of officers and how these issues continued to compete with military competence. As the war progressed, accented officers were a phenomenon that became more common, but that did not necessarily shift the expectation within the officer class that an officer's speech was a representation of class and eligibility to be an officer. Many memoirs touch on the discomfort of messing with officers who are not gentleman and use speech as evidence. It was not speech that was problematic, it was what it represented. Lord Moyne, Eton educated, and with an aristocratic heritage, struggled with messing in a service battalion, the 11th Cheshire Regiment, after he joined them.⁷³ He found solace in the company of the only two pre-war regular officers in the battalion and describes the others as 'uncivilised' and an 'uncouth' lot. He is particularly vitriolic about an adjutant named Hill who 'hasn't got an 'h' anywhere.'⁷⁴

⁷¹ TNA WO 339/16075 David Samuel Jillings. Letter from Major D.W. Powell, Royal Flying Corps, Brooklands, 8 January, 1916. Major W. W. Warner went on to become, Director of Air Personnel Services. From 1924 until 1929 he was elected MP for Mid-Bedfordshire.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Walter Edward Guinness Baron Moyne, Brian Bond, and Simon Robbins (eds), *Staff Officer: The Diaries of Walter Guinness (First Lord Moyne) 1914–1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1987), p. 103.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 107.

Temporary officers with a public-school background also chose to differentiate themselves from ranker officers by speech. Alan Thomas, a product of Malvern School, later to graduate in English from Cambridge, was a young, temporary officer in the Royal West Kent Regiment when he came across a ranker officer, ‘Alderman the adjutant’. In his memoir, he reported a conversation between the adjutant and a corporal; ‘Alderman and Hart — neither of whom,’ he observed, ‘had an ‘h’ in his vocabulary.’ He described an exchange between the veteran corporal and Alderman that began “‘Allo, ‘Art, ‘ow about them ’elmets?’ Interestingly, and less critically, Thomas observed that Alderson, very well respected by the men under his command, ‘talked to soldiers in a language they could understand’: a recognition that the ranks and the ranker officer shared a common language. He further observes of his conversation, that it was ‘amusing to listen to — provided it was addressed to third parties.’ The inference was that Alderson’s speech was ungentlemanly and Thomas’ ‘amusement’ was a form of condescension. This parody of accent in writing gives us a way of understanding how jokes and humour might have worked in the mess to differentiate outsiders.

In another memoir of a public-school educated, temporary officer, Julian Tyndale-Biscoe, there is a lengthy account of the actions of a sergeant-major that fended off a disaster in a battle, bringing ammunition to his artillery unit at great personal risk.⁷⁵ This leads to the NCO being commissioned. Despite the expressed admiration for the ranker officer, Tyndale-Biscoe repeats a story that parodies him, told about ‘Captain (ex-Sergeant-major) Alexander, O. C. the Brigade Ammunition Column’ by another junior officer:

The Column had just dismounted in a village street in front of Brigade Headquarters where the Colonel and several others were, when they heard a muffled expletive from one of the drivers – a

⁷⁵ Julian Tyndale Biscoe, Gunner Subaltern: Letters Written by a Young Man to His Father During the Great War (London: Cooper, 1971).

horse had probably trodden on his foot – followed by a mighty roar from Alexander, which could be heard right down the street. ‘stop that swearing, Damn you! Can’t you speak like a gentleman, you foul mouthed B.... r !!’⁷⁶

Loudness and the use of vernacular language was the antithesis of what was expected of the gentleman-officer. The story is also a parody representing the differentiation of the driver and the ranker officer by showing neither can speak ‘like a gentleman’. The suggestion that this story was being retold means that this was a shared construction of a caricature of ranker officer identity that set them apart. Its use in this memoir suggests it had been part of the oral lore of Tyndale-Biscoes’ mess.

Gentlemen-officers also found the conversational ability of the ranker officer was less than their cultural expectations. The ranker officer did not have the social capital needed to conform with mess discourse. Alan Thomas’s memoir illustrates this problem and shows the ambiguous relationship between the young officer and a senior ranker officer that results. He deals in some detail with his complex relationship, and it is worthwhile setting out in full, his observations about Alderman:

Having mentioned the Adjutant I must say a word about him: for he was a ‘character’. His name was Alderman, and he was a ranker. Soldiering had been his profession. He wore the South African ribbon (and the DSO) and talked to soldiers in language they could understand. There were several ranker officers in our battalion, all of them unpopular with the men – mainly because they knew their job and there was no chance of ‘swinging it over them’. But Alderman, though he was not universally popular, was universally respected. There was a directness of attack about him that appealed to everyone. Subtlety and sarcasm (which all men hate in their officers) were not in his make-up, and although the men knew that they might not be treated politely by Alderman they knew also that they would be treated fairly. He was a good administrator, particularly of rough justice. He was a splendid lieutenant and interpreter of orders. And he was a loyal friend. Where he fell short was in his conversation, which was boring, and in the reckless way he exposed himself to danger. To spend an evening with Alderman was to be subjected to endless reminiscences mostly about his early days of soldiering.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 56.

⁷⁷ Alan Thomas, *A Life Apart* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1968), pp. 68–9.

In describing Alderman as a ‘character’, Thomas immediately sets him out as different. He also observes his discourse with soldiers was in a ‘language they could understand’, suggesting it was different to his own and by implication, better understood. Thomas explicitly acknowledges that Alderman is an effective officer and a loyal friend, and, in so doing, he affords him the attributes of soldierly manliness from this era, described by Tosh, of physical vigor, energy and resolution, courage, and straightforwardness.⁷⁸ In martial prowess, the 19-year-old Thomas is respectful of Alderman. However, in Thomas’s assessment, Alderman ‘falls short’ of what is expected of an officer. Conjoining a criticism of his conversation with recklessness, he qualifies the latter by observing ‘Alderman’s recklessness in face of danger was due, not to bravado, but to a genuine desire to be ‘first there’ at the centre of the show.’ There is no mitigation of his boring conversation, which is criticised for being remorselessly about ‘shop’. This alienation from conversation with Alderman and the importance placed on it demonstrates the cultural gulf that existed between the gentleman-officer and the ranker officer.

Brian Bond, in his introduction to Lord Moyne’s memoir that pays as much attention to messing and social interaction as military endeavour, observed:

On the Somme and later we are reminded that Guinness was a cultivated, fastidious gentleman who found the boorish company of many of his fellow officers scarcely tolerable: ‘out of the line one finds this life very narrowing as...one has very few interests in common with those among whom one lives...The mess of the 10th London was less trying as there were several people who took an interest in books and politics’ (8 September).⁷⁹

These comments emphasise that it was not simply speech that created the gulf between ranker officers and gentlemen-officers, it was also their broader cultural differences. These two

⁷⁸ John Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society”.

⁷⁹ Moyne, Bond, and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 4. Guinness may not specifically be talking about ranker officers, however, they would have been included in his category of ‘boorish’ company. The 10th London Regiment, also known as the Shiny 10th or Hackney Rifles, were a Territorial battalion that generally had public school educated officers.

examples show how ‘boorish company’ and ‘boring conservation’ are labels attached to officers outside of the gentleman-officers’ cultural paradigm. They remain slight however, compared to the more frequently referenced deficiencies in pronunciation.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the differences in ‘appearances’ between the ranker officer and the gentleman officer that were exploited to caricature the ranker officer. The work of Colville is a useful prompt to consider the role of material culture, particularly the uniform, in defining and communicating understandings of class and masculinity and the challenges this represented to ranker officers. Navigating the expected ways to wear uniform and perform were primary obstacles to ranker officers. The influence of ‘ways of speaking’ over socio-cultural class differentiation was more enduring and more evident in the literature surveyed, possibly because of the strength with which they represented social class and gentlemanly behaviour and were more difficult to camouflage. These ways of differentiating ungentlemanly officers was also related to the obsessive attention to small details that were used to police the boundaries of gentlemanliness. The incongruity of an inappropriate voice or appearance with that anticipated of a gentleman-officer is a shock in 1914. This deviance later provided the opportunity for caricature and mocking, important in displacing the ranker officer from gentlemanly identity, and the process of othering.

This evidence also throws up another consideration: that of class and rank based differences in the army. The uniform and messes of NCOs, some of which had some of the qualities of officers, associated NCOs ‘with specific clusters of stereotyped socio-cultural qualities and characteristics,’ a different incarnation of masculinity. In many respects, the able NCO had many of the characteristics of manliness that were idealised — the physical vigour, energy and

resolution, courage, and straightforwardness described by Tosh.⁸⁰ Sobriety could also be added to the list. This is consistent with comments supporting continuation of the service of NCOs, later commissioned, where the language is more functional: ‘exceptionally good NCO in the office and the field — excellent accountant’, ‘honest, sober, hard-working and intelligent’, and ‘good clerk with a high standard of intelligence’.⁸¹ This chapter has shown how eligibility to move beyond manliness to acquire ‘gentle-manliness’ was contingent, in part, on appearance; self-presentation was critical, ‘the mastery of the body in space and in motion’. Simon Gunn has summarised this bodily code of gentility:

Although the codes of gentility became less exacting in the twentieth century, they remained difficult for newcomers to imitate, thus maintaining boundaries between old and new wealth while providing a model which all sections of the middle classes might recognize and aspire to overall [...] The result, however, was to ground ‘class’ ever more securely in the body, to give social difference all the appearance of a natural difference. In effect, the cultural capital of the English middle class, above all the established or upper middle class, has been transmitted in important measure somatically, in bodily form. It is partly this which has made privilege in England so elusive to study and so resistant to critique.⁸²

The uniform was part of a collective set of attributes in the military that conflated to differentiate rank and particularly the gentleman-officer. The officers’ mess was particularly important, fuelling the narcissistic obsession with small differences, manners, and rituals. The athletic, young NCO had more scope to find their way through this milieu than the older ‘ranker officer’ whose differences were too often irreconcilable and paved the way for a caricature. The increasing dominance of the ranker officer caricature needs to be considered against the representation as combatant officers in the war and this is examined in the next chapter.

⁸⁰ Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society”.

⁸¹ TNA WO 339/57524 Frances Llewellyn Cowley; TNA WO 339/48815 Arthur Luger; TNA WO 339/75206 Arthur Myrtle Saywood. These were commissions from the infantry, royal engineers, and royal flying corps. The assessments on the employment sheets are broadly similar in their language and criteria for a well performing NCO.

⁸² Gunn, “Translating Bourdieu”.

Chapter Six

Effectiveness, Leadership, and the Ranker Officer

This chapter examines how ranker officers performed and the implications for ideas about leadership in the war. However, this is not a detailed analysis and assessment of the relative performance of ranker officers and their military effectiveness, a task that is beyond the scope of this study and one that would form an interesting further contribution to understanding the ranker officer.⁸³ It does, however, look at their presence and explore how their leadership function was perceived and represented. Whilst the last chapter indicated an increasing differentiation of the ranker officer presented and caricatured in appearance and speech, the anomaly of officers performing leadership roles without the necessary character formed through their preparation as gentlemen is rarely parsed into the critical discourse about them. This is interesting because the leadership of soldiers in combat was a rubicon that NCOs and honorary officers were not allowed to cross before the war. This, and the presence of significant numbers of ranker officers in the army during the war, poses important questions that threaten to disrupt the pre-eminence of the historiographical idea of the gentleman-officer as the monopoly provider of British regimental leadership.⁸⁴

The identity of the gentleman-officer had thrived in the imperial context, as part of a ‘noble’ tradition of imperial policing by the British army, in which the virtuous, paternal characteristics of the officer-gentleman had evolved.⁸⁵ This identity was seriously challenged by the Anglo-Boer war, but then reasserted itself in the face of the subsequent challenges, previously

⁸³ See Hodgkinson for a comprehensive review of Infantry Battalion Commanders: Peter E. Hodgkinson, *British Infantry Battalion Commanders in the First World War* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015).

⁸⁴ Christopher Moore-Bick, *Playing the Game: The British Junior Infantry Officer on the Western Front 1914–18* (Solihull: Helion, 2011).

⁸⁵ Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914*, Themes in British Social History (London: Longman, 1980), pp. 26–9.

outlined. The emergence of ranker officers took place following the arrival of a mass, mechanised, industrial European war in 1914. Pre-war, the binary, class based relationship of the officer and ‘other ranks’ was, at its core, governed by the distinctiveness of the gentleman-officer identity that monopolised leadership as a moral right. This was ethically underpinned by the idea of a consensual officer-man relationship that only gentlemen led, and others followed. Implicit to this relationship was ‘paternalism’. This construct was a conjoining of the aristocratic concept of *noblesse oblige* and the feudal, rural, manorial relationship between the landed gentry and their estate tenants.⁸⁶ The cultural framework of officer-man relations was part of a wider construct of ‘Englishness’ that was prevalent before the war. This idea was particularly important within the army to resist suggestions of democracy and modernity.⁸⁷ This chapter seeks to explain how officer-man relations were represented and coherent with the emergence of the ranker officer for whom a class based explanation of leadership was redundant.

Paternalism was viewed by gentlemen-officers as central to cohesion, although this patriarchy was only maintained by the day-to-day intervention of NCOs maintaining discipline and managing the domestic space of soldiers.⁸⁸ In examining the First World War, military historians have seen ‘paternalism’ as the defining feature of ‘officer-man’ relations.⁸⁹ This has become an orthodoxy in the literature informing the view of the British army as ‘better’ and

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 26

⁸⁷ Peter Mandler, “Against ‘Englishness’: English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850–1940,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 7 (1997). Peter Mandler argues against aspects of this ‘invention’ in this paper.

⁸⁸ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c. 1870–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 170–6. French writes: ‘For most private soldiers authority and leadership on a daily basis was personified by junior NCOs [...]. They were an everyday presence in their lives that officer rarely were.’

⁸⁹ G. D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); G. Sheffield, *Command and Morale: The British Army on the Western Front 1914–1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2014). See Part 3, ‘Morale’.

being more enduring and cohesive than any of the other belligerent armies.⁹⁰ To the gentleman-officer, his ‘character’ formed at public school was a qualification to lead, and paternalism was the political orthodoxy that ensured subordination in military practice. This chapter will begin by looking at how ranker officers’ participation in the war impacted on that orthodoxy and at the implicit socio-cultural assumptions that only gentlemen could ‘lead’. It looks at how they and their military competence was viewed by the ranks and their gentlemanly contemporaries, how this has been subsequently represented, particularly in the historiography discussing ‘officer-man’ relations, and how this impacted on their representation. Understandings of ranker officers have been critically influenced by approaches to their study and representations in the historiography.

1) The Ranker Officer and Leadership

A surprisingly large number of ranker officers progressed to command battalions and batteries in the war after they were commissioned.⁹¹ The prosopography that informed this study showed that at least 24 infantry ranker officers commissioned in 1914 were promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, commanding battalions, and many more followed from the ranker officers commissioned in subsequent years. Peter Hodgkinson, who has intensively studied the infantry battalion commanders of the British army in the war, has observed ‘Haig may not have necessarily foreseen that 7 per cent of COs on 29 September 1918 would have been from other ranks (ORs) in August 1914. During the war 69 other ranks of August 1914 commanded battalions on active service.’⁹² Hodgkinson estimates that 47 ranker officers that commanded infantry battalions were regular rankers before the war.⁹³ Haig would also never have

⁹⁰ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 108–183.

⁹¹ Hodgkinson, *British Infantry Battalion Commanders*; Arnold D. Harvey, “A Good War: Wartime Officers Who Rose to Command Level in the First World War,” *The RUSI Journal* 153, no. 2 (2008).

⁹² Hodgkinson, *British Infantry Battalion Commanders*, p. 67.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

anticipated that similar or greater numbers would rise to command artillery batteries where 38 per cent of ranker officers served in the war. Hodgkinson's study was confined to the infantry, and large numbers of ranker officers populated the artillery, machine gun corps, and flying corps, reaching equivalent rank. Hodgkinson's point is that a traditional regular officer with Haig's outlook and a background in the cavalry would have never contemplated 'ranker officers' having such senior regimental roles. However, they did.

The progression of ranker officers commissioned in 1914 varied. In some instances, they were rapidly promoted into mid-level rank to perform training functions or take over adjutancies in the infantry and artillery. This was achieved through the award of acting and temporary rank. Promotion to substantive rank was slow, based on time served and reports. What is noticeable is that many ranker officers were rapidly promoted to key leadership roles in the infantry in 1916 and afterwards. 'Tommy' or Thompson Brook Lawrence of the 2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, a veteran of Ladysmith was awarded the DCM for 'the greatest bravery' at Festubert in May 1915.⁹⁴ He was commissioned in late June 1916 and awarded the MC for his leadership at Bazentin Le Petit Wood on 14 July 1916. In 1917, he attended a Senior Officers' School at Aldershot, he was promoted to acting major and almost immediately promoted to temporary lieutenant-colonel and given command of the 13th Battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment. His substantive rank was still a lieutenant. He was awarded the DSO for his work in withdrawing his battalion at Heninel and Fontaine-les-Croiselles, during late March 1918.⁹⁵ Lawrence had been a sergeant-major instructor at 3rd and 4th Army Schools from November 1915 to May 1916, and less than two years later was commanding a battalion. David Munro

⁹⁴ TNA WO 339/65720 Thomas Brook Lawrence.

⁹⁵ Ibid. He was gassed in September 1918. In 1920, he was awarded the brevet of major and retired in 1920. He was mentioned in despatches three times.

also awarded a DCM at Festubert was commissioned and went on to command the 10th Battalion, King's Liverpool Regiment (Liverpool Scottish).⁹⁶

William Henry Carter was commissioned into his own regiment, the South Staffordshire, in January 1915.⁹⁷ He first commanded the 17th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment in July 1916, followed by the 13th Battalion Essex Regiment for six months, and then the 7th Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment until the end of the war, and was awarded a DSO & bar and MC & bar. The general pattern of Carter's deployment with several regiments was typical of many ranker officers' careers as a CO.⁹⁸ Ranker officers were officers posted to service and territorial battalions that needed morale building and training, and, for this reason, they had multiple commands in different regiments. The battalions had preferred, as with the pre-war regimental culture, to keep their own regimental officers and in so doing retain their regimental identity. Attrition and appointments on merit made this difficult. The pattern of moving extensively between regiments was common to high-achieving ranker officers. Lieutenant-Colonels Albert Grover, Frank Naden, James Walsh, and others all held multiple commands at battalion level and have been noted as having 'had truly exceptional abilities to have achieved these commands.'⁹⁹

The expansion of the army had created a more complex hierarchical relationship between regiments, with expanded territorial and service battalions complimenting usually two regular battalions of infantry of the line. As the war progressed the most senior and commanding infantry ranker officers were promoted into these expanded parts of regiments, the service

⁹⁶ A. M. MacGilchrist, *The Liverpool Scottish, 1900–1919* (Liverpool: H. Young & Sons, 1930), p. 166. Lieutenant-Colonel David Campbell Duncan Munro, DSO, MC, DCM commissioned into the Gordon Highlanders after 11 years in the ranks, served in the East Yorkshire Regiment.

⁹⁷ Lieutenant Colonel William Henry Carter DSO and bar, MC and bar:
<http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/great-war-people/brothers-arms/2721-lieutenant-colonel-william-henry-carter-dso-and-bar-mc-and-bar.html>. Accessed March 1, 2017.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Hodgkinson, *British Infantry Battalion Commanders*, p. 62.

battalions. In 1918 ranker officers also commanded more elite regular battalions. The KRRC, noted for its excluding practices in resisting officers commissioned from the ranks before the war, offered its NCOs for commissions in other regiments and commissioned some into its own, and two commanded less prestigious KRRC battalions later in the war. Richard ‘Dick’ Pennell, a sergeant in the KRRC was very severely wounded at the Battle of the Aisne in 1914.¹⁰⁰ He was declared fit for home service, was made a warrant officer, and then commissioned in September 1915. He was almost immediately made adjutant. He returned to France in 1916 and, by September 1917, was commanding the 18th Battalion KRRC, which he continued to do until the end of the war, apart from a stint as an acting brigadier-general. In another service battalion of the KRRC, the 20th (Empire League), 42-year-old John Jenkins, who had served 21 years with the Grenadier Guards, was commissioned an honorary lieutenant and quartermaster. His commission was ‘converted’ to combatant and adjutant, and he was a CO by August 1917. In May 1918, he was commanding the 1st Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment and was killed leading them in October 1918.¹⁰¹

This incursion of ranker officers into senior battalion leadership roles did not extend to the Guards and Cavalry regiments that maintained their elite composition. However, by late 1918, six ranker officers were commanding ‘regular’ battalions, all Irish and Scots battalions.¹⁰² George Bissett was only 24 years of age, with six years rank service, when commissioned from

¹⁰⁰ Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Pennell DSO & bar. Pennell was promoted to the Ox & Bucks Light Infantry after the war and continued to be troubled by his wounds and retired. He later devoted his time to Toc H and helped establish the Talbot House Club for Seafaring Boys. Tubby Clayton wrote his obituary: Rev. P. B. Clayton, “Obituary Lieut-Col R. Pennell,” *The Times*, July 22, 1963.

¹⁰¹ Lieutenant-Colonel John Jenkins MC. See M. R. E. Priestley, *Breaking the Hindenburg Line: The Story of the 46th (North Midland) Division* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2012), p. 125. TNA WO 339/29646 John Jenkins

¹⁰² In addition, Major Harold Thomas Forster, DSO & bar, MC & bar commanded the 2nd Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment briefly in May 1918 before being killed in action on 29 May 1918. He had previously been commissioned into the 2nd Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment. TNA WO 339/2100 Harold Thomas Forster.

the Seaforth Highlanders into the 1st Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers on October 1914.¹⁰³ He served with them throughout the war, was awarded the DSO, MC & bar and became their commanding lieutenant-colonel on 22 July 1918. He died of wounds on a reconnaissance mission in October 1918. William Gordon, commanded the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders in 1918. The two regular battalions of the Royal Irish Rifles were commanded by ranker officers by 1918, Lieutenant-Colonels John Patrick Hunt and John Henry Bridcutt. Hunt enlisted in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers (RDF) in 1891.¹⁰⁴ He was awarded the DCM in South Africa and became a Dublin Officer Training Corps (OTC) sergeant instructor. Commissioned into the RDF in October 1915, he was appointed adjutant and awarded the DSO in 1916. He became a battalion CO in June 1917. A measure of his leadership was apparent in the German offensive of 1918 when he assembled ‘Hunt’s Force’, a scratch unit he assembled of eight battalions that won a considerable fighting reputation.¹⁰⁵

There are several factors that had a bearing on this dramatic ascendancy of ranker officers in the second half of the war that need to be considered. Regimental identity held up for considerably longer than could be expected in the war, but the character of regiments changed considerably through dramatic shifts in the social composition of the officer class, and an influx of conscripts after compulsion was introduced in early 1916. Mark Connelly, in his study of one regiment, the East Kent Regiment or Buffs, attributes the retention of a ‘semblance of continuity’ in regimental identity to ranker officers serving with their substantive regiments.¹⁰⁶ This may have been the case to a limited degree; equally, ranker officers being transferred into

¹⁰³ The career and death of Lieutenant-Colonel George Bissett, DSO, MC & bar are described by his friend Dennys Reitz. Reitz a South African took command of the 1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers after his death. Deney Reitz, *Trekking On* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1933).

¹⁰⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel John Patrick Hunt, CMG, DSO and DCM, TNA WO339/43268, Lieutenant-Colonel John Henry Bridcutt, DSO, TNA WO 339/24093. See James W. Taylor, *The 1st Royal Irish Rifles in the Great War* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2002), p. 26.

¹⁰⁵ James W. Taylor, *The 1st Royal Irish Rifles*, p. 264.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Connelly, *Steady the Buffs! A Regiment, a Region, and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 21.

other regiments reflected the dissolution of regimental identity within regiments. The lack of an expectation that regimental officers should ‘wear the same cap badge’, a term widely used to denote their substantive regiment, certainly relaxed the resistance to moving between regiments that had been a major problem for officers commissioned from the ranks before the war.

Three factors appear to have liberated the ranker officer; the lessening significance of social background as a factor in promotion, a results-driven promotion process and the more liberal approach to patronage based on performance. The officer class had not become a meritocracy but was more meritocratic. Three ranker officers, James Frederick Plunkett, Ernest Robert O’Connor, and William James Cranston were commissioned in 1915; their accelerated careers were based on battlefield assessments by brigadier-generals.¹⁰⁷ O’Connor and Plunkett were protégés of Brigadier-General Frank Crozier. He claimed to have recruited O’Connor, a Guards sergeant-major commissioned into the Manchester Regiment, after they met in a shell hole in 1918 and afterwards arranged for him to command the 12th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. He called his specially selected COs ‘tigers’. Similarly, Cranston had the patronage of Cyril Deverell who selected him after his initial commission into the Royal Fusiliers, when he saw him on the battlefield in 1916: ‘I had found him one night in a particularly unpleasant situation during the battle of the Somme, able to keep his head when others were losing theirs.’¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Ernest Richard O’Connor, MC, French War Cross, Royal Munster Fusiliers, mentioned in despatches twice. He took up command of the 12th Battalion, North Staffordshire Regiment on 14 October and transformed them in ‘less than a week. Frank Percy Crozier, *A Brass Hat in No Man’s Land* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), p. 229.

¹⁰⁸ The First World War Digital Poetry Archive, The Life of Colonel Cranston: <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa/document/9146/4779>. Accessed March 1, 2015. Field Marshal Sir Cyril John Deverell, (1874 –1947). Deverell was CO of 4th Battalion, the East Yorkshire Regiment in July, he then commanded the 20th Brigade from 29 October 1915.

These senior commanders had selected and promoted officers they thought had promise seemingly regardless of their social background. In May 1916, Deverell made a special case for commissioning Thomas Brooke Lawrence requesting that he was commissioned into the 2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, part of Deverell's brigade:

I am acquainted with CSM (a/RSM) T.B. Lawrence and consider him a suitable candidate for a permanent commission. His military qualifications entitle him to special consideration. The Commandant of 3rd Army School, Brigadier-General Kentish, spoke highly to me of the applicants ability and of the good work he had done as sergeant-major at the school.¹⁰⁹

When Deverell was appointed CO of 3rd Division, he recruited Lawrence and by January 1918, 18 months after his commission, he was CO of the 13th Service Battalion, King's Liverpool Regiment, which he commanded until the end of the war. Initially, a medical board found Brook unfit for a commission because he had lost 13 teeth and needed two fillings. He was passed fit three weeks later after dental treatment.¹¹⁰

At the end of the war, when the British army, it is argued, was at its most effective, there had been a major shift from the days before 1914 when promotion was on seniority to a merit based system. Peter Hodgkinson has eschewed calling it a meritocracy:

Measured against a strict definition in terms of competitive selection against set criteria, there was no true meritocracy. In an organisation where personal recommendation had ruled, formalised assessment of such characteristics was a project for the distant future. Yet perception of ability clearly sharpened, and the concept of merit became a growing consideration in selection, dominating in the last two years of the war.¹¹¹

It is notable that highly successful ranker officers were also inspirational trainers. The skills of one ranker officer, Joseph Levey, were praised by the Australian, Lieutenant-General, John

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ TNA WO 339/65720 Thomas Brook Lawrence.

¹¹¹ Hodgkinson, *British Infantry Commanders*, P. 210. See also Chapter 8, "The Hundred Days: Meritocracy in Command?".

Monash, who described him as an ‘extraordinary man’.¹¹² Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Levey DSO, Gordon Highlanders, was a deputy to the Inspector General of Training, Lieutenant-General Ivor Maxse in 1918, when he met Monash, one of the most highly regarded allied generals.¹¹³ Monash was fascinated by Levey because of his Jewish heritage which he shared, but in a personal letter he set out the extent of his admiration:

Among this very able and specially selected band of training officers, is my friend Lieutenant-Colonel Levey, and his real purpose incoming to the Corps was to give an exhibition of modern training methods. This he did yesterday in my presence and that of my Divisional Commanders and Brigadiers, and it was one of the most extraordinarily interesting demonstrations I have ever seen. He himself took fifty men at random, and, in less than two hours he had done marvels with them, by dint of a most extraordinarily attractive personality and much brilliant patter. I have never seen troops so ably handled and such rapid results achieved. In half an hour he had them marching along the roads like a company of Guards, vigorously singing a marching song he had taught them, and he did many other extraordinary ‘stunts’ with them that is was difficult to believe was possible with men who necessarily would be so self-conscious when under the gaze of so many general officers. All this was done so as to illustrate his particular methods of handling men as a Platoon Commander, and, although there was nothing new to us in these particular methods, it was, on the whole, a most interesting display. Lieutenant-Colonel Levey is himself a most handsome man and he had a smart soldierly style and demeanour.¹¹⁴

Levey was complimented by Monash, who in praising him awarded him the gentlemanly qualities of being handsome, smart, and having a soldierly style and demeanour. It is Levey’s drilling qualities that shine in this assessment of his leadership qualities. These are very different from the ideas of gentlemanly leadership based on class and character, and are drawn from his NCO experience. The methods used by Levey were ‘nothing new’, but his delivery of them, based on his ‘extraordinarily attractive personality and much brilliant patter’, is novel to Monash. Drill and ‘handling’ of men had become even more necessary as the war progressed in the context of a carefully marshalled industrial battlefield, discipline in action, such as when

¹¹² AWM, War letters of General Monash: Volume 2, 4 March 1917 – 28 December 1918 pp. 463–464. Levey wrote several booklets to compliment his training ideas: *Five Instructional Lectures to Regimental Officers on the Western Campaign* (1915), *Five Instructional Lectures to Regimental Officers on the Western Campaign* (1915), *Home Guard Training* (1940) and *What to Teach on Landscapes Targets* (1915).

¹¹³ General Sir John Monash (1865–1831).

¹¹⁴ AWM, War letters of General Monash: Volume 2, 4 March 1917–28 December 1918, pp. 463–4.

soldiers followed a creeping barrage at precise distances was at a premium. John Hunt, Frank Naden, Thomas Lawrence, and others who were very successful ranker officers and commanders, came from a common background; they were all NCOs with extensive training experience.

This background was rarely correlated to leadership by gentlemen-officers when commenting on the attributes of ranker officers, such as in the observations made by Brigadier A. Newth:

One of the finest officers I ever met was ex-Sergeant Naden (late Lieutenant-Colonel) of the Cheshire Regiment. He had been a PS (instructor) of 6th Battalion (territorial) returning just before the War. He re-enlisted in the 6th Battalion when the war started, was promoted sergeant, then commissioned. When I took over he was already commanding a company and had an MC and bar and a DSO. I made him 2i/c (second-in-command) and in September 1918 he was appointed to command a battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment, where he collected a bar to his DSO and later was promoted Brevet Colonel. He was of course a natural leader, with a great personality and a sound ‘other ranks’ military background and men would follow him anywhere.¹¹⁵

He attributed personality and a sound ‘other ranks background’ as qualities, but the absence of ‘character’ formed through gentlemanly preparation is compensated for by Naden’s being a ‘natural leader’. Being a natural leader was synonymous with being a natural gentleman, as one officer observed ‘We had a certain number of ranker officers who had been commissioned for gallantry in the field and the greater numbers were ‘natural gentlemen’.¹¹⁶ The observation that these officers were ‘natural gentleman’ manages the dissonance between their identity and their achievements.

The gentlemen-officers of the army, through a pragmatic approach of selection based on qualities shown on the battlefield and preparing soldiers for combat, valued selected ranker officers. However, the qualities that they valued derived from a ‘sound other ranks’ background

¹¹⁵ Simpson Archive: Brigadier A. L. W. Newth, the officer was Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Naden, Cheshire Regiment, DSO & 2 bars, MC & bar, mentioned in despatches four times, wounded three times.

¹¹⁶ Simpson Archive: Lieutenant Colonel J. D. Milne.

and are not the ones that they chose to define them by. The phenomenon of their achievement was explained through a narrative of their innate or natural born gentlemanliness.

2) Ranker Officer-man Relations in the War

Officer-man relations have been the focus of most studies concerned with leadership in the war. The gentleman's explanation for the legitimacy to lead in the pre-war era was class based. For instance, in 1901, Winston Churchill stated that soldiers had a distinct objection to being led or saluting anyone who was not a gentleman. This was disputed; Churchill was challenged about the claim in a letter to the newspaper by 'A Highland Soldier'.¹¹⁷ It was a prevalent idea that had been used in defence of the exclusive officering of the army by gentlemen, and it was most commonly a claim made by gentlemen, rarely the ranks. In 1928, Joseph Clare, a retired lieutenant, who had been commissioned from the ranks of the Royal Irish Regiment in November 1917, wrote to the magazine *Britannia*. His letter was a response to an earlier article by Major Lloyd-Jones who had stated 'that the rank and file do not as a rule take kindly to ranker officers'.¹¹⁸ Clare wrote 'As a ranker officer, now retired with 15 years' continuous colour service, I disagree with the opinion of your correspondent. The rank and file are quick to see inefficiency, and amongst themselves do not forget to criticise an officer whether he is from Sandhurst or whether they remember him as an NCO.'¹¹⁹

Major Lloyd-Jones' comment, which Clare strongly refuted, represented a modified, post-war reassertion of Churchill's trope that had persisted for much of the nineteenth century, and which had been perpetuated until the First World War. This trope dictated that the ranks preferred to be officered by gentlemen, and secondly, that they did not like to be officered by

¹¹⁷ A Highland Soldier, "The British Soldier and His Officers," *The Evening Telegraph*, January 15, 1901. A response to an article written by Winston Churchill, titled 'The British Officer', published in the *Pall Mall Magazine*.

¹¹⁸ "The Ranker Officer," *Britannia*, November 23, 1928.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

anyone from their own class or, who had served in the ranks. This was a view rarely expressed by the ranks, rather it was attributed to them by gentlemen. These two examples bookend the war, when the evidence of this study shows that there were many officers not gentlemen. This provokes an enquiry as to whether Clare was correct in his view that efficiency mattered more than class to the soldier in the ranks during the war.

The attributed preference of the ranks of the army to being exclusively officered by gentlemen was increasingly promoted by gentlemen-officers, and gentlemen generally, in the years leading up to the war. This countered pressures to democratise the officer class, an aspiration with origins in the concerns about the efficiency of the army in the Anglo-Boer War.¹²⁰ Clare's response was particularly powerful in invoking the term 'inefficiency', a term redolent of the National Efficiency movement that was critical of the late Victorian officer class after the Anglo-Boer War.¹²¹ The poor performance of the British army in South Africa had convinced many gentlemen-officers that industrialisation and urbanisation had undermined their ideals of both rural masculinity and feudal social hierarchy, and hence they reached out to a reactionary military interpretation of 'Englishness' as offering a secure and structured hierarchical relationship between officers and the ranks.¹²² This was an idea that dated back to Wellington and was embraced with renewed vigour.¹²³ The working classes' preference for officers who were gentlemen was propagated and culturally manufactured; Englishness and the idea of

¹²⁰ T. D. Pilcher, *Some Lessons from the Boer War 1899–1902* (London: Isbister, 1903); Spencer Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012) pp. 247–258.

¹²¹ Geoffrey R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) pp. 34–53.

¹²² See Keith Surridge, “‘All You Soldiers Are What We Call Pro-Boer’: The Military Critique of the South African War, 1899–1902,” *History* 82, no. 268 (1997); K. Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹²³ Hew Strachan, *The Reform of the British Army 1830–54: Wellington’s Legacy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

‘stations in life’ had permeated education and were culturally endemic, but up until 1914, few in the ranks had any experience of being commanded by an officer who was not a gentleman.¹²⁴

Major Lloyd-Jones, needing to voice this opinion in 1928, suggests that Englishness and the status of the gentleman-officer was being restored in the wake of the threat posed by ranker officers and lower-class temporary officers during the war. The reality of ranker officer-man relations was complex during the war. Ranker officers did experience resentment, and many soldiers, in the early part of the war, expected to be commanded by officers who were gentlemen. However, the main challenge for ranker officers was not commanding soldiers of the same class but lay in commanding those who thought themselves from a better class. This was particularly true in territorial battalions that contained gentlemen rankers and were commanded in a more liberal tradition than working-class recruits in the regular army.¹²⁵ The initial issue for ranker officers in this context was coping with the more casual approach to discipline in territorial battalions. Pre-war, regular officers, and NCOs were posted to territorial regiments and were concerned with discipline and drill.

There was precedence for this inversion of the normal class arrangements before the war. For example, in 1911, Sergeant Instructor Joseph Carless was attached to the 4th Battalion (Territorial) Royal Welsh Fusiliers. His performance was evaluated and his battalion CO observed ‘at first he was rather unpopular among the men owing to his over strictness. But he has now got to understand territorials much better.’¹²⁶ This demonstrates the difference in cultures and officer-man relations, between regular and territorial units, and the necessity for

¹²⁴ Stephen J. Heathorn, *For Home, Country, and Race: Constructing Gender, Class, and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880–1914* (Guelph: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

¹²⁵ K.W. Hutchinson, Gentlemen and Officers: The Impact and Experience of War on a Territorial Regiment 1914–1918 (Luton: Andrews UK Limited, 2012), Ian Beckett, Timothy Bowman, Mark Connelly, The British Army and the First World War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), page 104, Ian Beckett, The Amatuer Military Tradition 1558-1945 (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 235.

¹²⁶ TNA WO 339/22679 Joseph Arthur Carless.

NCOs to adopt a more relaxed approach. Initially, in 1914, mobilisation for war meant that experienced regular soldiers were valuable, and socio-cultural issues concerning class and status were temporarily waived in favour of professionalism. Charles Topsham, a regular NCO, had an impressive track-record of training with the territorial artillery, and his CO made a strong case for his commission and retention in his unit.¹²⁷ The urgency and haste with which territorial units sought out regular NCOs on mobilisation and welcomed their appointment as officers suggests any professional reservations about ranker officers were temporarily dissipated in anticipation of war.¹²⁸

The degree of resistance to ranker officers in many territorial battalions was proportionate to the concentration of gentlemen rankers in these units that exclusively had gentlemen-officers before the war. It would be wrong to think of all territorials as a ‘class corps’. There were some notably gentrified battalions. The Honourable Artillery Company and many other London and regional units, such as the Liverpool Scottish and Liverpool Rifles, came from middle-class, professional and business backgrounds.¹²⁹ These battalions were particularly culturally homogenous and emphasised ‘club’ atmospheres; ‘while three London Scottish battalions were run along public-school lines’.¹³⁰ The officers and ranks of these ‘class corps’ were resistant to ‘ranker officers’, but it is difficult to judge the extent of their power to exclude them.¹³¹

¹²⁷ TNA WO 339/75654 Charles Henry Topsham. He was sergeant instructor, 1st Battery of the London RGA, part of the 1st London Division Territorial Force. He was commissioned in September 1916 and died of wounds in October 1916.

¹²⁸ K. W. Mitchinson, *The Territorial Force at War, 1914–16* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 64–5. The reverence with which some NCOs were held is reflected in the impact on moral of the loss, killed in action, of a regular NCO and RSM with one territorial battalion; see K.W. Mitchinson, *Gentlemen and Officers: The Impact and Experience of War on a Territorial Regiment 1914–1918* (Luton: Andrews UK Limited, 2012), p. 42 and p. 67.

¹²⁹ Ian Beckett, “The Territorial Force,” in *A Nation in Arms*, ed. Keith Simpson and Ian F. Beckett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 145.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 145.

¹³¹ Gary D. Sheffield, “Officer-Man Relations: The Other Ranks’ Perspective,” in *The World War I Reader*, ed. M. S. Neiberg (London: New York University Press, 2007), 129–31.

Military discipline rarely led to an overt refusal to be commanded by a ranker officer but where the opportunity arose the resistance to the idea was made clear. The Royal Air Force (RAF) had evolved from the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) which had its origins in the Royal Engineers and, although it involved the introduction of new technology, the role of the pilot had eventually been monopolised by the public-school educated gentlemen-officers and the messing arrangements and hierarchy of the army replicated, although with its own quickly established ‘traditions’.¹³²

James McCudden, a ranker officer who had enlisted in the royal engineers before the war, was lauded as a pilot, and awarded the Victoria Cross but he was never fully accepted in the officers’ mess and regretted he did not have the advantage of a public-school education.¹³³ The 85th Squadron of the RAF were consulted as to whether McCudden should lead them. An airman from the United States of America observed:

The General came over and had tea with us and asked us who we wanted for C.O. He wanted to give us McCudden but we don't want him. He gets all the Huns himself but doesn't give anybody else a chance at them. The rest of the squadron objected because he once was a Tommy and his father was a sergeant major in the old army. I couldn't see that that was anything against him but these English have great ideas of caste.¹³⁴

Elliott Springs was observing his American colleagues’ reticence to fly with a leader that was selfishly competitive but the British response was class based. This illustrates the virulence of prejudices about social class, status and pedigree that had rapidly transferred to new and more modern branches of the military, mediated by gentlemanliness. What lay behind the rhetoric

¹³² See Ian McInnes and John Vernon Webb, *A Contemptible Little Flying Corps* (Luton: Andrews UK Limited, 2012), for the evolution of the RFC, the role of ranker officers and emergent culture (p. 345). John H. Morrow Jr., “Knights in the Sky,” in *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, Frans Coatzee and Marilyn Shevin Coatzee (eds.) (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995).

¹³³ James Byfield McCudden. The son of an RE QMS he joined the RE as a boy bugler aged 14 in 1910 McCudden was killed on 9 July 1918, by which time he was a major and been awarded the VC, DSO & bar, MC & bar, MM and Croix de Guerre. I. Mackersey, *No Empty Chairs: The Short and Heroic Lives of the Young Aviators Who Fought and Died in the First World War* (London: Orion, 2012).

¹³⁴ Elliott White Springs, *War Birds: Diary of an Unknown Aviator* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1926), p. 210.

that ranks preferred to be led by gentleman was a much starker scenario, so uncomfortable that it was rarely spoken; the gentleman-officer's abhorrence of being commanded by the ranker officer.

Most evidence about rankers' preferences for upper- and middle-class officers are from third parties, gentlemen-officers' own interpretations of the likes and dislikes of soldiers about who commanded them. However, ranker officers were described in some literature as being disliked for strict discipline and being 'fussy and bullying in matters of detail.'¹³⁵ In addition to transferring some of the traits of their NCO practices, there are some technical reasons why ranker officers may have been perceived this way. A majority fulfilled the function of adjutant at some stage in their career, because of the lack of knowledge of military law and regulations among temporary officers; thus, they were invariably responsible for battalion discipline.¹³⁶ Adjutants played a pivotal role in the administration of a battalion and particularly the exercise of discipline and disciplinary powers. They could crucially affect the morale of a battalion by how they operated.

The appointment to the post of adjutant was an affirmation of competence. Another reason is that ranker officers have been viewed as 'understanding the ways of the men', and this is portrayed as contrasting unfavourably with regular and territorial officers who were 'unknowing' and therefore maintained more liberal regimes, it is claimed, through ignorance.¹³⁷ This is close to another belief, discussed later, that implicit in the officer-man

¹³⁵ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 112. Gary Sheffield notes that this quote came from a temporary officer in the London Rifle Brigade, 'a Territorial class corps, he clearly regarded himself as being in a very different category from a former Regular NCO.'

¹³⁶ See Timothy Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 147 and p. 56; Hodgkinson, *British Infantry Battalion Commanders in the First World War*, p. 16. For example, in 1915 these officers were made adjutants shortly after being commissioned: TNA WO 339/26945 Captain George Gosnold, MC, commissioned lieutenant and adjutant in RFA. TNA WO 339/3536 Captain George Ellis Nelson, DSO, commissioned adjutant at Gallipoli with the 1/4th Battalion (Territorial force) Cheshire Regiment and made captain a few weeks later, serving as adjutant until July 1918. TNA WO/46954 Captain Leslie Gilbert Moojen, DCM, Warrant Officer II, RFA commissioned adjutant to Indian Volunteers, India 1915.

¹³⁷ Gary D Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 111–12.

‘contract’ of paternalism was the space for rankers to relax and live independently of officers’ close supervision. Lastly, their professional identity conflicted with the liberal values and treatment expectations of volunteers, particularly those from the lower middle-class, during the war.

Two oral history recordings at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) reflect the complexity and diversity of views of ordinary soldiers. George Cole, a gunner in the RFA, who had a positive view of ranker officers, said that ranker officers knew the ‘tricks of the trade’ and, referring to the ranker officer in his battery, said ‘it [his commission] never went to his head, he was still one of us’ and that when he was leading a unit transferring goods, he would also carry rations and equipment, and that ‘none of the others did that’.¹³⁸ He concluded ‘the ranker (officer) was a better soldier, real soldier’ than other officers. The class prism through which ranker officers were viewed was crucial. Donald Price had enlisted in the 20th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers also known as the ‘3rd Public Schools Battalion raised by the Public Schools and University Men’s Force’.¹³⁹ This was a unit that had gentlemen-officers and a significant proportion of gentlemen rankers. Price was wounded and left his battalion, returning later in the war, when he observed the manners and the upbringing of the individuals had deteriorated. He acknowledged that ranker officers brought useful experience but compared them negatively with his original officer, of whom he said ‘was a snob, but he were kind and generous, no bullying like those later officers.’¹⁴⁰

Price’s reference to his gentlemanly officer being ‘kind and generous’ is an important indication of ‘paternalism’ in action. It was a product of an important step change in the officer class maintaining control and cohesion in the army. Cookson writing about the army in the

¹³⁸ IWMSA, 9539 Interview with George Cole.

¹³⁹ IWMSA, 10168 Interview with Donald Price .

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

nineteenth century observed ‘officers assumed a greater responsibility for the good order and welfare of their men, much as the propertied classes in general sought greater lives over the control of the poor. They belonged to an elite that saw deference as the key to social cohesion.¹⁴¹ Implicit to this developing orthodoxy in the army was the idea of paternalism with the intention of generating ‘officer love’, a strategy described in General Wolseley’s *Soldiers Pocket-book for Field Service*, that concluded ‘The greatest talent of a General, says Plutarch, “is to secure obedience through the affection he inspires.” In fact, if you want to win battles, make yourself loved by those who serve under you.’¹⁴²

The wider social references to this can be seen in schools, where Sir Sidney Phillip’s last action, attributed to him when mortally wounded, of offering his last drink to a ‘common soldier’ was taught and explained as mark a of his gentlemanliness.¹⁴³ Paternalism was an appearance, it was concerned with the welfare of soldiers, but it was also an overt strategy of ‘demonstrating’ love that continued into the war, particularly focussed on the domestic; as one piece of advice for new officers in the First World War was praised for noting ‘Officers should inspect their men’s billets before their own. Even if nothing can be done, always visit them. The mere fact of showing yourselves will prove to them that their comfort is your first consideration.’¹⁴⁴

Paternalism is a crucial facet of scholarly analysis of the experience of war. Interpreted at its most literal, as an embedded practice that informed officer-soldier relationships, it has been explained as the distinctive feature of the British army that ensured its endurance and

¹⁴¹ John E. Cookson, “Regimental Worlds: Interpreting the Experience of British Soldiers During the Napoleonic Wars,” in *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790–1820*, ed. Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann, and Jane Rendall (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009).

¹⁴² Garnet Wolseley, *The Soldier’s Pocket-Book for Field Service* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1886), p. 3.

¹⁴³ Heathorn, *For Home, Country, and Race*.

¹⁴⁴ Basil Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies* (London: Constable & Co., 1918), p. 42.

superiority over all the belligerent armies in the First World War.¹⁴⁵ Although a posture derived from immersion in the pre-war public-school, Christian ethic, Gary Sheffield concluded that it could be taught to officers lacking a gentlemanly background who began to be more frequently commissioned as the war progressed in 1916; ‘paternalism’ was taught as part of officer preparation after officer cadet battalions were established, so that it was introduced to new officers whatever their background.¹⁴⁶ Paternalism, practiced in its class based, hierarchical form was political and economic. It was characterised, especially at the front, not just by ensuring the emotional and physical welfare of soldiers but through buying largesse.¹⁴⁷ Platoon and company officers would endear themselves to soldiers by buying them food, alcohol, and cigarettes. Hence Donald Price was speaking literally when he described his officer as ‘generous’.

The experience and service record of Ranker officers disrupts this narrative that has been accepted unequivocally in military history. Ranker officers had no sense of ‘paternalism’ which was class based, or the means to lavish gifts on soldiers; they did, however, understand soldier welfare. John Lucy appeared to have been a very effective officer without ‘social distance and deference’, describing returning to his battalion, when ‘on my way several standing men plucked my sleeve or grasped my hand — old friends, the regimental sergeant major, a battalion runner, a clerk. It is also evident that he understood the importance of maintaining the welfare of his men as an NCO ‘because warm and well fed men fight well’. Particularly when out of the trenches, the domestic care of soldiers lay with NCOs and QMS, and their daily lives were

¹⁴⁵ Watson, *Enduring the Great War : Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918*.

¹⁴⁶ Sheffield, *Command and Morale*, pp. 59–60, p. 102. Officer cadet battalions became the main source of supply of officers, ‘For the period between February 1916 and December 1918 107,929 commissions were granted to officers from Officer Cadet Battalions.’ War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War, 1914–1920*, War Office, March (London: H.M.S.O., 1922), p. 235.

¹⁴⁷ Moore-Bick, *Playing the Game*, p. 161.

rarely the concern of officers.¹⁴⁸ However, because of their background gentlemen-officers considered it extremely important to be seen to care.

Michael Roper states that ‘The emotional investments that subalterns made in matters of care drew upon feminine and maternal — as well as paternal — identifications and precursors.’¹⁴⁹ Hence Roper takes issue with a strictly gendered interpretation of military caring: ‘Gary Sheffield remarks that “the care and affection of the temporary officer for his men are constant themes running through memoirs, letters and diaries”. Mistakenly, however – in my view – he associates such care solely with paternalism, whereas it clearly has maternal elements as well, its sources being not only a public school or military education, but also domestic experience.’¹⁵⁰ Roper, although approaching from a different perspective, helpfully challenges the myth that soldier welfare has to be viewed solely through the class lens of the ‘deferential bargain’.¹⁵¹

The relationship between gentlemen-officers and ranker officers and particularly the ungentlemanly identity of the ranker officer is at the heart of this thesis. In earlier parts of this thesis, we have looked at how this discomfort was played out through caricaturing and disparagement of the ranker officer. It is important to note that despite the more general resentment of ranker officers in the officers’ mess, friendships did form. Mark Connelly has documented the friendship between two officers, Wilfred Barham, a traditional regular gentleman-officer and William Corrall, a ranker officer commissioned in 1914.¹⁵² When Barham arrived on the Western front, he shared a dug-out with Corrall, and they developed a

¹⁴⁸ John F. Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1993), p. 323. Lucy writes ‘The service of a good QMS was a most valuable asset to any company, and raised the morale of the front-line men to an incredible degree, because warm and well-fed men fight well.’

¹⁴⁹ Michael Roper, “Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History.” *History Workshop Journal* 59, no. 1 (2005), pp. 57–72. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>. Accessed December 27, 2016).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, see footnote 39.

¹⁵¹ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 71.

¹⁵² Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!*, pp. 21–3.

close friendship, despite their class differences and Connelly found no trace of class resentment in Barham's writing about the relationship. There are two points that emerge from the analysis; Barham's respect for Corrall's good character and his military efficiency. They were also proximate in age and rank which must have made the friendship easier.

This is more evidence that friendships occurred. Lionel Westropp, as already discussed, befriended an ex-Essex Regiment corporal and ranker officer, Rudolph Oscar Schuh, who was the son of a German tailor and commissioned at the same time as him.¹⁵³ Again, they were the same rank. Whether such relationships would have survived the war is doubtful but unproven, because in each instance one of the friends was killed. Westropp clearly felt it was legitimate to have had this friendship but also retain his wider social cultural prejudices against ranker officers.¹⁵⁴

The battlefield conditions forced closer personal relationships not least because of physical proximity, an idea that would have been abhorrent pre-war. James Dunn, in *The War the Infantry Knew*, describes Percy Welton, a ranker officer, three other officers, and Count de Miremont, sleeping in a hole together: 'A huge tarpaulin, salved from somewhere nearby, covered us. So tight a fit was this communal bed, and so exactly did our counterpane cover us, that it was literally a case of 'when father turns we all turn,' father usually being the Count.'¹⁵⁵ The relationship between ranker officers and gentleman-officers could also develop into a collusion against temporary officers; in February 1918, Percy Welton and Dunn bemoan the quality of 'officers of today', with another officer, lamenting 'their ignorance of mess-etiquette'.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Simpson Archive: Colonel Lionel Henry Mountifort Westropp, Devonshire Regiment.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, p. 536. Dunn observed 'A huge tarpaulin, salved from somewhere nearby, covered us. So tight a fit was this communal bed, and so exactly did our counterpane cover us, that it was literally a case of 'when father turns we all turn,' father usually being the Count.'

¹⁵⁶ Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, p. 445

These friendships are evidence that personal relationships could sometimes overcome socio-cultural differences. However, throughout the war, Sandhurst and Woolwich were producing young regular officers with the same socio-cultural background and outlook, promulgated through public schools and cadet training. These regular officers were immediately resentful of messing with ranker officers.¹⁵⁷ The friendships that developed during the war were dependent on the resulting liminal conditions and did not alter the basic fault line in social status that ran between the ranker officer and the gentleman.

The idea of ‘paternalism’ as a class based virtue embedded in public-school educated officers has strongly influenced discourses of leadership in Britain, both in the historiography and more widely. The change in social composition of the officer class in the First World War is explained as a collapse in the availability of gentlemen-officers through sheer attrition.¹⁵⁸ The changes also coincided with more rigorous training, the necessity for all potential officers to serve in the ranks, and a dawning meritocracy.¹⁵⁹ Military historians have noted the ‘paradox’ of a perceived declining standard of regimental officers with improved results on the battlefield.¹⁶⁰ However, some of the ‘standards’ judged may have been social rather than professional.

Basil Williams, an officer involved in training, wrote a book about training methods in 1917 and observed ‘One of the great objections to the early methods of selecting and training temporary officers was that they were often appointed very much in the dark, and once appointed it was difficult to deprive them of their commissions, however unsuitable they might

¹⁵⁷ Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!*, p. 24. See also Arthur Carr Osburn, *Unwilling Passenger* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), pp. 279-281.

¹⁵⁸ Keith Simpson, “The Officers,” in *A Nation in Arms : A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 84.

¹⁵⁹ Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies*, p. 98.

¹⁶⁰ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. X. See the Foreword written by Peter Simkins for a summary of this paradox.

prove.¹⁶¹ This reflected how gentlemanliness, the single criteria that led to so many early commissions, had been seriously undermined; furthermore, the disciplinary apparatus applied to officers largely revolved around policing gentlemanliness and not performance, making it difficult to ‘deprive them of their commissions’ if they were poor officers.¹⁶² Williams explained the new system of selecting and offering commissions: ‘The training as we have seen, was not entirely adequate. By the new system, introduced in February, 1916 temporary commissions, except in a few special corps, are granted only to men who have already had training in the ranks.’¹⁶³ This was a complete ‘volte face’ on the attitude to commissioning from the ranks before 1914. It was, however, a solution to train temporary officers. Meanwhile Sandhurst and Woolwich were producing gentleman-officers who shared the same understandings about class and masculinity as their pre-war counterparts.¹⁶⁴

3) The Status of the Ranker Officer in the Historiography

The ranker officer has only been partially represented in the military historiography of the war. One reason for this general absence of ranker officers from the historiography and their limited, prejudiced assessments is the dependence of the historiography of the war on middle-class sources. It has enabled a class based narrative of the war conjoining class, leadership and sacrifice, to be unchallenged. Drawing together evidence from researching officers, ‘discovered’ through assembling previously unexamined data, and attaching biographies to ranker officers gives an entirely unexpected collective portrait of a previously poorly described type of officer. In seeking to understand the under-representation, and the form of

¹⁶¹ Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies*, p. 98.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid. For a description of Officer Cadet Battalions, see Simpson, “The Officers,” p. 80.

¹⁶⁴ Arthur Osburn, *Unwilling Passenger* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), pp. 279-281.

representation, of ranker officers in the historical literature about leadership, the work of Helen McCartney provides an interesting example.¹⁶⁵

McCartney undertook a study of a Liverpool territorial regiment in the First World War, that was important in showing how citizen soldiers retained their civilian outlook and how this influenced their experience of soldiering and war.¹⁶⁶ In the course of the study reference is made to David Munro, a regular ranker officer sent to lead the Liverpool Scottish, a territorial battalion in March 1918, and then led them through some decisive battles until November 1918. McCartney's study is heavily dependent on the papers of a gentleman sergeant, R. A. Scott Macfie, from a wealthy family, educated at Oundle, Cambridge, and Edinburgh.¹⁶⁷ The study revolves around the changes to the middle-class identity of the battalion. Observing that regular officers 'could be more constrained to follow the rulebook', McCartney writes 'Sergeant Macfie, for example, voiced his indignation over the matter of his morale-boosting cooking competition, which was designed to entertain the Battalion and improve the culinary skills of the cooks. In a letter to his sister he wrote, "The CO has sanctioned the competition and deleted all the best paragraphs from the rules in case the general should see them and stop his promotion. Professional soldiers are dreadful cowards morally." The CO was David Munro of the Gordon Highlanders, who had been attached to the Liverpool Scottish four months earlier in March 1918.'¹⁶⁸ Appearing to use a single source, a letter, McCartney states 'A year later, it was evident that he had failed to gain the trust of the Territorials, still being described as a 'stranger' in February 1919.'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Helen B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War*, vol. 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 145–6.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

This is in contrast with the view of Archibald MacGilchrist, the official historian of the battalion who served with them throughout the war, unreported by McCartney, who said ‘The (Liverpool) Scottish should always be grateful to Brigadier-General Kentish for one thing, that he applied specially for Major Munro to be sent out from England to Command them. The battalion never had a more competent, sympathetic or — incidentally — fearless commanding officer, nor one who more jealously looked after the interests of officers and men under him.’¹⁷⁰ MacGilchrist was writing in 1930, when it was easy to valorise retrospectively, but his praise of Munro is exultant, particularly placing his ‘paternalism’, looking after the interests of his officers and men. McCartney, in using this example, was referencing the failure of regular officers to adopt the more liberal relations between territorials, however in Macfie’s dislike of the ‘dreadful moral cowardice’ of the professional soldier, is found the middle-class gentleman’s distaste for being commanded by a professional soldier and a ranker officer. We are left with this monochrome view of Munro because, as McCartney acknowledges, there ‘was a paucity of conscript letters for 1918’, and despite the ranks becoming more socially diverse, the dominant narrative of the war here, and elsewhere is from the middle-class, literate soldier.¹⁷¹ Again, paradoxically, Munro’s failure to be ‘trusted’ and regard as a stranger coincides with the most successful era in the battalion’s history.¹⁷² It is through this approach that sources have shaped the marginalisation of the ranker officer in the historiography.

The failure of Munro to be ‘liked’ by Mcfie implicitly becomes a judgement of how ‘good’ he was. This representation of ranker officers, such as Munro, leaves popular military history to

¹⁷⁰ MacGilchrist, *The Liverpool Scottish, 1900–1919*, p. 166.

¹⁷¹ There are a few exceptions to this but because they are less well known texts they are rarely cited. For instance, and giving a view from the ranker officer in a territorial battalion, Ernest Shephard is highly critical of their NCOs. Ernest Shephard, *A Sergeant-Major’s War* (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press, 1987).

¹⁷² McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 22, pp. 231–9.

perpetuate the dominance of the ‘gentleman officer’ ideal, epitomised in this quote from contemporary popular history of the war:

Junior officers came, initially at least, from a very thin stratum of British society. Almost all were volunteers from public schools, or occasionally a well established grammar school. When August 1914 came the values of the public school were exactly what the country at war needed. After all who could withstand the highly drilled militarism of the Kaiser’s Army — except for a corps of young British men who believed in the qualities of courage, patriotism, selfless service, leadership and character? Wellington allegedly quipped that Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. Indisputably, the First World war was part won in the classrooms, fields, and Officers’ Training Corps parade grounds of public schools.¹⁷³

The next chapter looks at how and why popular post war literature also supported the resurgence of the gentlemanly ideal and compounded the marginalisation of ranker officer identity.

Conclusion

This study and others have raised interesting questions about the participation of ranker officers in regimental leadership during the war. Research that brings together evidence in new ways, in this case aggregating data that allows the presence of ranker officers to be calibrated, throws a new light on leadership and highlights the strengths of ranker officers that challenge the heroic depictions of regimental officers and the qualities necessary to lead in a technological war. This chapter looks at how this evidence undermines the continuing arguments about the nature of officer-man relations and the reality of the ‘deferential bargain’ that dominates discussions about leadership in the war.¹⁷⁴ The caricatures of the ranker officer rarely implied anything about their capabilities as leaders. This was out of a mutual ‘other ranks’ respect, and a recognition that ranker officers did respond well to the leadership in the war. However, the fact that they did perform well is explained not in terms of what appears to be their greatest

¹⁷³ John Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks: The Short and Gallant Life of the British Officer in the First War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010), p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 71 and p. 106.

strengths; professionalism, training expertise and commitment to drilling, products of their military training, but as a product of their being natural-born gentlemen. Paradoxically the inheritance of moral authority to lead had previously rested with the aristocrat.

Frank Crozier's biography, *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land* has been pilloried for sensationalism and his own tarnished gentlemanly reputation.¹⁷⁵ However, his book leaves a profound description of what happened to the officer class as the war became ruthlessly driven by results and the idea of gentlemanliness foundered in the last year of the war. He describes a traditional old-school staff officer coming to visit him because the censors have found a letter from a junior officer in his brigade, an officer commissioned from the ranks, advising his 'wife', who had written complaining about her lack of money, that 'she had better sit in hotels and earn more, as she has a fortune in her face'.¹⁷⁶ The officer reports 'here is an officer, holding the King's commission, trying to prostitute his wife'. Crozier contemplates whether the officer could be tried under 'Section 16, scandalous conduct, etc., of a gentleman.' He reflected that he knew a case where an officer tried under Section 16 defended himself by claiming he 'never asked to be made an officer and never claimed to be a gentleman'.¹⁷⁷ The next chapter considers what became of the ranker officer at the end of the war, and why and how the caricature that had emerged became the dominant public perception.

¹⁷⁵ Crozier, *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land*; C. Messenger, *Broken Sword: The Tumultuous Life of General Frank Crozier 1897–1937* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2013).

¹⁷⁶ Crozier, *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land*, p. 225.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 226.

Chapter Seven

Ranker Officers become Beasts

This chapter examines the range of postwar responses to ranker officers amidst the resurgence of the traditional officer class after the First World War. It charts the institutional marginalisation of the ranker officer towards the end and after the war, the difficulties faced by ranker officers in the aftermath, and the reassertion of gentlemanliness in the 1920s. It begins by investigating what happened to ranker officers in the army, because, as the war neared its conclusion, the liminal conditions that had supported their existence began to evaporate. It is only at this point that ranker officers recognised the fragility of their identity and the limitations on their professional future. Extensive research undertaken in support of this thesis demonstrates the difficulty experienced by ranker officers adapting to civilian life, the socio-cultural impact of their wartime transformations on their post-war lives, and how they understood themselves from their response to the circumstances around them. It concludes that they had no lasting socio-cultural qualities or characteristics of gentlemen, only retired military rank and limited prestige from the military service and that they invested in their pre-commission regimental NCO identity as a source of esteem.

The abasement of the ranker officer's representation accelerated with the reassertion of the unique coupling of officering with gentlemanly status in the 1930s. The caricature of ranker officers crossed a threshold into disgust, illustrated by Alfred Burrage's description of them as 'vulgar beasts'.¹ This chapter shows how, in parallel with pejorative representations of the ranker officer, the dominance of the 'gentleman-officer' identity was reasserted in the military and public domain after the war.

¹ Alfred McLlland Burrage, *War Is War* (London: V. Gollancz Limited, 1930), p. 71

1) Ranker Officers in the Aftermath of War

The term ‘ranker officer’ was rarely used before the war. Where ‘ranker officer’ was employed, it was used to identify honorary officers. The term began to become part of the informal army lexicon as the war progressed. It was not an official rank, and it was unprecedented to confer a title based on an officer’s antecedents; however, in this case, ‘ranker officer’ became a useful discriminatory label. The term was useful because of the socio-cultural meanings attached to it. Since it had no formal status, the term does not exist in any official documents, however it appears in a variety of discourses late in the war and after the war, particularly in memoirs, and was a widely used term. Crucially, it had appeared in a military journal in 1918, demonstrating that the name had a shared meaning between ranker officers and other types of officers, before the war ended.

It was used as the title of an article in the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, the most important professional journal of the British army.² Samuel Warne, the author was the archetypal ranker officer. He had joined the Royal Garrison Artillery as a 15-year-old boy, shortly followed by his 14-year-old brother.³ He had passed all the essential examinations to become an NCO within two years of enlistment and passed additional examinations in law and administration. He transferred to the clerical department and yet maintained his gunnery expertise, passing examinations in artillery. He was commissioned in December 1914, and by the end of the war would progress to become a major and a battery commander.⁴ He was a capable soldier, with an excellent record, and sufficiently scholarly and well-respected to both write and have accepted an article in an important journal. His use of the term suggests that

² Samuel Warne 6197 R.G.A. (S.W.), “The Ranker Officer,” *Royal United Services Institution. Journal* 63, no. 451 (1918).

³ TNA WO 364, Samuel Warne, War Office: Soldiers’ Documents from Pension Claims, First World War.

⁴ “Obituary: Samuel Warne,” *The Times*, August 16, 1967.

whilst it differentiated the officer commissioned from the ranks, it had not yet acquired its full pejorative weight.

Warne's article anticipated the end of the war and the future of the ranker officer. It was an insightful assessment of the rank officer's situation, recognising that some of his colleagues would need additional support to pass examinations to bring them to the pre-war requirements for a commission. He also anticipated the problems of peace-time messing and the challenges this would pose if the level of officers' expenses returned to their pre-war levels. It was particularly pertinent for Warne to have written the article because of the high proportion of ranker officers in the artillery, of which he was one. What he did not anticipate was that his article would be ignored and ultimately steps would be taken to remove the clear majority of ranker officers. Warne with many other ranker officers was forced into retirement under circumstances described later at 35 years of age in 1920.⁵

The reduction in the size of the army and demobilisation of over six million personnel was a challenge for the War Office at the end of the war. Demobilisation of temporary and territorial officers serving for the duration of the war began after the Armistice. In the army reductions that followed, structural and cultural sanctions were applied to remove ranker officers, despite assurances as to their long-term tenure when they were first commissioned. They were subject to special incentives and punitive steps not applied to other officers. These steps began before what is known as the 'Geddes' Axe' was brought to bear more widely as the army retracted and reorganised.⁶

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Keith Grieves, *Sir Eric Geddes: Business and Government in War and Peace* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. vii.

In 1919, to encourage ranker officers to leave, the retirement benefits that had been an incentive to accept a commission and provided a better pension were increased.⁷ The impact of the more meritocratic approach to promotion and diminishing regimental identity towards the end of the war had been to see ranker officers attached to different regiments and spread across all types of battalions; regular, service and territorial. The gradual demobilisation of service and territorial formations had two unfortunate consequences. Ranker and other regular officers promoted to temporary senior command and staff appointments were reverted to their substantive rank and posted back to their regiment.

John Proud Breckon, a ranker officer and lieutenant-colonel, commanding the 12th Battalion, Rifle Brigade at the end of the war, was reduced to his substantive rank of lieutenant and faced the prospect of being junior to officers he had once commanded.⁸ Since rank represented a social status outside the army, officers like Breckon could retain the honorary rank of lieutenant-colonel, something that may be useful, if they promptly retired.⁹ The implications for ranker officers diminished in rank who remained was a loss of status and significantly, remuneration, and their financial problems compounded as the traditional officer class resumed peace-time messing that made remaining an officer unaffordable. Hence George Sutton, commissioned into the Welsh Regiment in 1916, after six years in the ranks and only 29 years of age, resigned because: ‘being a married officer and having no private income I could not maintain my commission as a regular officer.’¹⁰

For the traditional gentleman-officer in a regular battalion, the reductions meant a concentration of ranker officers in regular battalions which was particularly undesirable

⁷ Hansard, HC Deb 04 August 1924 vol 176 cc2669-714. Several adjustments were made to the Article 572A of the Royal Warrant.

⁸ WO 339/48813 John Proud Breckon.

⁹ *The London Gazette* of 11.12.1919 page 15415, “Rif. Brig.- Lt. J. Breckon, D.S.O. retires on ret. Pay, 12th Dec. 1919, and is granted the rank of Lt.-Col.”

¹⁰ TNA WO 339/61737 George Samuel Sutton.

because of the attendant risk to the socio-cultural status of the mess.¹¹ The cultural homeostasis of the regular army was realised by removing ranker officers and replacement by a steady flow of ‘gentlemen cadets’ from Sandhurst and Woolwich and a sudden influx of officers from the upper class, such as Lord Russell of Liverpool, who had enjoyed their army experience, converting their territorial commission into a regular one.¹²

The officer class returned to its traditional ethos and attitudes after the war.¹³ The expanding British Army of 1914 afforded opportunity, and the reverse was true in the post-war years, as it ‘reverted in size, organisation and ethos to that of the pre-war days’.¹⁴ The reversion of the army to its small size and imperial function meant that it could be populated by gentlemen-officers despite the attrition of the war. The ranker officer wishing and able to stay in the army had only limited opportunities as promotion returned to a system largely driven by precedence. Hence Albert Lewis commissioned into the King’s Own Scottish Borderers in 1914 and ending the war a captain, remained a captain and adjutant with the regiment in 1925.¹⁵ Reverting to pre-war options, ranker officers sought extra-regimental colonial attachments. The Indian army was a refuge where officering was affordable. Francis Townsend was commissioned into the West Yorkshire Regiment in 1914 and achieved the rank of major. He secured a transfer into the Indian army in 1919, but was still only a captain in 1926.¹⁶ Arthur Beard, a Royal Engineer who had been born in India, was not commissioned until May 1918, transferred to the Indian Army in 1923 and retired a lieutenant-colonel on the Indian army staff in 1938.¹⁷ William

¹¹ Simpson Archive, Colonel Lionel Henry Mountifort Westropp.

¹² Lord Russell of Liverpool, *That Reminds Me* (London: Cassell, 1959).

¹³ Keith Simpson, “The Officers,” in *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 65.

¹⁴ Edward M. Spiers, “The Regular Army,” in *A Nation in Arms: A Social History of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. I. F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 90.

¹⁵ HMSO, *The Monthly Army List*, April, 1926.

¹⁶ HMSO, *The Monthly Army List*, April, 1926.

¹⁷ *The London Gazette*, 30705 of 27.5.1918. p. 6182, “Corps of Royal Engineers, The undermentioned Warrant and N.C.O.’s. of Ind. Unattd. List to be 2nd Lts. 28th May 1918 –Staff Sergts., Mil. Works Servs. Arthur William Beard;” *The London Gazette* 34571 of 18.11.1938 page 727, “Lt.-Col. A. W. Beard, O.B.E., retires, 14th Nov. 1938.”

Stanway, commissioned into the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (but concluding the war with the South Wales Borderers), a lieutenant-colonel commanding a battalion in 1919, went to India where he had a range of administrative posts including adjutant Indian Defence Force from 1921 to 1929, Commandant of a depot from 1929 to 1933, and Director of Military Prisons and Detention Barracks in India from 1933 until he retired.¹⁸ Other highly decorated ranker officers, such as Thomas Fitzpatrick, could only find a future in colonial administrative appointments.¹⁹

Compulsory retirement on age grounds prematurely ended many careers, and although extensions could be allowed, ranker officers were summarily retired. The staff of the Military Secretary were highly vigilant in taking steps to retire ranker officers reaching 45 years of age. Hence George Nelson commissioned in the Cheshire Regiment and promptly made a captain in 1915, a veteran of Gallipoli and awarded the DSO, was compulsorily retired aged 45 years in December 1919.²⁰ The pleas of General Sir G. F. Milne commanding the Army of the Black Sea to extend the service of Charles McCabe, commissioned in 1915 after 27 years' service, because of his excellence as an officer and his expert local knowledge, were rejected.²¹ Edward Bicheno had enlisted in the Royal Garrison Artillery in 1898 and became a sergeant-major, instructor of gunnery and was posted to Bermuda in 1912.²² He was commissioned in March

Lieutenant-Colonel William Arthur Beard, OBE. The Royal Engineers commissioned in India served long careers and few retired at the end of the war.

¹⁸ Hero of the Red Dragon Crater, RWF Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/146060182083938/photos/pcb.1103532216336725/1103532153003398/?type=1&theater>. Accessed March 29, 2017.

¹⁹ "Obituary - Colonel Thomas William Fitzpatrick, CBE, DCM," *The Times*, March 26, 1965. He enlisted in the ranks of 18th Royal Irish Regt; commissioned second lieutenant and adjutant 2nd Battalion 1914 (despatches five times and wounded twice, DCM, Russian Cross of St George, French Médaille Militaire and Croix de Guerre); Brevet Major to West Yorkshire Regt, 1919; Provost Marshal, Egypt and Palestine, 1921; retired, 1926, to Egyptian Police of Alexandria and Cairo; Commandant, Suez Canal Police, 1942 with rank of Lewa (Maj.-Gen.) and title of Pasha.

²⁰ TNA WO 339/3536 George Nelson.

²¹ TNA WO 339/24155 Charles McCabe.

²² TNA WO WO 339/24130 Edward Bicheno.

1915 and was acting commandant of the Bermuda Militia Artillery when he was recalled to Britain since he had reached the compulsory age for retirement and was retired in 1921.

These processes of exclusion gained maximum impetus through the proposals put forward by the Geddes' Committee in February 1922, aimed at reducing public spending by £87 million, and army reorganisation.²³ It created the opportunity for the restoration of the old, traditional form of the army and tidying up the membership of the officer class. The proposal saw army reductions of 50,000 officers and men. Army Order 133 saw reductions in cavalry regiments, some regular battalions of English infantry regiments, and the disbandment of six Irish infantry regiments.²⁴

The Royal Warrant of 11 May 1922, the 'Disposal of Officers on Reduction of Establishment', was a measure that gave the army powers to institute compulsory redundancies to reduce the officer establishment.²⁵ The establishment of regimental committees to select officers for compulsory retirement allowed the traditional officer class carte blanche to exercise prejudice towards ranker officers. The process was very abrupt and uncompromising; a letter of notification gave selected officers ten days' notice of being removed and gazetted. The criteria for selection were vague and included the committee deciding someone had 'no prospect of a military career'. This process of decision-making was shaped by reinvigorated assumptions about the connections between social class and military prospects. Leonard Johnstone-Jones had been commissioned into the North Staffordshire regiment in October 1914 and captured a month later, but was keen to resume his army career.²⁶ He appealed his initial selection for compulsory retirement to the Army Council who agreed it was unfair, but the message from

²³ Andrew McDonald, "The Geddes Committee and the Formulation of Public Expenditure Policy, 1921–1922," *The Historical Journal* 32, no. 03 (1989).

²⁴ TNA WO 123/64, Army Order 133 of 1922.

²⁵ TNA WO 123/64, Army Order 179 of 1922.

²⁶ TNA WO 339/12290 Leonard Johnstone-Jones. He emigrated to Canada after compulsory retirement.

his CO stating that he was lacking in ‘military knowledge and personality’ indicated that his future was limited, and prompted his decision to go anyway.

The artillery had seen the commissioning of ranker officers proportionately greater than anywhere else in the army. Hence specific measures were implemented to remove ranker officers. The many ‘acting’ ranker officer majors in the artillery were reduced to their substantive ranks of second-lieutenant and lieutenant at the end of the war. In 1920, the War Office issued an army order decreeing that subalterns in the artillery who had reached 35 years of age should be placed on the half pay list and ‘allowed’ to retire on special terms.²⁷ The cadre of officers who fitted this category were not named, although, by definition, any officer in this age group and at this junior rank was a ranker officer.

The order stated that this group of officers, if they chose to retire, would get £50 a year more pension, unless they were close to the compulsory age of 45 years. This did not break the promise of the Army Order of 1914 that those officers who ‘wished to serve after the war should be permitted to do so,’ but it made it practically impossible. Half pay was not a sustainable position for many, particularly married ranker officers, and retirement was the only alternative. This blanket measure meant the removal of most ranker officers before the further measures were effected in 1922. Ranker officers angrily complained that if they had remained in the ranks they would have had longer service and not be forced to retire.²⁸ Samuel Warne was placed on the half pay list and retired in December 1920.²⁹

²⁷ Army Order 291 of 1920 ‘RA Subalterns.’

²⁸ TNA WO 339/65507. Jasper Beasley Burchill. An ambitious ranker officer commissioned in July 1916, Burchill had become a staff officer serving with the British Army on the Rhine. He wrote after he retired, struggling to find employment and seeking restitution as a district officer.

²⁹ *The London Gazette*, 32155 of 7.12.1920 page 1212, “The undermentioned Lts. h.p. list, retire on ret. pay. 8th Dec. 1920: - And are granted the rank of Capt.: - S. Warne.”

Some officers reverted to becoming ‘honorary officers’; a status that didn’t require a gentlemanly identity, was affordable, and meant extended service.³⁰ Ironically, only officers who had reached the rank of warrant officer in the ranks usually after 21 years of service qualified. Donald McCorquodale reached the acting rank of major but with a substantive rank of lieutenant and was considered for an appointment as a district officer or quartermaster with the Royal Artillery in 1920.³¹ He was refused because he had not served as a warrant officer in the ranks. He retired later that year.

The artillery showed another significant trend post-war: the use of military law and dismissals from the service increased significantly. There was much closer attention to policing the limits and boundaries of acceptable or respectable gentlemanly behaviour in the army, and the consequences of breaches were much more harshly dealt with post-war. In ways redolent of pre-war army culture, any misdemeanours by ranker officers were harshly dealt with, sending cautionary messages to other ranker officers. The ranker officer could expect relatively harsher treatment at a military court than the gentleman officer, as Arthur Osburn, a regular officer in the RAMC, observed of the officer with a public-school background; ‘There is a natural and quite excusable freemasonry that tempers justice for one of their own kind.’³² The use of military law against ranker officers had abated during the war, there been a few war-time court-martials of artillery officers for indecent behaviour and drunkenness, and a few officers vanished at the end of hostilities.³³ However, the frequency and severity of legal sanctions against ranker officers resumed at the end of the war.

³⁰ *The London Gazette*, LG 30990 of 1.11.1918 page 12986, “Lt. (temp. Capt.) G. Woodward, D.C.M. to be Ridmr. 8th Oct. 1918.” For instance, George Woodward, awarded a DCM and Mentioned in Despatches in the Anglo Boer War, commissioned in 1914 and Mentioned in Despatches in the First World reverted to become a riding master.

³¹ TNA WO 339/22065 Donald McCorquodale.

³² Arthur Osburn, *Unwilling Passenger* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), p. 300.

³³ TNA WO 339/40852 Benjamin Walter Silva Newnham. Cashiered in February 1916 for scandalous behaviour and indecency. TNA 339/22750 Frederick Dakin. Cashiered after a field court martial found him guilty of gross indecency, indecent assault and drunkenness. TNA WO 374/73192 William James West. He absconded on 13 November and dismissed from the service in April 1921.

Post-war, the focus of ‘crimes’ investigated and prosecuted returned to the failure of ranker officers to operate within the ‘honour economy’. Charges of scandalous conduct and conducting unbecoming of an officer and gentleman was the consequence of bounced cheques and forgery. Young officers without much experience of managing their finances and messing in peacetime were particularly at risk. Albert Know had served for ten years in the ranks before being commissioned in May 1918.³⁴ In 1920, he was court-martialled for scandalous conduct, not being able to pay his mess bills and reprimanded. Only a few months later, he was cashiered when a cheque for one pound could not be honoured.³⁵

Thomas Barry was convicted of absenting himself, issuing eight cheques that could not be honoured, and fraud in Dehra Dun, India.³⁶ He was cashiered and sent back to Dorchester prison to serve an 18-month prison sentence with hard labour. William Growse had enlisted in 1909, was commissioned in 1916, and cashiered in 1919.³⁷ His offence was forgery, a civil offence, since he wrote three cheques attributed to another officer, and he was sentenced to six months in Shepton Mallet prison. The consequences of a ‘dishonourable discharge’ for an ex-officer were considerable, the financial consequences disastrous, with loss of pension and a ruined reputation. The court was increasingly using civil imprisonment, a harsher treatment than had been seen before the war, where the disgrace of being cashiered was sufficient. There was a more rigorous policing of the gentlemanly boundaries of officer identity after the war.

Employment options for a cashiered or dismissed officer were so bleak that enlistment in the ranks was an option; William Growse re-enlisted in October 1919 not stating his having been cashiered, and was still in the army in 1931.³⁸ The implications of the dismissal of Arthur

³⁴ TNA WO 374/26959 Albert Edward Know.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ TNA WO 339/106690 Thomas Henry Barry. He was the son of an RGA NCO. Barry had a distinguished war record, he was wounded twice, mentioned in despatches and later trained and flew as an observer in the RFC.

³⁷ TNA WO 339/69682 William Henry Growse.

³⁸ Ibid.

Ernest Parker, tried by court martial at Westminster Guild Hall in 1919, caused many representations to be made on his behalf to recover his pension.³⁹ Parker's father had been a district officer and his family had served in the artillery from 1809. He had served 21 years in the artillery, serving in the elite RHA after the war. He was found guilty of misrepresenting a single cheque for six pounds and dismissed. His wife wrote to Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State and made failed representations for restoration of his pension.⁴⁰ The President of the Court Martial that dismissed Lieutenant Frank Haviland for selling army stores at Ypres noted that his actions were a result of thoughtless rather than being deliberately corrupt and that he had been scrupulously honest to the court, when asking for clemency.⁴¹ Haviland was only three months away from retirement, pension, and a gratuity but the Adjutant-General found the plea for clemency 'amazing' and 'promulgated' the sentence.

The increase in the application of military law, largely for fraud and cheque related offences, was indicative of a hardening of attitude towards ranker officers coupled with increased messing costs. 21 artillery ranker officers were cashiered, dismissed, or removed from the Army in a few years after the war. Four were removed during the war. Many officers would have been allowed to resign their commission in the face of a court-martial, and the problem was certainly more widespread than indicated by the incidence of court-martials. There were only 33 ranker officers in the artillery, or 2 per cent of those commissioned during the war, serving after 1930, and most of these were posted extra-regimentally. The careers of those that served after 1922 are illustrative of the limited opportunities for ranker officers and the fragility of their existence in an economic and culturally exclusive officer class.

³⁹ TNA WO 339/38868 Arthur Ernest Parker.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ TNA WO 339/107866 Frank Haviland.

Campbell Kelly, born in Wexford, Ireland enlisted in 1910.⁴² He was wounded and awarded the MM before being commissioned in January 1918 and was awarded the MC and Croix de Guerre. He was posted extra-regimentally and, in 1921, he served as an Intelligence Officer in Ireland interrogating Republican prisoners and survived an assassination attempt before being awarded an OBE. Returning to the artillery in 1923, he was posted at various low-status dock garrisons before taking up another ‘affordable’ post as adjutant to a territorial unit. Despite his competence, he was still only a captain when, in 1928, he was convicted of fraud and cashiered.⁴³ Similarly, Thomas Horton was awarded the DCM and commissioned in 1915, aged 25 years.⁴⁴ By 1917, he was second in command of a siege battery. He finished the War with as an acting major commanding a siege battery, holding the DSO and MC. Reverting to his substantive rank of lieutenant, he served in the Artillery School holding the position of range officer. He was not promoted to captain until 1929.⁴⁵

What emerged post-war was a series of different ways in which ranker officers were ‘problematised’; the problem was solved by removal through incentives to leave, compulsory retirements, discriminatory promotion policies, and military law to police behaviour. However competent, their lack of gentlemanliness and ‘ranker officer’ identity meant that they did not fit with the post-war era officer class, and their careers only continued at the margins of the service, if at all. Secondly, and perhaps more surprisingly, ranker officers, despite their years spent as officers, were quite willing to reassume their old identities in the ranks or take up the

⁴² TNA WO 209/94 His conviction was not the last time Kelly came to prominence. In 1941, he was awarded the George Medal for his actions as an ARP Control officer and fire Chief at a Coventry Factory. The publicity led to him being identified as a bigamist and he was charged with this offence in the same year. He died a year later.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *The London Gazette*, 29301 of 17.9.1915 page 9285.

“The undermentioned Warrant and Non-commissioned Officers to be Second Lieutenants for service in the Field:- Royal Garrison Artillery. Dated 31st August, 1915. Corporal Thomas Horton.”

⁴⁵ *The London Gazette*, 33500 of 31.5.1929 page 3587, Lt. T. Horton, D.S.O., M.C., D.C.M. to be Capt. 1st June 1929. He was awarded a Brevet major in 1934, but did not become a full major until 1938, twenty years after holding the acting rank. He served in the Second World War.

traditional honorary officer role. Henry Casbolt, Bernard Newnham, and Henry Growse were all cashiered or dismissed artillery rankers who re-enlisted for war and post-war service in the ranks, when there was no compulsion to do so, sometimes covertly.⁴⁶ Sidney Alexander was dismissed from the service for drunkenness by sentence of general court-martial in March 1918.⁴⁷ In May 1919, he re-enlisted as a bombardier in the Russian Relief Battery, without declaring his commissioned service in the war. There was a similar propensity to re-enlist, across all types of ranker officers.⁴⁸ Removed from having a pension, military service was the only form of employment they knew.

One other hypothesis is that this return to the ranks concerned identity; most had joined the army at the age of 14, were ‘army children’, and they were grounded in the socio-cultural world of the army ranks. This alienation from the officer class can be clearly felt in John Lucy’s biography. Despite his becoming an officer, with a relatively successful post-war career, his loyalty and comfort is strongly embedded in his identity in the ranks, where his important relationships and admiration is most strongly located.⁴⁹ It would be wrong to suggest that most ranker officers saw a return to the ranks as a desirable thing; however, it would be reasonable to observe that for some, the culture of the barracks and their ability to conform to a soldierly manliness was preferred to the officers’ mess.

Ranker officers coalesced to form a collective identity only after the war. The British Legion, formed in 1921, made representations on behalf of ex-ranker officers, but ‘the numbers

⁴⁶ TNA WO 339/26933 Henry Casbolt; TNA WO 339/40852 B.W.S. Newnham; TNA WO 339/69682 William Grouse. William Growse re-enlisted in October 1919 not stating his having been cashiered and was still in the army in 1931.

⁴⁷ TNA WO 339/22795 Sidney Alexander.

⁴⁸ TNA WO 374/68360 David Thomson. David Thomson, a captain in the Royal Scots Fusiliers was allowed to resign ‘honourably’ in 1921, clearly struggling to afford his commission. Eight months after his retirement he enlisted in the RAF, retiring as a corporal clerk seven years later. TNA WO 374/34886 Sidney Charles Houchen. Sidney Houchen enlisted in 1909 and was a CQMS in the Dorsetshire Regiment when he was commissioned in January 1918. He retired in May 1919, but re-enlisted as a sergeant in the Army Pay Department in July 1921.

⁴⁹ John F. Lucy, *There’s a Devil in the Drum* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1993).

involved were small and the government remained indifferent.⁵⁰ The *Legion Journal* of 1921 included this angry letter from a ranker officer:

I am a captain, retired after 29 Years' service – two campaigns – five years commissioned service in the late war – severely wounded in France, Pension – hush! £74 per annum.

In the Daily Mail I note that Southwark Borough council are asking for a retiring allowance of £434 a year for a rate collector [...] And £136 a year for dustman and sweeper.⁵¹

There was a persistent post-war dissatisfaction with pension arrangements, and there were several anomalies peculiar to ranker officers. For instance, if a ranker had been badly wounded, he would be entitled to a ‘wound gratuity’ only if the wound had been incurred during his officer service.⁵² This triggered ranker officers to form their own association, to lobby for improved pensions and recognition, and they formed one of many post-war ex-servicemen’s groups, the Ex-Ranker Officers’ Association.⁵³

The core of the Ex-Ranker Officers’ Association were 2,000 ranker officers, NCOs who had retired before the war, had re-enlisted, and were commissioned during the war.⁵⁴ They found themselves resuming life with their pre-war pensions and with no recognition for their war service. This was amply illustrated by the case of John Hunt of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, who had re-joined the army in 1914, after taking his pension after 21 years rank service.⁵⁵ He was given a temporary commission in 1915. In 1918, he was commanding a battalion of the Royal

⁵⁰ Brian Harding, *Keeping Faith* (London: Pen and Sword, 1990), p. 197.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁵² The pension arrangements of ranker officers retired under special conditions and who also had disabilities became very complicated. See TNA PIN 15/2136.

⁵³ Graham Wootton, *Politics of Influence* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1998), p. 65. The Officers’ Association was one of three organisations that constituted the British Legion when it was formed in 1921.

⁵⁴ Hansard, HC Deb 21 February 1924 vol 169 c2003W. The Ex-Ranker Officers Association claimed there were over 2,500 men who had served as temporary officers who had been retired regular NCOs. The War Office said they believed there were 2,120. In 1924 Clement Atlee posted a figure of 2,500.

⁵⁵ TNA WO 339/43268 John Patrick Hunt. When he re-enlisted in 1914 he was 41 years of age and enlisted for services in the UK. His family were provided with a small allowance by a benevolent fund, the Officers Association. TNA WO 339/25835 John Henry Langton. Langton another ranker to have reached the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel reverted to his sergeant’s pension after the war.

Irish Rifles. He was discharged to his sergeant's pension in 1921 and when he died in 1938, his wife and child received no pension as they would have done if he held a regular commission.⁵⁶

The clamour regarding ranker officer pension arrangements prompted a review by a committee set up by the House of Commons in 1924.⁵⁷ The committee was chaired by George Barnes, the retired National Democratic and Labour Party MP, and included representatives of the War Office and the Ex-Ranker Officers Association, represented by Captain F. D. Bone.⁵⁸ It first met on 15 April 1924. The committee finally recommended no change, arguably because its remit required it to look at the legal framework rather than equity. The restoration of full officers' pensions to a similar group in the Navy worsened the feeling of inequity.⁵⁹ In July 1929, the Secretary of State for War advised the House that he saw no grounds for re-opening the situation of army pensioned ranker officers.⁶⁰

The lobbying by ex-rankers and their widows, continued throughout the interwar period. Numerous mentions in newspapers and the House of Commons ensured that the term ranker officer entered public parlance, and they were publicly perceived as a specific military identity.⁶¹ The Ex-Rankers Association was primarily political, however ranker officers were

⁵⁶ TNA WO 339/43268 John Patrick Hunt. In July 1918, Douglas Haig had sought his appointment to a permanent commission, a move that would improve his status and pension eligibility. This was based on his war record and performance. The war office refused.

⁵⁷ TNA PRO 30/69/237 1924 War Office: Papers re. Pensions for Ex-Army Rankers.

⁵⁸ TNA WO 339/17569 Frederick Darling Bone. Captain Bone had served in the RE for 21 years before retiring in 1911 and became a journalist. He was given a temporary commission of quartermaster in the 12th Battalion, KRRC in September 1914. In 1916 he became a staff officer, and was demobilised in 1919. In addition to taking a leading role in the Ranker Officers' Association, he was a founder of the Army League in 1924. He was publicity officer for the Tank Victory Club and a freelance journalist.

⁵⁹ Brian Harding, *Keeping Faith* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1990), p. 197

⁶⁰ TNA T161/124 and TNA WO 339/17197 William Rees. Rees wrote to the Prime Minister expressing his dissatisfaction with his pension arrangements. The reply from the Army Council was unequivocal in refusing further consideration of the matter.

⁶¹ See, for instance, the lengthy debate in the House of Commons on 13 March 1924: Hansard, HC Deb, 13 March 1924, Vol 170, cc 2640-721. Argument in support of ranker officers were being made in 1934, when the average age of ranker officers was 62 years: Hansard, HC Deb, 6 December 1934, Vol 295, cc 1824-5.

involved in other old comrades and regimental associations, and specifically those that could distribute charitable funds to help destitute officers and their families.⁶²

A retired artillery ranker officer, Captain John Patrick Danny, founded the Old Contemptibles Association, set up in June 1925 to acknowledge the pre-war British army expeditionary force.⁶³ It did not have an overt political function, but was allied to the British Legion and organised pilgrimages, commemorative events and provided charitable support to members. The habitats of many of these associations were homosocial ‘clubs’ providing continuity with military messes.⁶⁴ Ranker officers were strongly represented in the regimental associations of their pre-war regiments.⁶⁵ It is particularly relevant to understanding their self-perception that their regimental identity was tethered to their experience as senior NCOs rather than their commissions.

2) Ranker Officers after the Army

Martin Petter’s study of demobilised officers after the First World War shows the problems created for men who felt that their social status had been changed by temporary officer status and how this was represented.⁶⁶ The meritocratic commissions of temporary officers who had to serve in the ranks as a prerequisite after 1916 had caused an unprecedented influx of officers from lower social classes. When these officers were demobilised their expectations were considerably raised, and their pretensions turned the term ‘temporary gentleman’ into a derisive

⁶² Deborah Cohen, *Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 2001).

⁶³ TNA WO 339/37077 John Patrick Danny.

⁶⁴ Mark Connelly, *Steady the Buffs! A Regiment, a Region, and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 220–1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁶⁶ Martin Petter, “‘Temporary Gentlemen’ in the Aftermath of the Great War: Rank, Status and the Ex-Officer Problem,” *The Historical Journal* 37, no. 1 (1994).

label. Some regular officers were also challenged by the post-war situation, as post war austerity reduced private incomes and opportunity.⁶⁷

The problems of the ex-ranker officer were different to those of the temporary officer and has not been engaged with in the historiography of the post-war period. Despite work on temporary gentlemen, there has been limited work on post-war ranker officers and analysis of their experiences, what evidence there is, suggests a different relationship between class, culture, and military service. Brian Harding observed there was ‘a category whose plight at that time is sometimes overlooked: those who had intended to make the Navy or Army their career but whose prospects were frustrated by the post-war reductions in the armed forces known as the ‘Geddes Axe.’’⁶⁸ There is little substantive evidence that ranker officers had pretensions to gentlemanly status. Their long military careers meant that they had access to a limited range of occupations after the war. Many followed the route taken by retiring senior NCOs and honorary officers in looking for opportunities as War Office clerks or army recruiting officers, but the overwhelming number of applicants made even these posts inaccessible. There was a waiting list for these posts that grew longer each year. The War Office began discouraging ranker officers from anticipating an appointment because the waiting list was so long.⁶⁹

Concerns in the literature of the period focussed on officers from the traditional class having to take employment beneath their status and the lack of opportunities for young officers with no professional or industrial experience.⁷⁰ The ranker officer also encountered these problems further compounded by their age. The ranker officer struggled to find comparatively well remunerated employment and had few transferrable skills. William Adventure Lepper, a

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Brian Harding, *Keeping Faith*, p. 196.

⁶⁹ TNA WO 339/77392 William David Philo. The conditions for appointments were revised in 1927.

⁷⁰ Philip Gibbs, *Now it Can be Told* (New York: Harper 1920); Arthur L. Bowley, *Some Economic Consequences of the Great War* (London: Thomas Butterworth 1930).

gardener attested into the Lincolnshire Regiment at Gibraltar in 1888. He was in the ranks for nine years and a warrant officer for seven years before being commissioned into the Royal East Kent Regiment on 1 November 1914. He unsuccessfully applied to be a recruiting officer, exceeding the age limit, and requested a records office job from the War Office. He found employment in 1921, working for the Imperial War Graves Commission as a gardener, carrying out what he regarded as ‘sacred work’ tending graves in France.⁷¹ As pre-war regulars, ranker officers had been combatant for the entire war and many suffered from the trauma that resulted. Captain W. J. Sprinks was admitted to a ‘lunatic asylum’ in 1924.⁷² His wife claimed his psychological problems were a consequence of his long war. A combination of pain from wounds and feelings of worthlessness caused by unemployment caused George Royce to shoot himself at St Alban’s Station on Armistice Day 1925.⁷³

The offer of a gratuity or a lump sum, rather than a pension attracted ranker officers and was ultimately to place them at risk in the aftermath of war. The post-war economic climate and lack of investment experience made ranker officers uniquely vulnerable to speculative losses of their capital. One of the chief problems was fraud, attributed to officers’ ‘backgrounds and conditioning making them more trusting than most’.⁷⁴ The combination of a structural problem, the gratuity rather than a pension, and the historical conditions of economic instability worked against the interests of ranker officers. A gratuity of between one thousand and 15 hundred pounds seemed a considerable sum, and many invested in property, farms, or small businesses, without having any commercial or business experience, with disastrous consequences.

⁷¹ TNA WO339/15646 W. A. Lepper.

⁷² TNA WO339/13867 W. J. Sprinks.

⁷³ TNA WO339/11288 George Noel Royce.

⁷⁴ Brian Harding, *Keeping Faith*, p. 197.

Francis Mitchell was discharged after 22 years' service with a gratuity from the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders in 1919.⁷⁵ He started a confectionary business that failed, and, by 1934, he was an unemployed labourer dependant on his 15-year-old daughter. William Aldworth had been a RQMS with The Royal Berkshire Regiment, commissioned into the Essex Regiment.⁷⁶ He was wounded four times and awarded the DSO. In 1927, he wrote to the War Office, pleading for work to enable him to support his wife and five children, of whom the oldest was nine years old, who had insufficient food. He was 49 years old and had lost his gratuity, having been 'let down' through 'foolishness and inexperience', and he had offered to 'do anything, or go anywhere' for work. For some notable ranker officers, such as Lieutenant-Colonel William Henry Carter, business careers proved a disaster.⁷⁷ He left the army in 1922 with a gratuity of 15 hundred pounds, having completed 21 years' service. He invested in a poultry farm, then a taxi business, both of which failed. He had to return to manual work as a motorcycle mechanic and steel erector. It was reported that he accepted this down-turn of his circumstances with equanimity.⁷⁸

Paradoxically, while many ranker officers struggled to capitalise on their military rank, younger men were assuming a military past to misrepresent themselves and accrue the 'admiration and philanthropy' that came from a military career.⁷⁹ The advent of the BBC and consumerism meant that imposters could easily acquire the language and dress of a gentleman, something that had been more difficult for the ranker officer in his army career.⁸⁰ The currency of being a retired army officer was being devalued by a surplus of availability, and imposters

⁷⁵ TNA WO 339/17386 Francis Jack Mitchell.

⁷⁶ TNA WO 339/30219 William Aldworth.

⁷⁷ Western Front Association, Brothers in Arms, Lieutenant Colonel William Henry Carter DSO and Bar, MC and Bar <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/great-war-people/brothers-arms/2721-lieutenant-colonel-william-henry-carter-dso-and-bar-mc-and-bar.html>. Accessed March 29, 2017.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Matt Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 29.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 37–8.

created a climate of mistrust with military identities. As shown in the introduction to this thesis, the fact that a man carried his military rank of ‘captain’ with him in returning to unskilled employment and yet had no gentlemanly qualities, caused his employers to write to the War Office to check if he had been a captain, as they found this difficult to believe.⁸¹

Patrick Balfour, in assessing cultural change after the war, observed that the £400 per annum salary attracted a new breed of politician to the House of Commons.⁸² Military figures had always been prominent in parliament, and Balfour observed ‘it was the man not of social but of military eminence who was ordained to power after the war’ and ‘These ex-officer MP’s, not a few of them rankers — were among the first and most effective instruments in the leavening of post-war society.’⁸³ Generally, Balfour was talking about lower-middle-class temporary officers, promoted from the ranks. A ranker officer who entered parliament was Robert Gee, distinguished by a VC awarded for his actions at Masnieres in 1917. He took part in the 1918 ‘coupon’ election on 14 December 1918. He accepted an invitation to become the Coalition (National Democratic Party) candidate for the Consett Division of Durham. He fought the election from the Tees garrison whilst still serving as an officer and lost by 293 votes to the Liberal candidate. He did sufficiently well to be chosen for the Woolwich East by-election in 1921. He stood against the great Labour figure and pacifist, Ramsay MacDonald, and ran what has been described as a ‘scurrilous campaign’.⁸⁴ The press pitched the contests background as ‘Woolwich VC vs Pacifist’. Gee was prepared to use his working-class credentials to make his claim to the seat, stating:

I know more than anybody today about the hardships of the working classes, and I can speak for them as authoritatively as any theoretical Labour leader in the House of Commons. I have worked

⁸¹ TNA WO339/13716 Captain Thomas Wadner.

⁸² Patrick Balfour, *Society Racket: A Critical Survey of Modern Social Life* (London: John Long, 1934), p. 73.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 74.

⁸⁴ Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain!: A New History of the Labour Party* (London: Vintage Books, 2011), p. 194.

with my hands all my life. I started life as a workhouse boy, spending three years in a home, and so I consider myself more entitled to speak for working people than almost anybody today.⁸⁵

Gee beat Ramsay MacDonald by 683 votes. He was politically a Conservative and a pragmatist. In May 1922, he formed a British Legion branch at the House of Commons and was an advocate of ex-servicemen in debates. The collapse of the munitions industry that had provided so much employment in the war meant that he lost his seat in November 1922. He fought and lost elections in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in January and December 1923, before winning the seat for Bosworth in his native Leicestershire with a 358 majority in 1924. If Gee's career was the apotheosis of ranker officer achievement, it was short-lived. In 1926, he 'disappeared' much to the consternation of the party whip, and later resurfaced in Australia. There was conjecture that financial difficulties had led him to leave the country with some misappropriated funds. In Australia, he invested in a farm that failed, and he ended his career working in a department store.⁸⁶

The ranker officer's authority and power rested in professional knowledge, and claims to authority derived from rank and service had little value in civilian life after the war. Ranker officers recognised that despite changes in civil life, the 'gentleman-officer' and the elite class they represented maintained its hegemony over the army and remained closely connected to power in Britain. Arthur Fennell was a long serving cavalry ranker officer facing the end of his career through compulsory retirement. He sought the help of an aristocratic officer from the war, the Earl of Home, who wrote to a friend in the War Office on his behalf:⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Derek Seaton, *A Tiger and a Fusilier: Leicester's VC Heroes* (Leicester: D. Seaton, 2001), p.48.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 62. A widely circulated rumour was that he had been made treasurer of the National Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and absconded with funds; IWMSA, 9339, interview with William George Holbrook.

⁸⁷ Charles Cospatrick Archibald Douglas-Home, 13th Earl of Home (1873 – 1951), was a Scottish peer and the father of British Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home. Educated at Eton and Christ Church College Oxford, he fought in the First World War, being mentioned in despatches. He served as Lord-Lieutenant of Berwickshire and was made a Knight of the Thistle in 1930.

My Dear Lord Stopford, I hope you will not mind me troubling you but I have much interested in a case, particulars of which I enclose. The case I believe comes before your department. Captain Fennell was my adjutant in Ireland towards the close of the War. It would be the greatest help to him if he could stay on his full term in the army. As a widower with five small children he has a poor outlook if he has to go this autumn. You probably have hundreds of sad cases before you, but I thought you would not mind me drawing your attention to this one which is especially hard. His wound was a bad one in the head and if he has to go it might be possible to get him before a Board again on the chance of some disability pension being allowed.⁸⁸

Matt Houlbrook concurs with a contemporary history from 1932 that noted ‘how the war lived on through the enduring cachet of military rank’.⁸⁹ This is debatable. In the example above, Arthur Fennell had been a major, and Douglas-Home, a lieutenant-colonel, both senior regimental officers. The inequality in their post-war status lay in the enduring cachet of the gentleman-officer embedded in Douglas-Home, not their ‘rank’.

3) Post-war Representations of the Ranker Officer

In 1930, Alfred Burrage’s anonymous memoir *War is War by Ex-Private X* was published.⁹⁰ He described ranker officers as ‘vulgar beasts’, and ‘quite the worst type of officer’ was the ‘promoted sergeant-major’. He said that ‘whatever rank they achieved they were still warrant-officers in spirit.’⁹¹ Burrage, a journalist and author of romantic novels had a jaundiced view of the entire army. He enlisted in the 28th Battalion, the London Regiment (Artists Rifles) which recruited middle-class recruits and was refused a commission in the war. In addition, Burrage, an indifferent soldier by his own admission, detested both the working-class men with whom he served, and the French, about whom he said ‘nearly all the local peasants were genial, dirty and obscene.’ He claimed ‘they had the morals, manners and habits of tame monkeys’.⁹²

⁸⁸ TNA WO 339/17365 Arthur Fennell.

⁸⁹ Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*, pp. 52–3.

⁹⁰ Burrage, *War Is War*.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 71–2.

⁹² Ibid., p. 43.

He disliked all types of officers generally, the exception for whom he had a grudging respect were ‘temporary gentlemen’, who he describes as having ‘won the war’.⁹³ Burrage had the journalistic acumen to see an opportunity for a controversial memoir to raise public interest and sales, at a time when memoirs of the war were prolific. His general observations were sufficiently provocative to fuel interest in his book. Although controversial, his contrasting the caricature of the ranker officer with the qualities of the temporary officer was consistent with other contemporary representations.⁹⁴

The prompt for Burrage to write his memoir was the success of Richard Aldington’s autobiographical *Death of a Hero*. Aldington, an important and controversial literary figure by the time of his death, had enlisted in 1916 and had been commissioned into the Royal Sussex Regiment a year later. His reputation was based on his ‘imager’ poetry, until he published *Death of a Hero* in 1929.⁹⁵ The narrator of the book was based on a character not dissimilar to his own. The leading character, George Winterbourne is an educated middle-class man in the ranks who was commissioned a temporary officer and, shortly afterwards, killed.⁹⁶ After writing *Death of a Hero*, Aldington attempted to repeat the success of his earlier book with a collection of short stories based on the war, called *Roads to Glory*.⁹⁷

In this book, he wrote a particularly dark story about the rivalry between two pre-war NCOs. Aldington chose to portray one of them as a ranker officer. In selecting the vignette, he betrayed his own contempt for ranker officers and incorporated some wider tropes about them.⁹⁸ He narrates a story about the ‘rivalry, hatred and bitterness’ of two pre-war regulars, whose

⁹³ Ibid., p. 71.

⁹⁴ R. C. Sherriff, *Journey’s End: A Play in Three Acts* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1929).

⁹⁵ Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (London: W. Heineman, 1929).

⁹⁶ Andrew Frayn, Writing Disenchantment: British First World War Prose (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

⁹⁷ Richard Aldington, *Roads to Glory* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930).

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 115.

behaviours are a product of ‘The careerism of the mercenary Army, its narrowness, its combative idleness, its encouragement of unscrupulous emulation, its bullying, its monotony, its enforced respect for rank.’⁹⁹ It is a story without redemption. Crane is the son of a soldier whose ‘whole horizon was bounded by the army’ with a pre-war aspiration to emulate his father and become an RSM, ‘and to end his days with a belly and a hoarse voice in a country pub.’¹⁰⁰

The war is conjured as an ‘opportunity’ for Crane who has a ‘carefully concealed rage’ and the ‘vindictiveness of a narrow life and a narrow nature’ towards a better NCO, Hann.¹⁰¹ Crane is commissioned and cruelly plots against Hann, frustrating his hopes of a commission. Hann, embittered, takes the opportunity to murder Crane when he meets him cowardly hiding in a shell hole in No Man’s Land. To complete his caricature of a ranker officer, Aldington recounts Crane’s speech to consolidate the representation of his lower-social-class origins ‘Now look ‘ere, Lance-Corporal ‘Ann, you’ve bin in the Army long enough you know ‘ow a junior N.C.O. should speak to a’ orfficer.’¹⁰² The kernel of Aldington’s detestable creation is his opportunism which wins him his commission: ‘with the mercenary soldier’s eye to the main chance, Crane took very good care of himself when no superior was present, but ostentatiously exhorted his men, feigned to expose himself, and seemed to be fighting like a tiger, whenever an officer was about.’¹⁰³

Aldington’s book of short stories was not as successful as *Death of a Hero*, but ‘Killed in Action’ was reproduced as a short story in two popular magazines reaching a wide audience.¹⁰⁴ Aldington generalises his critical depiction of the appearance, speech, and motives to all ranker officers who are, in his eyes, a ‘type’ that emerged in the war. This collective disparaging of

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Aldington, “Killed in Action,” *Nash’s Pall Mall Magazine*, March 1930, pp. 42–5; “Killed in Action,” *Tit-Bits*, March 29, 1930, pp. 102–4.

the ranker officer, creating a caricature rather than a character, is at odds with all the other literary depictions of other types of officers in the book which are sensitive examinations of ‘individuals’ and their experience of the war. Aldington was writing at a pivotal point in the way the war would be remembered, in the wider context of the ‘war books boom’ in the late 1920s, a moment at which modern ideas about the war solidified for the first time.

It was also a period where ‘bogus honorables’ had been rampant, and the presence of many thousands of temporary officers with different social backgrounds had removed the safety of officer rank as a guarantee of gentlemanliness.¹⁰⁵ The ranker officer was unambiguously an ‘impostor’ in a world where gentlemanly identity was in flux, and pretenders with freshly learned ‘good speech’, dress, and manners could masquerade as ‘gentlemen’. Ranker officers were distinctly ungentlemanly in ways that offended the cultural aesthetic. Furthermore, it was safe to view them with opprobrium as they lacked strong advocacy. In post-world war, where there was an emergent conscious political class divide, ranker officers occupied an uncomfortable space.¹⁰⁶

The behaviours and appearances that had once been parodied in the wartime officers’ mess are seen in the work of Adlington and Burrage and endow the ranker officer with a mantle of disgust. As Miller has observed ‘Disgust, along with contempt, as well as other emotions in various settings, recognises and maintains difference. Disgust helps define boundaries between us and them, me and you. It helps prevent *our* way from being subsumed into *their* way.’¹⁰⁷ In the vacuum of post-war Britain where the signifiers of class were blurred, this disgust could be shared with readers; pretentiousness was morally reprehensible to all classes.¹⁰⁸ This disgust,

¹⁰⁵ Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*, pp. 50–6.

¹⁰⁶ David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London: Penguin 2000); Ross McKibbin, “Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?,” *The English Historical Review* 99, no. 391 (1984); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp 98-99 & pp 530-531.

¹⁰⁷ William I. Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ Petter, “Temporary Gentlemen”.

underpinned by an emphasis on class and character and behaviour, worked to secure the difference and the Otherness of the ranker officer in the aftermath of war. It placed them on the outside of military and national identities. Hence the literary treatment of the ranker officer was significant in determining how they have been remembered in popular historiography and memory.

Aldington's writing was part of a new literary phenomenon, the 'so called "war books boom" of the late 1920s and early 1930s'.¹⁰⁹ Dan Todman has observed 'The period saw the publication of many of the novels and memoirs which remain at the heart of the modern mythology of the First World War, including Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of George Sherston*, Robert Graves' *Goodbye to all That* and Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War*'.¹¹⁰ Aldington and these literary figures shared middle-class, public-school backgrounds. Their war narratives of the inter-war period were only part of a vast literary outpouring, producing over 400 war novels and countless poems.¹¹¹

The influence of these books came from their being extremely literary and readable, and they were iconic in their representation of the experience of the temporary officer, an impact that has persisted. Sassoon's work had a significant and reactionary impact on masculinity and the recovery of gentlemanly values.¹¹² Christine Berberich's assessment of Sassoon, as reflected in his alter-ego George Sherston, suggests a man whose ideals of gentlemanliness are shattered

¹⁰⁹ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), p. 155; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 2009); Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Random House, 2011); Andrew Frayn, *Writing Disenchantment: British First World War Prose, 1914–30* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹¹⁰ Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory*, p. 155.

¹¹¹ Hugh Cecil, "British War Novelists," in *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, ed. H. Cecil and P. Liddle (London: Leo Cooper, 1996); Todman, *The Great War*, p. 155–7.

¹¹² Christine Berberich, *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007).

by the war, although he cannot let go of them.¹¹³ Similarly, Aldington, although critical of his public-school education, uses his alter-ego, the character George Winterbourne in *Death of A Hero* to show great admiration for an officer who was a ‘typical public school product’, saying he ‘was honest, he was kindly, he was conscientious, he could obey orders and command obedience in others, and took pains to look after his men’.¹¹⁴

The most public representation of a ranker officer during the war, came with the case of Patrick Barrett, a ranker officer commissioned into the Royal Welsh Fusiliers at the end of 1915.¹¹⁵ Barrett’s main protagonist in a series of events that unfolded in 1916 was Mary Cornwallis-West, known as ‘Patsy’ and her husband William, Lord-Lieutenant of Denbighshire and an Honorary Colonel in the 4th Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (RWF).¹¹⁶ In 1915, she met 23-year-old Barrett, a convalescing sergeant, who had been badly wounded and shell shocked with the RWF in 1914. ‘Patsy’ formed a close relationship, beyond anything acceptable given the difference in their social status, with the much younger Barrett, manipulating her husband and another close friend, General “Jack” Cowans to secure his commissioning as an officer, and when the relationship turned sour, for his posting elsewhere.¹¹⁷ The accusation that Barrett had pursued Cornwallis-West led to him being charged with ‘scandalous behaviour’, however a woman caring for Barrett, an employee of the Cornwallis-West family, caused the affair to become a public scandal by contradicting Cornwallis-West’s evidence. There were two inquiries instituted, one especially established as a tribunal by a special act of Parliament.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Norman T. Gates, “The Stereotype as Satire in the Fiction of Richard Aldington,” in *Exploring Stereotyped Images in Victorian and Twentieth-Century Litearture and Society*, ed. John Morris (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993).

¹¹⁵ TNA WO 339/50137 Patrick Barrett.

¹¹⁶ Mary Adelaide Virginia Thomasina Eupatoria Cornwallis-West, née FitzPatrick (1858–1920), William Cornwallis-West (1835 –1917). Cornwallis-West had been the mistress of the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, at the age of 16. When this was discovered, she married William Cornwallis-West, twice her age, in 1872.

¹¹⁷ General Sir John Stephen Cowans (1862 –1921), Quartermaster-General.

¹¹⁸ WO 33/3282 Army (Courts of Inquiry) Act 1916: Court of Enquiry Case No. 1 case of Patrick Barrett, Second Lieutenant, Royal Welsh Fusiliers; report 1917 Jan 01–1917 Dec 31.

‘Patsy’ and Cowans were censured for their actions and Sir John French, who it was found had removed a senior officer previously, at the request of ‘Patsy’. Lloyd George is attributed with exploiting the situation for political ends, siding with Barrett, who was popular amongst Lloyd George’s Welsh constituents.¹¹⁹

The case produced public opprobrium towards Patsy and the senior army personnel involved. Cowans, who has been shown to have influenced commissions from the ranks previously in this study, used friends in the press to argue that his work in supporting the campaign in Mesopotamia meant that he was too essential to be removed.¹²⁰ Lieutenant-Colonel Delme-Radcliffe, the officer who had ‘recommended’ Barrett’s commission and then had him removed to another battalion, was censured for his conduct and ‘very seriously impugned, was removed from command of his battalion.’¹²¹ Barrett’s defence had hinged on some of ‘Patsy’s’ intimate personal correspondence to him. This proved his case, although with disastrous consequences. Making the correspondence public was considered ‘un-gentlemanly’ and irrevocably damaged his reputation with regimental counterparts in the RWF. Barrett was left damaged by the stress of the affair and, faced with the likelihood of ostracism or worse if he tried to return to his regiment, he was retired because of ill-health in 1917, without returning to active service. He died prematurely, an alcoholic, in 1935.

The damage to the reputation of Welsh regiments through what became afterwards known as ‘the Welsh Army Scandal’ made Barrett a highly unpopular figure in the RWF. Importantly, within the army, the event was a dramatic demonstration of the failure of a ranker officer to accept the socio-cultural norms of the gentleman. He had been expected to resign the moment

WO 141/63 Courts of Inquiry under Army (Courts of Inquiry) Act 1916: case of 2/Lt P. Barrett and Brigadier Thomas; question of undue influence bought by certain Senior Officers and Mrs Cornwallis-West.

¹¹⁹ Jonathan Walker, *The Blue Beast: Power and Passion in the Great War* (History Press Limited, 2011).

¹²⁰ Committee of Inquiry, HC Deb 22 December 1916 vol 88 cc1824–7. Also see TNA WO 339/9537 Hilary Maurice Cadic, where Cowans intervened to secure a commission.

¹²¹ Hansard, HC Deb 22 December 1916, Vol., 88, cc1824–7.

the scandal became public, and to allow public access to Patsy's correspondence was considered ungentlemanly.¹²² This was a singular and landmark event that caused disgrace to a regiment and underlined to many gentlemen-officers that the ranker officer had none of the character and honour expected of the gentleman-officer. Barrett was publically regarded as a sympathetic figure, but was quickly forgotten.¹²³

The idea of ranker officers as transgressors of class and sexuality caused a ranker officer to be depicted in a book first published in 1928, that would not be widely accessible for many years, one that portrayed one of the leading characters as a ranker officer. Whilst more sympathetic, it cast the ranker officer as a highly ambiguous figure. It was one of the most controversial fictional stories of the twentieth century, depicting a ranker officer in a relationship with an aristocrat. This representation portrayed the ranker officer as working-class and a transgressor of class and sexual codes, and someone confused and uncomfortable with their identity.

Ironically, with faint references to the Barrett case, the ranker officer identity became a foil for the sexually assertive and independent female in literature. D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was a sexually explicit story about an aristocrat's wife's adulterous relationship with a gamekeeper. It was not legally available in Britain for many years.¹²⁴ The two male protagonists, Oliver Mellors, the gamekeeper, and his employer, Sir Clifford Chatterley were differentiated by social class and have a common background as army officers in the war.

Clifford Chatterley served in a 'smart' regiment and had been terribly wounded in the First World War and left a paraplegic.¹²⁵ The character of Oliver Mellors was not strictly speaking

¹²² TNA WO 339/50137 Patrick Barrett.

¹²³ Hansard, HC Deb 02 April 1917, Vol., 92, c 950W

¹²⁴ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Florence: Privately Printed, 1928). It was not published in Britain and the United States until 32 years after its first publication in Florence, Italy.

¹²⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Vintage Books, 2011) p. 31 and p. 35.

a ranker officer: there is a reference to him enlisting in 1915, being commissioned from the ranks, and serving after the war as an officer in North-West India.¹²⁶ Curiously, Lawrence makes him the protégé of a Colonel who was himself a pre-war officer, commissioned from the ranks and also with working-class antecedents. With this pedigree, the similarity to the Barrett case, and because of the ideas Lawrence communicates, Mellors is considered here as a ranker officer.¹²⁷

Lady Chatterley expresses her surprise in the novel that Mellors had been made an officer, when he ‘speaks broad Derbyshire’, and Sir Clifford observes ‘I think he’s quite a nice fellow, but I know very little about him. He only came out of the army last year, less than a year ago. From India, I rather think. He may have picked up certain tricks out there, perhaps he was an officer’s servant, and improved on his position. Some of the men were like that. But it does them no good; they have to fall back into their old places when they get home again.’ In response, ‘Connie gazed at Clifford contemplatively. She saw in him the peculiar tight rebuff against anyone of the lower classes who might be really climbing up, which she knew was characteristic of his breed.’¹²⁸

Scholars regarded the book as an explicit critique of post-war society and a ‘call for cultural and economic reform’, suggesting it addressed the dissatisfaction with the social order before the war and the reform Lawrence wished to see emerge from the post-war chaos. Sir Clifford’s description of Mellors addresses some of the anxiety created by post-war gentlemen imposters — his reference to ‘certain tricks’ hints at impersonation, and his reference to ‘some of the men were like that,’ suggests that Mellors was a ‘type’ who manipulated his commission. Sir Clifford’s belief that ‘they have to fall back on their old places’, shows a contempt for the

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.102.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 205.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 102.

ranker officer in assuming that their officer rank in the war may have given them pretensions to gentlemanliness.

Mellors is an interesting portrait. He claims he can choose to use dialect or speak received pronunciation, the inference being that he can choose to be a gentleman or not. This conforms to an interpretation of the book as a vision of cultural and social reform in the aftermath of the war.¹²⁹ However, the portrait of Mellors' character is of a man unsure of his class and identity, on the one hand distrustful of the middle and upper classes and yet no longer comfortable with the vulgarity of day-to-day working-class existence: in Lawrence's view, he is being 'hunted down, destroyed'.¹³⁰ The fictional description of the socially displaced Mellors is a powerful representation of an ambiguous position of post-war ranker officers, and it was an interesting device for Lawrence to use as a challenge to post-war class and sexual mores. The book is sensitive to the issues faced by ranker officers in the post-war world, but it placed a ranker officer as a character within a book that was banned and regarded as disgusting.¹³¹ The banning of the books publication makes it unclear as to how well read the book was in the period before 1960, although there are claims that it was widely available. It is therefore difficult to judge how far it might have added to the air of disgust and opprobrium attaching itself to the ranker officer.

In contrast, The First World War literati painted a picture of the public-school educated temporary officer as both a victim of the war and a model of war winning consensual leadership and provided a representation that would dominate the rest of the twentieth century. In this representation, the ranker officer was portrayed as a marginal and often abject figure. Authors,

¹²⁹ Abdelfattah Ghazel, "Class Consciousness in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*," *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)* ISSN 2356–5926 1, no. 3 (2016).

¹³⁰ Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, pp. 26–7. Lawrence's foreword.

¹³¹ Cornelia Wachter, "Middlebrow Negotiations of Larentian Sexuality in Una Silberrad's Desire" in Christoph Ehland & Cornelia Wachter (eds) in *Middlebrow and Gender, 1890–1945* (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016), p. 251.

such as J. B. Priestly, R. H. Mottram, Cecil Roberts, Gerald Bullett, Henry Williamson, and R. C. Sherriff were ‘clerk-soldiers’ returning from the war with a ‘greater confidence of their worth as individuals and value of their ideas’, and this was reflected both in their identity and writing.¹³²

Their work also contributed a vision of the subaltern in the First World War, the young officer, sometimes from the lower middle class or grammar-school educated who could assume the gentility, manners, and outlook of public-school educated officers. In many respects, this colluded with the remaining regular officer class who were reasserting themselves and their pre-war gentlemanly identity. As Keith Simpson, has observed ‘although the nature of battle in the First World War did much to “destroy neo-feudal myths about the unique compatibility of officering with gentlemanly status” it lingered on survived in the post-war army and could be found in the Second World War.’¹³³

In this climate, there was no room for reconstructing the story of the ranker officer and the first, and only significant memoir of a ranker officer, John Lucy’s *There’s a Devil in the Drum* was not published until 1938, and any new interpretations it might have afforded were eclipsed by the Second World War.¹³⁴ Lucy started writing the book in 1936, after he had become a journalist. His motive wasn’t expressed. Lucy continued in service after the war. His regiment became the Royal Ulster Rifles in 1921, although typical of ranker officers, he hardly served with it because, until 1932, he was attached to the King’s African Rifles, and later a staff post in Bombay. He retired in 1935.¹³⁵ The bulk of the book is the story of his career in the ranks and ends with his commission.

¹³² Jonathan Wild, “‘A Merciful, Heaven-Sent Release?’ : The Clerk and the First World War in British Literary Culture,” *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 1 (2007): p. 91.

¹³³ Keith Simpson, “The Officers”, p. 92.

¹³⁴ Lucy, *There’s a Devil in the Drum*.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. xi.

The period he spent as an officer before being seriously wounded is only dealt with as an ‘epilogue’. His valedictory statement about the qualities of pre-war NCOs and the affirmation that they fought and led in war — without supervision — at the end of the book is significant. Lucy was making a very strong statement about perceptions of leadership in the war, and this was perhaps a reaction to the way this had been appropriated by the public-school boy on the Western Front.

Conclusion

The betrayal of the covenant given to ranker officers that their post-war careers would be secure led to them being inexorably marginalised, and the majority left the army after the war. It was only in the chaotic post-war economic conditions that followed, when it was in their political and economic interests, that they coalesced as a group, looking for equity in their pensions. However, they represented another disenfranchised group and the search for equality of treatment never materialised. The progressive differentiation of the ranker officer identity during the war reflected their differences from the gentlemanly benchmark, and they were not equipped to capitalise on their rank and status in civil life. If ranker officers had any social and economic capital, it rested not in gentlemanly dispositions but their military worth and soldierly masculinity. The question as to why this value never materialised in their representation and their identity became progressively more opaque was closely linked to the reassertion of the officer-gentleman.

The restoration of the ‘gentleman officer’ ideal in popular imagination marginalised the representation of the ranker officer. The ranker officer had been differentiated and caricatured by the end of the war to distinguish their ungentlemanliness and set them apart as a different sort of officer. Their representation in post-war literature reduced them to objects of disgust and marginal figures. The sacrifice of the gentlemanly officer and the social class they

embodied in the war ‘helped bolster the profoundly conservative political culture of inter-war Britain and beyond.’¹³⁶ The enduringly popular play, *Journeys End* is attributed with reviving the cult of heroism and immortalising the public-school ethos, courage, and character.¹³⁷ It also consigned the ranker officer to a lasting caricature, a vulgar beast, somewhere in the background.

¹³⁶ J. M. Winter, “British National Identity and the First World War,” in *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain*, ed. S. J. D. Green and R. C. Whiting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 262.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 272.

Conclusion

The ranker officer was a dramatic and short-lived phenomenon in the First World War that has been subject to a historiographical marginalisation. It disrupted the hegemonic, enduring presence of the gentleman-officer, an identity that has overwhelmed ideas about and representation of the British army officer in the twentieth century. This thesis has demonstrated how socio-cultural policing of boundaries operated to preserve a dominant masculinity, the gentleman officer and ensured the persistence of an elite. Ranker officers serve to illustrate how, when the boundaries to occupations such as the British army officer class were tested, particularly when they were forced to become permeable, the socio-cultural indicators, rules, and behaviours that determine membership become much clearer. The war paradoxically provided the context for the emergence of the ranker officer and a literary legacy that would leave an obscure and tainted representation that has informed public and historical perception. This study has analysed how that representation came about and the construction of ranker officer identity in the socio-cultural milieu of the British army and post-war world.

The historiography of the Edwardian army is sparse, particularly compared with that of the war, and this study began by drawing mainly on social studies to establish the relationships between officers and senior members of the ranks — NCOs and honorary officers. It first explored the emergence of the gentleman-officer identity and how its ethos was derived from a public-school education and shared in the formation of a gentlemanly elite, drawing particularly on the work of Patrick Joyce.¹

¹ Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

It then analysed how increasing professional and technical demands caused the emergence of a better educated, aspirant, social, and professional strata of NCOs in the army. Rather than progress to becoming commissioned officers, their highest achievement was to be appointed an honorary officer. The threat of this increasingly sophisticated ranks, and civil-military tension about the nature of the army led to a reaffirmation of existing culturally important ideas of leadership and authority, acquired in the gentleman's development. Commissioning from the ranks presented serious challenges and was strongly resisted by gentlemen-officers who controlled the process at regimental level. This never previously examined context is crucial to understanding the paradoxical resistance to commissioning officers from the ranks of a modernising British army in the Edwardian era, when NCOs were well educated, and there was an acute shortage of army officers.² It is within these strategies that it is possible to see the persistence of a British elite.

The gentlemen-officers of the British army confronted an uncomfortable truth in 1910; a future war in Europe would entail more technology and bigger armies, a context different to fighting small colonial wars. It would need more officers, and these would have to be professionally competent and not simply gentlemen with a wish to bear arms. Even if they were competent, a small elite would have struggled to provide them. In 1910, the army adopted a plan, effected in 1914, to commission from the ranks that was potentially so destabilising, it was kept secret. The 7,000 officers commissioned from the ranks of the pre-war army (investigation proved it was nearer 10,000) have been a footnote in the historiography of the war. Investigation of the officers commissioned in the ten years before the war demonstrated only a small number, predominantly gentlemen, were commissioned from the ranks on the basis that they were socio-culturally assimilated.

² Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914*, Themes in British Social History (London: Longman, 1980), p. 279.

A comparative prosopography of over 7,000 officers commissioned during the war led to the conclusion these were older, professional, working-class NCOs. Generally obscure and with a pejorative label of ‘ranker officers’, investigation showed that these officers could not be assimilated into the homo-social world of the gentleman-officer. The mess was at the heart of gentlemanly identity and officers regarded appearance, demeanour, and speech as particularly important signifiers of status and acceptability that were beyond the reach of ranker officers. This is crucial to understanding the relationship between class and the institution of the army.

Drawing particularly on the ideas of Quintin Colville, Amy Milne-Smith and scholars who have explained the socio-cultural significance of uniform, appearances, and habitats of gentlemen, the study has shown how key deficiencies in the ranker officer were differentiated and caricatured.³ The war created pressures on gentlemanly exclusivity and the emergence of the ranker officer, necessitating its stereotyping with socio-cultural characteristics that were antithetical to the gentleman-officer and supporting its differentiation. Contrary to suggestions that social and cultural differences were forgotten in the army during the war amidst a ‘camaraderie of the trenches’, this study has argued that traditions and elite culture powerfully persisted, and that compromises of co-existing with ranker officers was tolerated by necessity in ordinary regiments of the line, the artillery where technical competence was a premium, and resisted by the regimental elite.

The regiment in the army was a peculiarly British phenomenon that created an additional socio-cultural layer of mysticism and tradition and an ‘elite athleticism’. This was a league table of financial, social and cultural exclusivity that before the war made it increasingly less receptive

³ Quintin Colville, “Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer: The Role of Uniform in Shaping the Class- and Gender-Related Identities of British Naval Personnel, 1930–1939,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Sixth Series)* 13 (2003); “Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity: Royal Naval Officers and Their Shipboard Homes, 1918–39,” *Gender & History* 21, no. 3 (2009); Amy Milne-Smith, “Club Talk: Gossip, Masculinity and Oral Communities in Late Nineteenth-Century London,” *Gender & History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 86–106; Amy Milne-Smith, “A Flight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen’s Clubs of London, 1880–1914,” *The Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 04 (2006).

to commissioning rankers. This study shows that this league table created competition, and this was a driving force behind the persistence of elitism before and during the war. This demonstrated how elites fuelled their ideas about themselves and is interesting because it proved they were not static but constantly seeking to improve their status in relation to the groups to which they belonged. Wealth was central to this competition.

The examination of ranker officers' careers, drawn from the prosopography, demonstrated that ranker officers were competent leaders and in some cases, highly successful battlefield commanders. This contrasted with their representation in post-war literature. The belief that character and heroic leadership were the sole prerogative of the gentleman was challenged by the presence of ranker officers on the battlefield. This was ameliorated by regarding ranker officers as 'natural born' gentlemen or heroic figures in regimental narratives where they were parsed into the everyday account of the war without their ranker officer identity being prominent. Gentlemen-officers respected the martial prowess of ranker officers. This did nothing to relieve the cultural dissonance that gentlemen officers felt in sharing the mess, their exclusive homo-social space, with ranker officers.

The study has shown that the threat from the ranker officer was practically diminished by incentives and punitive measures employed to persuade them to leave the army and the reassertion of financial and socio-cultural exclusivity of messing after the war. The ranker officer was ill equipped to resist these changes and most found themselves competing for work and status outside the army in an economic and socially turbulent post-war era. The social cache of military rank was no longer guaranteed, thus adding to more uncertainty about their future. The place of ranker officers may have been obscure and forgotten if it was left to regimental narratives to account for them, however, the wider cultural changes after the war was to further damage their reputation.

In articulating their prejudices towards the ranker officer, the traditional regular gentleman-officer had a great ally in the ‘temporary gentlemen’ of the war. The post-war abasement of ranker officer identity was hastened by the canonical literature of a range of writers starting in the late 1920s; those who produced the most enduring depictions of the war had the same interest in promoting the cultural values they shared with the gentleman-officer. The ranker officer, in a period of anti-militarism and combined with the need to re-establish certainty about gentlemanliness, was easy prey for a caricature emphasising socio-cultural deficiencies in speech, appearance, and manners.⁴ This evidence contributes a new perspective on Janet Watson’s work on how wartime experiences and their representation were distinct.⁵

The material culture surrounding the gentleman-officer was imbued with socio-cultural meanings, and these were shifting; in the case of uniforms that shift related to fashion and subtle changes in gender emphasis. Performance in the world of the gentleman-officer shifted between demonstrating martial authority and belonging to the broader gentlemanly elite in civil settings. Uniforms evolved to satisfy ‘particular understandings of class and masculinity.’⁶ In the case of the gentleman-officer, they had uniforms that informed their gentlemanliness and martial prowess, and in the war, wore field uniforms that were qualitatively distinguishable. The ranker officer struggled to meet the sartorial demands of being officers in the war and cope with the obsessive policing of detail.

The study contributes to the understanding of the debate regarding professionalism, amateurism, and how identity impacted on modernisation of the army.⁷ The army in this era

⁴ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (Hambledon and London, 2005), pp. 129–34; Matt Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

⁵ Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶ Colville, “Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer”.

⁷ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, C. 1870–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Gary D. Sheffield and Dan Todman, *Command and Control on*

was a bastion of an outmoded masculinity.⁸ The analysis of the wider class and gender debates raised by commissioning officers from the ranks set out in this study shows the sustained pressure on the army's gentlemanly elite to compromise the hegemony it exercised within the army. In the face of faltering structural obstacles to preventing commissions from the ranks, the officer class strengthened socio-cultural policing of its boundaries. The purposeful, pre-planned commissioning of officers from the ranks matured into an unanticipated long-term threat to the gentleman-officer identity. This threatened the exclusivity of homo-social gentlemanly world of the officers' mess and significantly the claim to 'character' as the gentlemanly quality that inspired leadership. Commissioning of rankers was legitimated through an established narrative of heroism and gallantry rather than professionalism.

The conclusions of this study were reached through an exploration of socio-cultural spaces — the regiment and the officers' mess — that proved crucial in shaping the identity of the gentleman-officer and providing a complex terrain that ranker officers, without the appropriate socio-cultural tools, were forced to navigate in the war. Here, deviance from the socio-culturally determined norms, appearance, and presentation of the gentleman-officer was crucial in the critical, censorious representation of the ranker officer. The study has shown how, in the face of challenges to their homogenous identity, elites could use socio-cultural tools to police their boundaries.

In undertaking this thesis, the construct of the gentleman has been the main tool of analysis. The idea of the gentleman has most frequently been examined from the perspective of its

the Western Front : The British Army's Experience 1914–1918 (Staplehurst, Kent: Spellmount, 2004); G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Ian Frederick William Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558–1945* (Manchester University Press, 1991).

⁸ John Tosh, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005).

representation in literature.⁹ The gentlemanly ideal has been shown to change, adapt, and loose its currency as the twentieth century progressed.¹⁰ It could be argued that it is a weak tool of analysis. The evidence against this is the power of its hold over the imagination of the British ruling elite in the era studied. They owned the most potent, enduring, and exclusive gentlemanly masculine identity. It had matured in the public schools, informed the lifestyle of an upper-middle-class elite, and was given substance in the incarnation of the gentleman-officer in the army. The strength of using it as a tool lies in the way gentlemanly assessments, status, and symbols were employed in every day discourse and represented in material culture surrounding the army and its officers. In the period from 1903 until the war, there was no ambiguity about the characteristics and lifestyle of the gentleman officer, and it was the yardstick of assessing the potential officer. An exhaustive review of many hundreds of ranker officers' personnel files at The National Archives has provided a rich source of material that has informed these conclusions.

The impact of looking at how ranker-officer identity was represented in the period is that it highlights that current research only examines the surface of the range of other masculinities that pervaded the army in this period. The hegemony of the gentleman-officer identity over the NCO and other ranks and the tropes that have emerged from the perception of regimental officers in the war have restricted understanding and investigation of the socio-cultural qualities and characteristics of these masculinities and the way their identity and lifestyles were constructed. These cultural antecedents in ranker officers are touched upon through their clash with codes of gentlemanly masculinity. The records of the war and its popular representation by gentlemen means that popular and academic interest remains hypnotically fixed on a small

⁹ Christine Berberich, *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia* (Farnham: Ashgate publishing, 2007); R. Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

¹⁰ Marcus Collins, "The Fall of the English Gentleman: The National Character in Decline, C. 1918–1970," *Historical Research* 75, no. 187 (2002).

elite. The comparisons of the ranker officers' habitat with that of their contemporaries in the sergeants' mess points to another socio-cultural world that is unexplored.

The study importantly described a process, commissioning from the ranks, never described before, and the incarnation of the ranker officer during the war. Set against the background of structural process and changes governing commissions from the ranks, it illuminated the degree to which an elite can persist. The public schools remain closely tethered to the officer class of the British army today, and the history of socio-cultural exclusion points the way to understanding how elites have persisted in dominating modern Britain. This study has concentrated on the powerful way differences were exaggerated to perpetuate a hegemonic identity. Its enduring influence was illustrated in 2003 when Kevin Myers a *Telegraph* journalist asserted that given the army's success in the Iraq war, British army officers were entitled to use their 'relaxed, understated, trifle languid' pose and speak with the singular accent of Sandhurst:

But most Army officers speak unmistakable Sandhurst, which can be relied on to infuriate many non-English people, and those curious self-haters, the hard Left of England. Of course, Army officers speak that way simply because it works. Though it is not a politically congenial thing to say, in certain circles, the truth is that plain soldiers expect their officers to sound like that. The Left can deplore this all they like. It makes no difference. The existence of an officers' dialect is central to the culture of the British Army. Any officer who spoke like Liam Gallagher would simply get no respect. Two full generations of the social engineering of comprehensive education haven't altered that truth about British life: clever people speak posh, and dullards don't. Of course, that's not remotely true: but it is a perception, and perceptions are everything in a military hierarchy. From such perceptions flow the currents of respect, deference and obedience [...] Prose, manners, speech: these are mimicked indicators of identity. Whenever there's a war on, soldiers are back in vogue, so it is suddenly fashionable to speak and look like a warrior-toff again; as one day soon it won't be.¹¹

Myers column, although slightly tongue in cheek, is a serious expression of the expectations of the British army officer in the twenty-first century. The endurance of this identity and its

¹¹ Kevin Myers "It's fashionable to speak like a warrior again," The Telegraph, 6 April 2003; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3589742/Its-fashionable-to-speak-like-a-warrior-again.html> - accessed 1 May 20017.

place in sustaining the persistence of an elite is alluded to in the final chapter of this study. Paradoxically, the identity of the gentleman-officer drew much of its energy that saw it persist in the twentieth century, from presenting the ranker officer as the Other.

Following the war, the identity of the ranker officer, particularly as a contributor of regimental leadership in the war, conflicted with the establishment of a post-war vision of Englishness reflected in popular culture as observed by J. M. Winter:

These images were full of cliches. But this fictional ‘imagined community’ of Englishmen and women, poorly expressed and full of contradictions as it was, nonetheless sold. What did the people who saw these films or read these novels get for their money? Entertainment, escape, adventure, to be sure; but they took in other messages too. After the shock of the 1914–18 war and the losses it entailed, these works celebrated the survival of ‘traditional’ English virtues and values, generalised to the whole population during the war and in the immediate post-war period, but which came to mean the values of the officer class. Inter-war art, fiction, theatre and film presented a vision of ‘Englishness’ the central features of which were, in effect, its attachment to the habits of an identifiable social stratum — the educated urban middle class, from which the bulk of officers serving in the British army was drawn.¹²

The reassertion of established social boundaries after the war has been reflected in an enduring historiographical marginalisation, challenged by this thesis. The ranker officer was a significant phenomenon during the First World War, but they are obscured and forgotten, just as they were in the 1920s. This thesis has addressed this missing identity and shown how the ranker officer allows us to understand the relationship between class and institution in modern Britain. In doing this, it makes an important contribution to the literature on class in 20th century Britain.

¹² J. M. Winter, “British National Identity and the First World War,” in *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain*, eds. S. J. D. Green and R. C. Whiting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 276.

Appendix 1: Commissions Granted from the Ranks of the British Army 1885-1914¹

Year	Cavalry	Infantry and ASC	Totals from Army List²	Cohort Studied³
1885	7	15		
1886	7	17		
1887	7	23		
1888	6	29		
1889	2	12		
1890	3	15		
1891	6	6		
1892	3	9		
1893	4	13		
1894	6	19		
1895	1	23		
1896	0	14		
1897	0	8		
1898	1	12		
1899	1	11		
1900	0	27		
1901	1	26		
1902	1	26		
1903	0	14	13	13
1904	0	8	5*	4
1905	0	6	10*	9
1906	0	10	11*	10
1907	0	10	11*	10
1908	0	8	8*	7
1909	0	11	9	9
1910	0	10	10	10
Total	56	375	76	72
1911	-	-	13*	12
1912	-	-	11	11
1913	-	-	7	7
1914 ⁴	-	-	6	6
Total	-	-	115	109

¹ The first two columns are commissioned second lieutenants sourced from: *Army Commissions (Promotion from the Ranks)*, in continuation of Parliamentary Paper No. 178 of Session 1909. Commons Papers, 28 March 1911, No. 104. This table also included commissions (lieutenants) into the Royal Artillery (District Officers) and Royal Engineers (Coast Battalion) Total for the period 1885 – 1910: 165.

² These figures were extracted from Army Lists 1903-1914 and include Bandmasters; one occurring in each year indicated (six in total)*

³ These figures exclude Bandmasters and are the basis for the prosopography referred to in Chapter 3.

⁴ To August 1914

**Appendix 2: Regimental List Showing the number of Rankers
Commissioned (left) and number of Ranker Officers allocated (right) in the
period 1903 - Aug, 1914**

No of Rankers Commissioned	Regiment (Precedence order)	No of Officers from Ranks
0	1st Life Guards	0
1	2nd Life Guards	0
1	Royal Horse Guards	0
2	2nd Dragoon Guards	0
1	3rd Dragoon Guards	0
2	4th Dragoon Guards	0
1	1st Dragoons	0
1	2nd Dragoons	0
1	3rd Hussars	0
1	4th Hussars	0
1	8th Hussars	0
2	10th Hussars	0
1	13th Hussars	0
1	15th Hussars	0
3	16th Lancers	0
1	17th Lancers	0
1	18th Hussars	0
3	21st Lancers	0
3	5th Lancers	0
7	Royal Field Artillery	0
1	Grenadier Guards	0
1	Coldstream Guards	0
1	Scots Guards	0
0	Irish Guards	0
1	Royal Scots	1
1	Queen's (Royal West Surrey)	1
0	Buffs (East Kent)	2
0	King's Own (Royal Lancaster)	1
1	Northumberland Fusiliers	1
0	Royal Warwickshire	1
3	Royal Fusiliers	0
1	King's (Liverpool)	3
0	Norfolk	2
1	Lincolnshire	2
0	Devonshire	1
0	Suffolk	2
1	Somerset Light Infantry	1
0	West Yorkshire	1
1	East Yorkshire	2
0	Bedfordshire	1
1	Leicestershire	3
1	Royal Irish	1
1	Yorkshire	1
1	Lancashire Fusiliers	2

0	Royal Scots Fusiliers	1
5	Cheshire	3
1	Royal Welsh Fusiliers	1
0	South Wales Borderers	1
1	King's Own Scottish Borderers	0
0	Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)	1
0	Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	2
1	Gloucestershire	1
1	Worcestershire	2
1	East Lancashire	3
0	East Surrey	3
1	Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry	2
0	Duke of Wellington's (West Riding)	3
2	Border	1
2	Royal Sussex	1
1	Hampshire	2
0	South Staffordshire	3
0	Dorsetshire	1
3	South Lancashire	3
0	Welsh	2
1	Black Watch	0
2	Ox & Bucks Light Infantry	1
1	Essex	2
0	Sherwood Foresters	0
0	Loyal North Lancashire	3
0	Northamptonshire	1
0	Royal Berkshire	2
1	Royal West Kent	1
1	King's Own (Yorkshire Light Infantry)	1
1	King's (Shropshire Light Infantry)	1
3	Middlesex	3
2	King's Royal Rifle Corps	1
0	Wiltshire	3
1	Manchester	2
1	North Staffordshire	1
0	York and Lancaster	1
0	Durham Light Infantry	1
0	Highland Light Infantry	0
1	Seaforth Highlanders	0
4	Gordon Highlanders	1
2	Cameron Highlanders	0
1	Royal Irish Rifles	2
1	Royal Irish Fusiliers	0
1	Connaught Rangers	3
3	Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders	0
1	Leinster	3
4	Royal Munster Fusiliers	1
0	Royal Dublin Fusiliers	2

0	West India	5
3	Rifle Brigade	0
1	Army Service Corps	3
1	Royal Army Medical Corps	0
1	Army Veterinary Corps	0
1	Army Ordnance Corps	0
109	Total	109

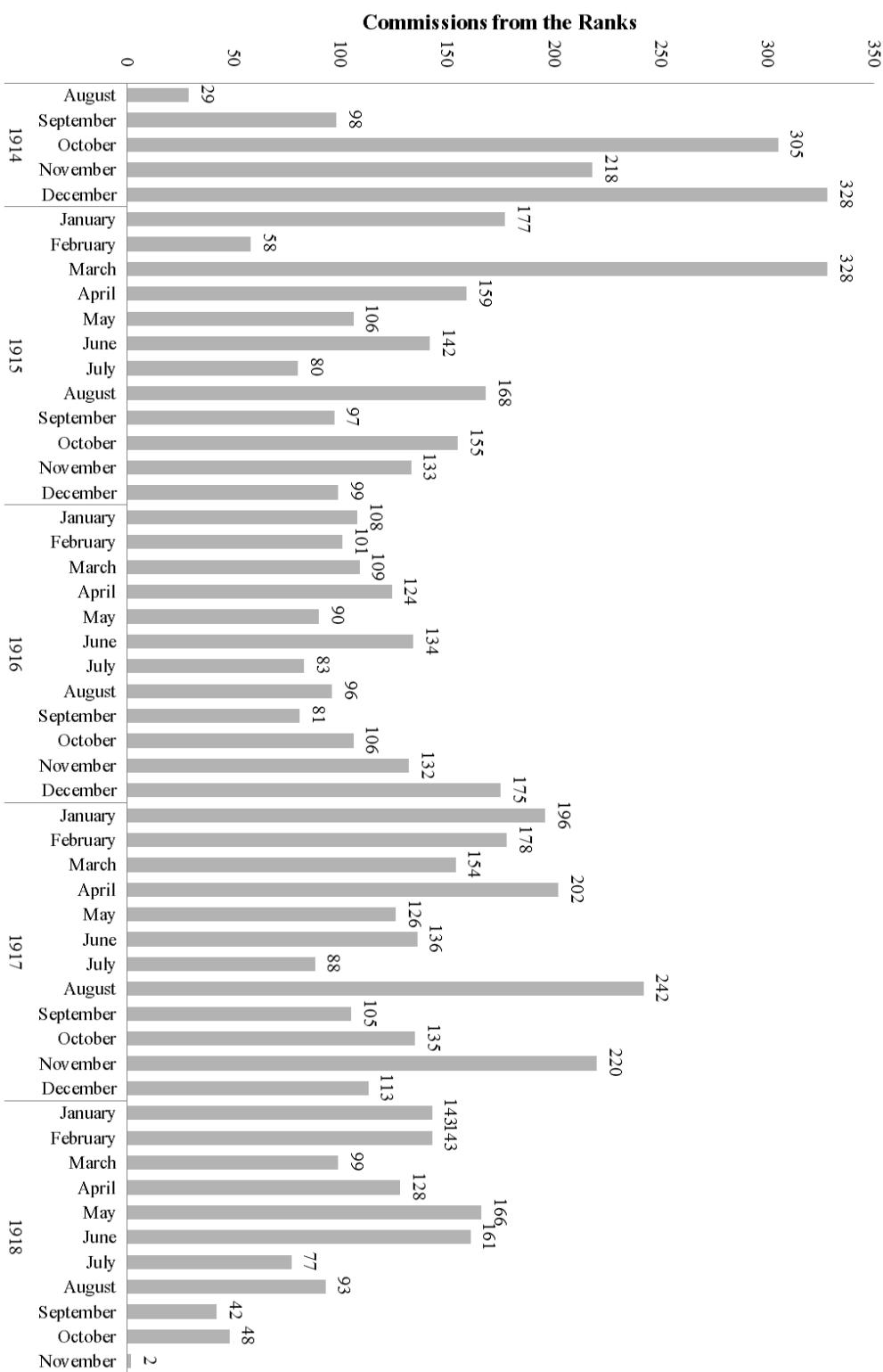
Appendix 3: Annual Distribution of Ranker Officers commissioned from Pre-War Regular Army by Regiment

Regiment (Precedence order)	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	Total
1st Life Guards	0	0	0	0	0	0
2nd Life Guards	0	0	0	0	0	0
Life Guards	0	0	0	0	1	1
Royal Horse Guards	0	0	2	0	0	2
1st Dragoon Guards	0	6	0	0	0	6
2nd Dragoon Guards	2	1	0	0	0	3
3rd Dragoon Guards	0	2	2	0	0	4
4th Dragoon Guards	4	1	2	0	0	7
5th Dragoon Guards	8	2	2	0	0	12
6th Dragoon Guards	1	4	0	0	0	5
7th Dragoon Guards	5	0	2	0	1	8
Dragoon Guards	0	0	0	1	1	2
1st Dragoons	0	2	2	1	0	5
2nd Dragoons	2	1	2	1	0	6
3rd Dragoons	0	0	0	1	0	1
5th Dragoons	0	0	1	0	0	1
6th Dragoons	0	1	1	0	0	2
Dragoons	0	0	0	2	2	4
3rd Hussars	2	0	1	0	0	3
4th Hussars	2	1	0	0	0	3
5th Lancers	5	4	0	1	0	10
7th Hussars	1	0	1	0	0	2
8th Hussars	1	0	1	2	0	4
9th Lancers	4	0	0	0	0	4
10th Hussars	0	5	0	0	0	5
11th Hussars	3	1	0	0	0	4
12th Lancers	3	3	3	0	0	9
13th Hussars	0	2	1	0	0	3
14th Hussars	0	3	0	0	0	3
15th Hussars	0	1	0	0	0	1
16th Lancers	5	2	4	2	0	13
17th Lancers	0	1	0	2	0	3
18th Hussars	3	1	0	0	0	4
20th Hussars	3	1	1	0	0	5
21st Lancers	0	6	1	0	0	7
Lancers	0	0	0	2	4	6
Hussars	0	0	0	8	5	13
Grenadier Guards	0	1	0	1	1	3
Coldstream Guards	2	1	0	1	0	4
Scots Guards	0	0	0	3	0	3
Irish Guards	0	1	1	0	1	3

Royal Scots	8	8	13	11	10	50
Queen's (Royal West Surrey)	7	14	10	25	30	86
Buffs (East Kent)	8	16	7	15	4	50
King's Own (Royal Lancaster)	2	13	7	17	13	52
Northumberland Fusiliers	5	18	15	23	8	69
Royal Warwickshire	6	6	11	19	11	53
Royal Fusiliers	8	33	29	54	33	157
King's (Liverpool)	5	7	11	18	7	48
Norfolk	6	5	9	13	16	49
Lincolnshire	7	4	4	23	14	52
Devonshire	4	5	10	14	9	42
Suffolk	8	8	9	13	10	48
Somerset Light Infantry	1	13	3	11	16	44
West Yorkshire	8	8	9	12	7	44
East Yorkshire	6	5	11	29	14	65
Bedfordshire	8	12	8	21	12	61
Leicestershire	12	9	17	15	16	69
Royal Irish	7	13	3	7	9	39
Yorkshire	2	7	9	30	12	60
Lancashire Fusiliers	4	15	6	33	16	74
Royal Scots Fusiliers	11	6	4	9	8	38
Cheshire	8	11	11	19	8	57
Royal Welsh Fusiliers	6	7	16	23	9	61
South Wales Borderers	5	7	6	8	8	34
King's Own Scottish Borderers	3	6	10	6	6	31
Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)	5	9	7	9	9	39
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	11	4	9	22	7	53
Gloucestershire	9	13	14	28	17	81
Worcestershire	7	12	18	30	19	86
East Lancashire	2	20	12	31	4	69
East Surrey	5	10	6	12	9	42
Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry	6	9	9	15	6	45
Duke of Wellington's (West Riding)	5	6	6	11	7	35
Border	5	8	15	20	10	58
Royal Sussex	8	10	7	14	4	43
Hampshire	7	10	8	18	19	62
South Staffordshire	10	12	8	20	11	61
Dorsetshire	14	8	6	14	15	57
South Lancashire	8	4	8	17	8	45
Welsh	5	6	17	14	12	54
Black Watch	5	17	4	21	6	53
Ox & Bucks Light Infantry	5	4	4	9	5	27
Essex	3	12	11	19	17	62

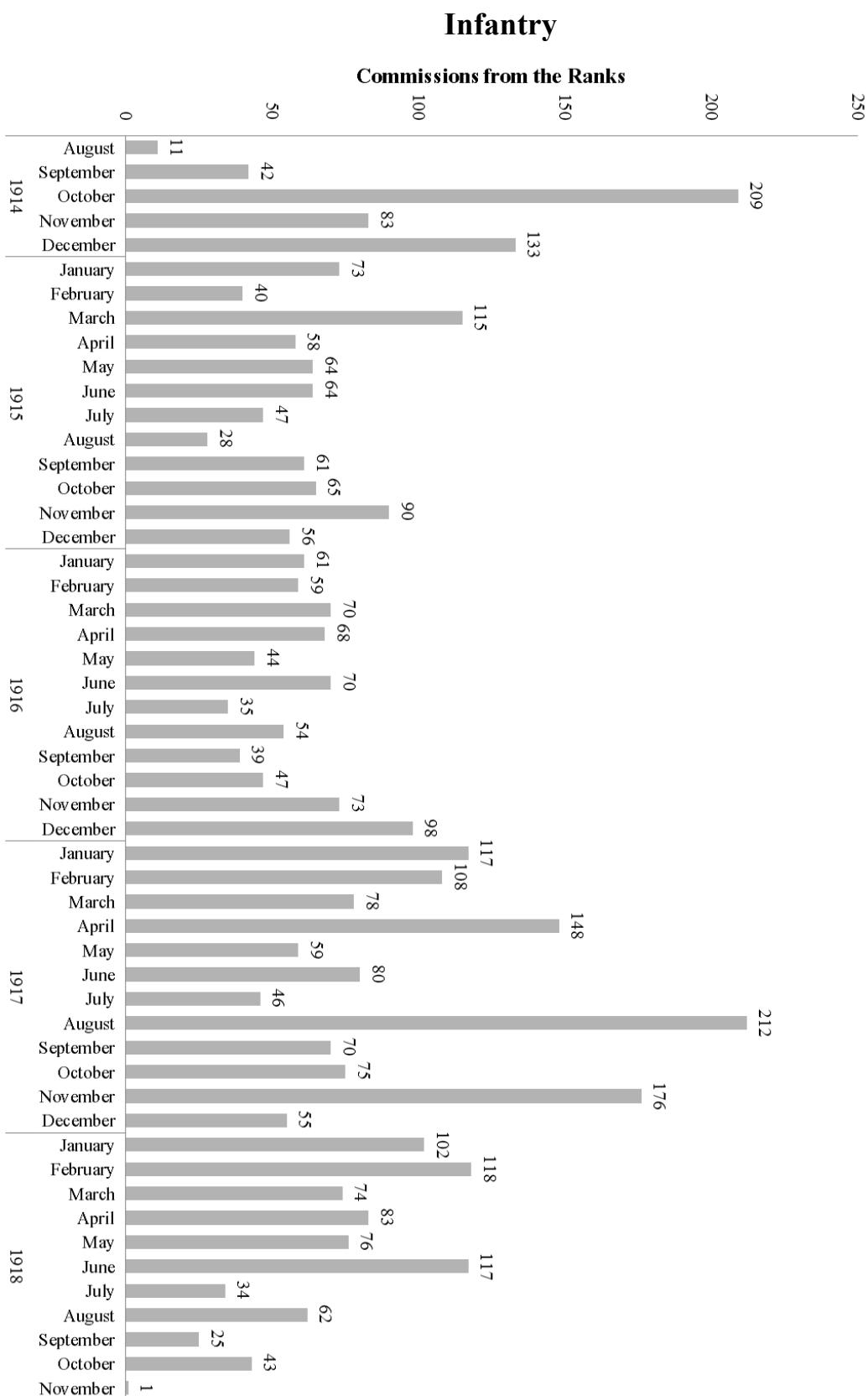
Sherwood Foresters	8	8	6	13	5	40
Loyal North Lancashire	6	12	16	18	5	57
Northamptonshire	9	10	8	26	7	60
Royal Berkshire	6	7	12	26	13	64
Royal West Kent	4	9	8	16	0	37
King's Own (Yorkshire Light Infantry)	3	21	10	23	11	68
King's (Shropshire Light Infantry)	12	5	16	14	25	72
Middlesex	6	17	24	38	13	98
King's Royal Rifle Corps	23	30	17	9	3	82
Wiltshire	5	5	14	7	14	45
Manchester	6	11	12	27	14	70
North Staffordshire	5	4	10	12	10	41
York and Lancaster	4	9	11	11	6	41
Durham Light Infantry	6	18	18	16	8	66
Highland Light Infantry	6	11	3	13	7	40
Seaforth Highlanders	2	14	14	9	5	44
Gordon Highlanders	10	10	8	7	6	41
Cameron Highlanders	13	22	9	22	11	77
Royal Irish Rifles	13	13	10	24	15	75
Royal Irish Fusiliers	12	7	17	12	20	68
Connaught Rangers	8	3	2	7	5	25
Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders	4	8	12	9	10	43
Leinster	7	17	1	9	7	41
Royal Munster Fusiliers	8	9	10	6	5	38
Royal Dublin Fusiliers	3	15	8	22	6	54
West India	2	3	0	0	2	7
Rifle Brigade	10	30	24	31	9	104
Royal Artillery	392	843	554	573	281	2,643
Royal Engineer	0	44	6	1	41	92
Army Service Corps	18	0	0	9	9	36
Army	14	1	31	55	20	121
Royal Marines	20	2	1	3	2	28
Royal Marines Artillery	2	0	0	0	0	2
Royal Flying Corps	0	0	0	6	0	6
Total	978	1,702	1,339	1,894	1,102	7,015

Appendix 4: Monthly Commissions from the Ranks, 1914-1918

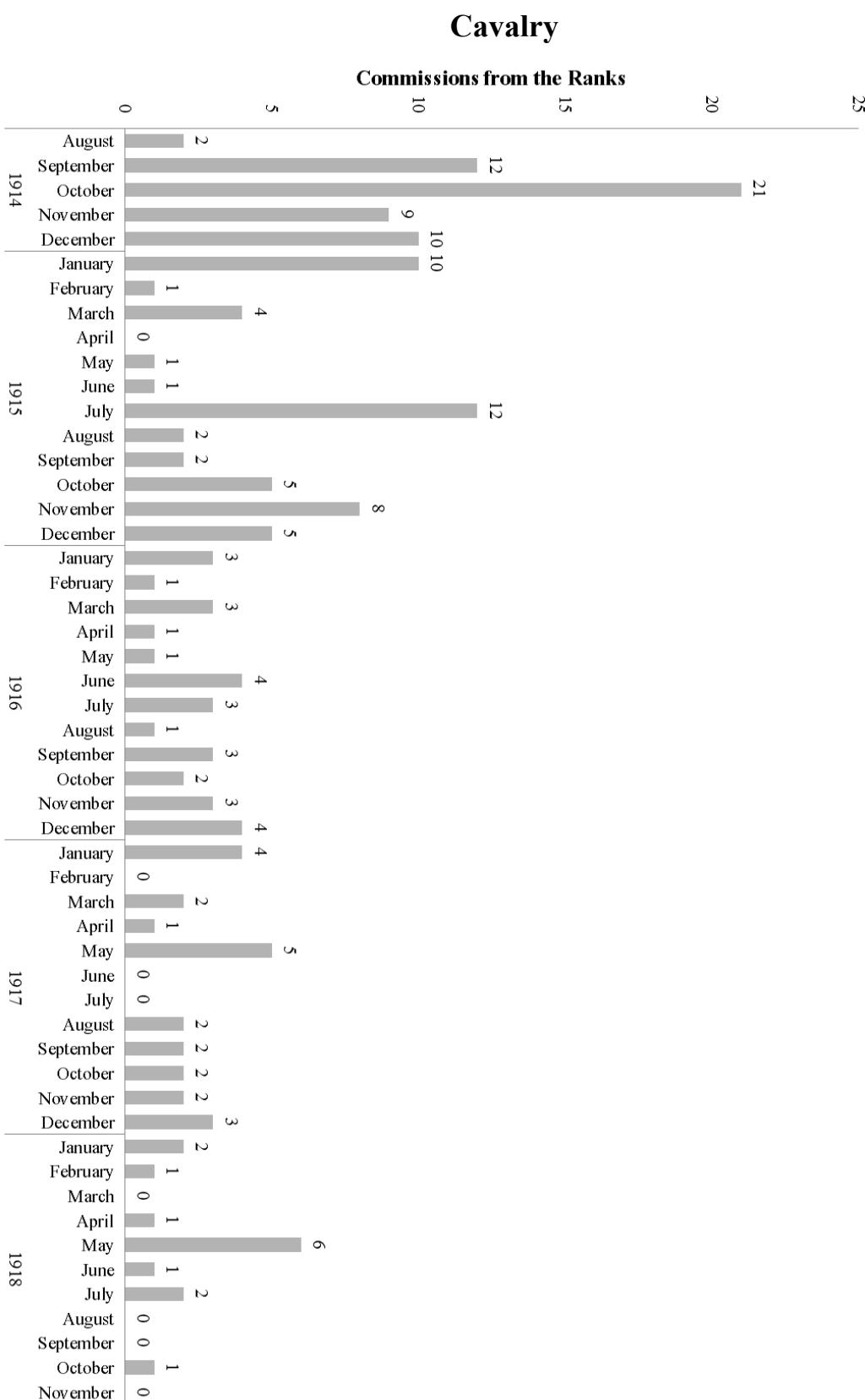


Monthly Commissions from the Ranks of the Pre-War Regular Army August 1914 - November 1918

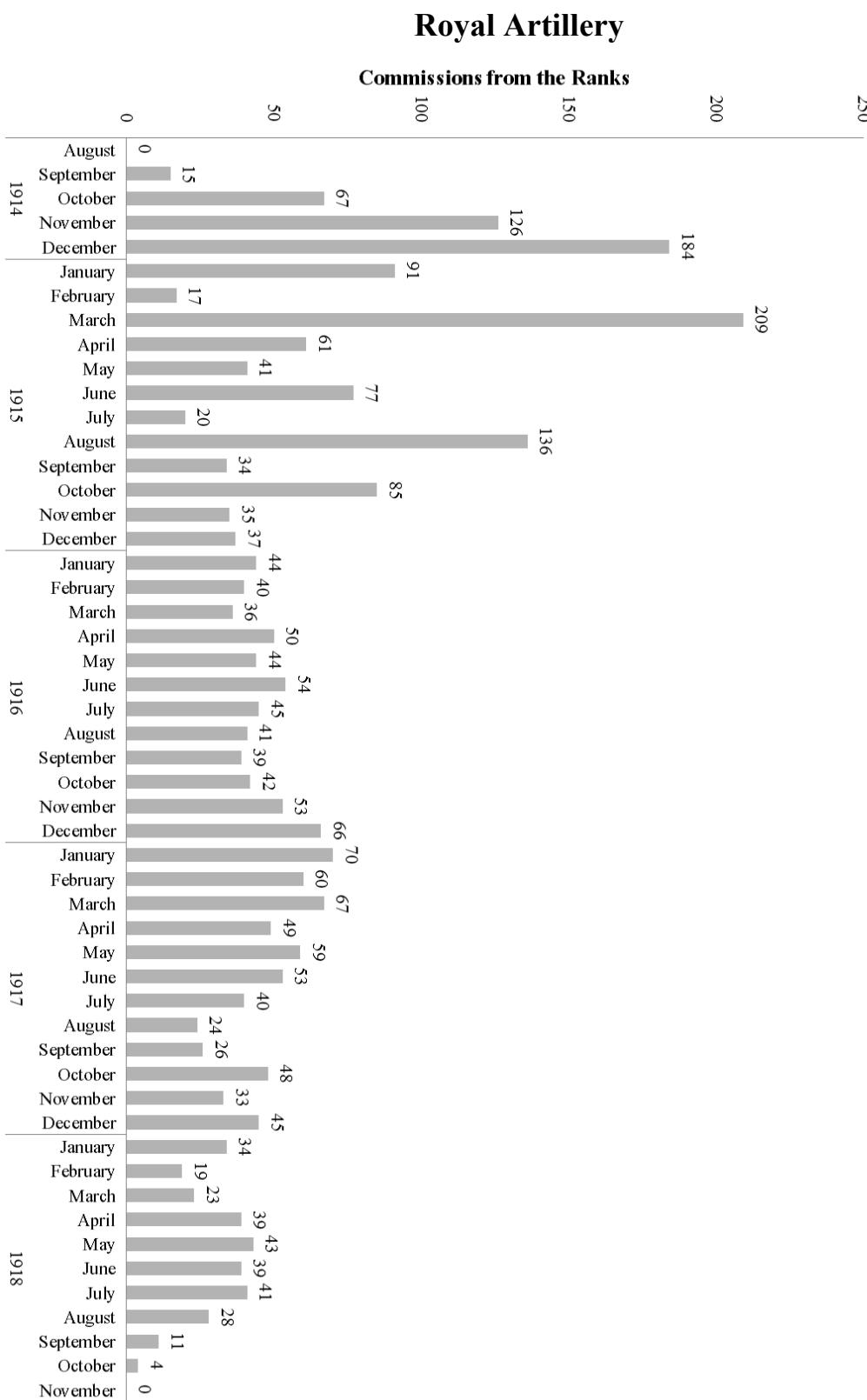
Monthly Commissions from the Ranks of the Pre-War Regular Infantry August 1914 - November 1918



Monthly Commissions from the Ranks of the Pre-War Regular Cavalry August 1914 - November 1918



Monthly Commissions from the Ranks of the Pre-War Royal Artillery August 1914 - November 1918



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Batchelor, Valentine	AIR 79/655
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Belcher, Reginald George Holland	WO 339/5924
Bicheno, Edward	WO 339/24130
Birkby, John Spearman D'Hautville	WO 339/7657
Bissett, George	WO 339/11273
Bone, Frederick Darling	WO 339/17569
Bridcutt, John Henry	WO 339/24093
Bryce, Samuel	WO 339/17356
Burchill, Jasper Beasley	WO 339/65507
Burton, Louis	WO 339/14028
Bush, George	WO 374/11310
Butterworth, Thomas	WO 339/13825
Cadic, Hilary Maurice	WO 339/9537
Carless, Joseph Arthur	WO 339/22679
Carroll, James	WO 339/6475
Condon, David	WO 339/13406
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Dickerson, Frank	WO 339/16708
Dimmer, John Henry Stephen	WO 339/7051
Douglas, William Archer	WO 339/6447
Dundas, Henry Joseph	WO 339/6135
Forster, Harold Thomas	WO 339/2100
Friend, Francis Temple Lancelot	WO 339/6913
Garbett, Hugh Godfrey	WO 374/26354
Gay, Ambrose	WO 339/6316
Gee, Robert	WO 339/30007
Graham, Patrick Frederick Irving	WO 339/8111
Growse, William Henry	WO 339/69682
Houchen, Sidney Charles	WO 374/34886
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