

Forged Through 'Blood and Iron':

How and Why the Army was
so Important in the Creation
of a German Nation from the
1860s to 1918

Nadja Siegel

Second Year Undergraduate,
University of New England*

It is not possible to comprehend the nation-building processes of Germany without recognising the importance of the military. The essay seeks to set out how and why the army was so important in the creation of a German nation from the 1860s to the eve of the First World War. It explores the historical context of the rise of the military during the nineteenth century and the particular importance of France as the 'hereditary foe', which eventually led to the political establishment of the German nation state after the Franco-German war. The role of the military in the unification in political terms has been extensively covered. Blackbourn for instance acknowledged the army as 'architect' of a unification that was won on the battlefield.¹ Whilst the military functioned as both a tangible institution of the State and creator of unification, in its role as national symbol it became a feature of German national culture and consciousness. The essay therefore applies the more recent concept of Eric Hobsbawm's 'invented traditions' that are traced through national histories - in particular those created through the Franco-German war - and associated public celebrations; monuments such as the *Hermannsdenkmal* or *Völkerschlachtendenkmal*, and national symbols, in which we find a celebration of military culture. Everyday life was permeated by military culture, the army visible and omnipresent.² Institutions such as the navy were a 'national metaphor'.³ Yet the military achieved real political power: its privileged position outside the constraints of civilian rule was cemented through its past achievements and prominence in tradition.

*Where translations have been made from the German language, these have been made by myself and are marked in quotation marks and italics.

1 David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 375. David Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Fontana Press, 1997), 245.

2 David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, 11.

3 Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 197.

A few concepts are particularly relevant to this study: Eric Hobsbawm notes that nations use 'invented traditions' to establish and legitimise themselves.⁴ These traditions are marked by their symbolic or ritual nature and often seek to 'establish a continuity with a suitable historic past', which itself can be invented by 'creating an ancient past beyond effective continuity'.⁵ Hobsbawm notes that traditions illuminate how humans relate to the past and are evidence of developments that can be easily identified by historians.⁶ The past also plays a major role in the understanding of a nation in Ernest Renan's view. For Renan, the nation was a solidarity that was built on a 'heroic past' and 'effort and sacrifice'.⁷ In this context the military's accomplishments were of prime importance. The remembrance of military victories and sacrifices created what Rudy Koshar called a 'memory landscape' (*Erinnerungslandschaft*). For Koshar, monuments as part of the physical environment represent collective memories and interpret historical meanings.⁸ This memory landscape, which was characterised by a predominantly militaristic influence, shaped Germany's self-understanding.⁹

First, it is important to look at how the military came to occupy such a central role in the unification of Germany and the formation of its identity. The French Revolution, which inaugurated the age of people's self-determination, also initiated a search for *la patrie* in Germany. The 'War of Liberation' from the French gave intellectuals like Johann Friedrich Jahn or Theodor Körner an opportunity to infuse the war with patriotic feeling as the longing of the 'Volk's soul'.¹⁰ The Napoleonic era was important in creating France as the *Erbfeind*, the 'hereditary foe' and *casus foederis* by which Germany was to come into existence in 1871. Ernst Moritz Arndt, ignoring the fact that some German kingdoms fought for Napoleon, notes as early as 1813:

That is the German's fatherland,
Where wrath pursues the foreign band,—
Where every Frank is held a foe,
And Germans all as brothers glow.¹¹

Admittedly, Arndt displays an extreme form of anti-French patriotism. However, as later nationalist historiographers exploited and embellished the 'war of national liberation', nationalist feelings developed and the hostility toward the hereditary foe became part of later nationalism.¹² The Rhine Crisis of 1840 highlighted the continued need for military protection against this hereditary foe. When France declared the left Rhine areas should again be part of its natural borders (as it briefly did under Napoleon's 'Confederation of the Rhine'), a wave of anti-French feeling erupted in Germany. Schneckenburger wrote his 'Watch on the Rhine', full of militaristic character and

4 Eric Hobsbawm 'The Nation as Invented Tradition,' in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 264, 274.

5 Eric J. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions,' in *The Invention of Tradition*, 1, 7.

6 *Ibid.*, 12.

7 Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation? (Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?), a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne, 11 March 1882,' in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 1, (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947-61), 887-907.

8 Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 9-10.

9 *Ibid.*, 50.

10 George L Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 19.

11 Ernst Moritz Arndt, 'The German Fatherland (1813)' in *The Poets and Poetry of Europe*, ed. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1845), 322-33.

12 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 88-89.

emphasising the duty of the sons to their fatherland of defending the German Rhine.¹³ Other songs in a similar vein like Becker's 'Rheinlied' and Fallersleben's 'Deutschlandlied' were written at the time of the Rhine Crisis and would rise again to popularity later during the Franco-Italian war.¹⁴ The rivalry between Prussia and Austria during this war had shown that such strength was only to be found in unity.¹⁵ Friedrich Engels noted at the beginning of the conflict in 1859 that 'the Rhine needs to be defended at the Po' and only unity '[...] protects us and can make us stronger internally and externally'.¹⁶ The wars of liberation and a growing demand for defence and strength in unity were a fertile ground from which the military would emerge as a tangible and symbolic force in the unification of Germany and thereafter.

Political unification was the culmination of orchestrated military actions of the 1860s and the military finally saw the German *Reich* proclaimed in 1871. In 1860 Bismarck expressed his view that the German people would support Prussia and vice versa, 'as long as it [the German *Volk*] regards the Prussian Army as its protagonist and hope for the future' (*solange es in Preußen seinen Vorkämpfer und die Hoffnung auf seine Zukunft erblickt*).¹⁷ Under Bismarck's leadership in the 1860s, the military might of Prussia evolved as a potential unifying power for Germany. In 1862, Bismarck famously noted that 'Germany is not looking to Prussia's liberalism, but to its power; [...] it is not by speeches and majority resolutions that the great questions of the time are decided - that was the big mistake of 1848 and 1849 - but by iron and blood'.¹⁸ Bismarck sought to extend Prussia's borders and establish her dominance in Germany through military strength. In 1864, the victory of the predominantly Prussian troops over Denmark brought Schleswig closer to Prussia's sphere of influence.¹⁹ A second military step taken towards unity was the 'German War' of 1866, when Prussia defeated Austria at Königgrätz. Whereas in the Schleswig-Holstein question national sentiment had been pro-war, the public opinion in 1866 was divided over what was perceived as a 'brother's war'. Prussia was opposed not only by Austria but also armies of the 'third Germany' such as Saxony, Bavaria or Württemberg.²⁰ However, the surprising and succinct victory swayed the public opinion very quickly towards Prussia.²¹ Blackbourn calls the German civil war a 'decisive moment' in which a 'Lesser Germany' (*kleindeutsche*) solution to the German question became more likely because of Austria's expulsion from Germany.²² Growing tensions between the Northern Confederation and the Southern States that were part of the *Zollverein* ('tariff union') were eventually set aside in 1870, when the Southern States honoured their military alliances to the North in the war against France. This time the French declaration of war over the Spanish succession conflict united all the German 'tribes' in a strong national sentiment against the

13 Max Schneckenburger, 'The Watch on the Rhine [Die Wacht Am Rhein], 1840,' in *The World's Story: A History of the World in Story, Song and Art*, Vol. 7, ed. Eva March Tappan, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 249-50.

14 Egmont Zechlin, *Die Reichsgründung*, 2nd ed., (Frankfurt: Ullstein Verlag, 1974), 50.

15 *Ibid.*, 52.

16 Friedrich Engels, 'Po und Rhein,' in *Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels - Werke*, Vol. 13 (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 1971), 225-268. Retrieved from ML Werke, first correction 4 August 1998, http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me13/me13_225.htm, accessed 1 April 2012.

17 Zechlin, *Die Reichsgründung*, 59.

18 Otto von Bismarck, 'Excerpt from Bismarck's "Blood and Iron" Speech (1862),' in *Bismarck: Collected Works*, ed. Hermann von Petersdorff. (Berlin: Otto Stolberg, 1924-35), 139-40 in German History Docs, n.d. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=250&language=english, accessed 14 May 2012.

19 Zechlin, *Die Reichsgründung*, 106.

20 *Ibid.*, 115. Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 243.

21 Zechlin, *Die Reichsgründung*, 115.

22 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 243.

Erbfeind France. The military, including a respectable portion of non-Prussian contingents such as Saxon, Bavarian and Swabian troops, achieved a decisive victory at Sedan.²³ A few months later the German Empire was proclaimed as a federal union of the various states. The unification was not a public affair of the *Volk*, however, its military character is clearly shown in Figure 1 below:



Figure 1 - Anton von Werner, *The Proclamation of the German Empire (January 18, 1871)*.²⁴

The artist Anton von Werner recalls the event a short and dull affair.²⁵ It was a military event, dispassionate and devoid of any participation of the common people. That princes and officers - all emblazoned in military uniform - were the only attendees underlines the position of the military within the pre-existing power structures. The victory over the hereditary enemy France made the German Empire a *fait accompli* and firmly established the military as paramount, making its elevated position acceptable.²⁶

The military victory of 1871 created Germany as a political reality; however, its real importance was in the creation of a history of common sacrifice and a series of invented traditions that build the nation or national identity. In the sense of Ernest Renan's 'nation as a solidarity', the following quote of Bismarck's shows how the German nation was to understand itself:²⁷

²³ Gordon A. Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 28-29.

²⁴ Anton von Werner, 'The Proclamation of the German Empire (January 18, 1871) – First (or Palace) Version (1877)' [painting] with permission from Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (bpk Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte), in German History Docs, n.d., accessed 24 May 2012, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=815&language=english.

²⁵ German History Docs, 'Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany (1866-1890),' Images - Politics I: Forging an Empire, n.d., http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1401&language=english, accessed 11 May 2012.

²⁶ Eda Sagarra, *An Introduction to Nineteenth Century Germany*, (Harlow: Longman, 1980), 160.

²⁷ Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', 7.

The bond which holds us inseparably together was formed from a mixture of blood, wounds, and death on the battlefield of St. Privat [near Gravelotte, the largest battle of the Franco-Prussian war], from deeds performed in common under the attack of the hereditary foe who threatened our nationality [...] history reveals that unity is most firmly established by comradeship in war.²⁸

Bismarck's statement provides an application of Ernest Renan's answer to the question 'What is a Nation?': 'A nation is a great solidarity, created by the sentiment of the sacrifices which have been made and of those which one is disposed to make in the future.'²⁹ The memory of the war of 1870/71 against the hereditary foe France and the sacrifices made were eventually called upon, and reinforced the sense of solidarity in 1914. The poster below in Figure 2 reminded the young soldiers of the Franco-Prussian war (the inscriptions on the gravestones of Gravelotte and Marslatour being important battles in that war), and the ghosts of the heroic forefathers encourage the new generation to defend the fatherland. The line under the drawing reads 'Bravo, dear sons, our blessing is with you!' ('*Bravo ihr lieben Söhne, unser Segen geleitet Euch!*'). This message is a reminder of what Renan would label 'history of effort, sacrifice' and 'common glories in the past [and] a common will in the present' that underlies the solidarity of a nation.³⁰

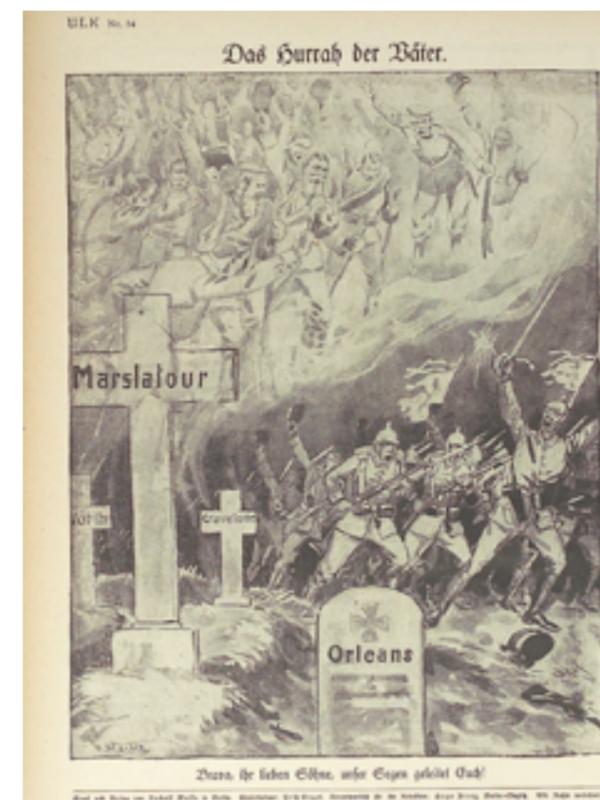


Figure 2 – 'ULK' Nr 34 'The Hurrah of the Fathers', August 1914.³¹

²⁸ Otto von Bismarck, address to the Dresden Choral Society, quoted in Otto Pflanze, 'Bismarck and German Nationalism,' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (1955), 559.

²⁹ Renan, *What is a Nation?*, 7.

³⁰ Renan, *What is a Nation?*, 7.

³¹ ULK Nr 34 'The Hurrah of the Fathers,' August 1914, in *Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg*, <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/ulk1914/0264>, accessed 2 April 2012.

The Franco-German war became the symbolic cradle of the new nation and allowed Germany to invent a common history and traditions based on its military successes. As Eric Hobsbawm argued, the German Empire created a series of invented traditions on which German nationhood was based.³² According to Hobsbawm, invented traditions take the character of being constructed and formally constituted.³³ One example of such tradition, celebrating the German victory over France at Sedan, was embodied in the Sedan-Fest. The army had gained high prestige as the 'architect of unification' and saw its position affirmed at the annual 'national holiday' of Sedan Day.³⁴ Although Sedan Day had not been celebrated equally across Germany, it can be argued that it was intended to act as 'invented tradition' furthering the nation building process.³⁵ It was public ceremonies like Sedan Day - by default staged in a military manner - that allowed different groups to express their relationship with the newly formed state, either being supportive (i.e. local Sedan Committees) or absent (i.e. Catholic minorities in the Rhineland).³⁶ A military character permeated most festivals. Not only the Emperor's birthday celebrations but even Luther's four-hundredth birthday celebration had the character of military parades.³⁷ *Kaiserparaden* were created after 1871. These were officially orchestrated events of nation building that gave the German population in all states of the newly formed Empire the chance to experience a visit by the Emperor ('*Kaiser*'). These colourful military performances attracted masses of spectators.³⁸ Thus the symbolism of the army, created by military achievements and a heroic past, reinforced the regime's portrayal of the origin of the German nation.

In Germany, national symbolism evolved to signify military symbolism, in particular after unification, as symbols came to have an inherent military character, value or relevance. This is obvious from the character of public monuments that sprang up all across Germany after 1871. The Franco-German war caused a wave of monument building, lasting for over a decade.³⁹ One of the most prominent of those monuments is the *Siegessäule* ('Victory Column') in Berlin, which is still a major tourist attraction. The design of the *Siegessäule* was originally conceived after the war against Denmark in 1864, yet it became the symbol of the victory over France when inaugurated on Sedan Day 1873.⁴⁰ After 1871, the victory over France was something that all Germans could share and it placed the army who had forged the union on a national pedestal. The *Hermann* monument on the other hand personified the historical continuity of Germany's strength reaching back to Roman times in the mythical knight Arminius, or *Hermann* 'the German'. However, this continuity, as Hobsbawm notes, was invented as it was outside 'effective continuity'.⁴¹ Heinrich von Kleist, who Carl Schmitt termed the 'poet of national resistance' in the Napoleonic wars, did the groundwork

32 Eric J. Hobsbawm cited in Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 313.

33 Eric J. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions,' 1.

34 Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, 12.

35 Max L. Baeumer, 'Imperial Germany as Reflected in Its Mass Festivals,' in *Imperial Germany*, eds. Volker Dürr, Kathy Harms and Peter Hayes, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 65-66.

36 Green, *Fatherlands*, 313.

37 Baeumer, 'Imperial Germany as Reflected in Its Mass Festivals,' 69-71.

38 Jakob Vogel, 'Military, Folklore, Eigensinn: Folkloric Militarism in Germany and France, 1871-1914,' *Central European History*, Vol. 33, No. 4, (2000), 492.

39 Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*, 50

40 German History Docs, 'Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany (1866-1890)', Dedication Ceremonies for the Berlin Victory Column (September 2, 1873), n.d., http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1295&language=english, accessed 11 May 2012.

41 Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions,' 7.

of introducing Hermann to the national German heritage in his play *Herrmannsschlacht*, which was ostensibly anti-French.⁴² The colossal statue of Hermann is a bellicose hero, his sword inscribed with the words 'German unity is my strength; my strength is Germany's might'.⁴³ This strength is also encapsulated in the Monument to the Battle of Nations (*Völkerschlachtdenkmal*). It is the largest memorial in Germany and commemorates the 1813 battle and Napoleon's defeat. However, the monument does not portray the battle itself; rather it celebrates Germany's national military power and German sacrifice. The giant solemn warriors of the *krypta* inside the building describe what George Mosse called 'sacred spaces of a new civic religion' to the heroic dead (refer Figure 3a) - and in fact it is an imposing statue Archangel Michael that guards the entry to the memorial, bearing resemblance to a church (Figure 3b).⁴⁴



Figure 3a – Völkerschlachtdenkmal (interior)⁴⁵ Figure 3b - Völkerschlachtdenkmal (exterior)⁴⁶

Hobsbawm places the mass production of public monuments in the realm of invented traditions that define this 'recent historical innovation, the nation,' whereas Nipperdey sees these gigantic forms as 'an attempt to anchor the nation in the elemental, the irrational, and the absolute'.⁴⁷ Importantly though, the construction of monuments experienced wide popular support, in particular after 1870.⁴⁸ Although Ernst von Bandel started construction of the *Hermannsdenkmal* - the 'first national monument erected by the entire German people' - in 1838, public donations only started to flow in the late 1860s.⁴⁹ The *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* was to a large degree built with funds collected by the German Patriots' League ('*Deutscher Patriotenbund*').⁵⁰ Similarly, the

42 Ingo Breuer, *Kleist-Handbuch: Leben - Werk - Wirkung*, (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2010), 258.

43 Green, *Fatherlands*, 123.

44 Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 32.

45 Nadja Siegel [photograph], *Völkerschlachtdenkmal (interior)*, August 2009.

46 Nadja Siegel [photograph], *Völkerschlachtdenkmal (exterior)*, August 2009.

47 Hobsbawm 'The Nation as Invented Tradition,' 9-10. Thomas Nipperdey cited in George L. Mosse, 'Caesarism, Circuses and Monuments,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1971), 175.

48 Mosse, 'Caesarism, Circuses and Monuments,' 175.

49 Schmidt quoted in Baeumer, 'Imperial Germany as Reflected in Its Mass Festivals,' 67

50 German History Docs, "Monument to the Battle of Nations (1897-1913)", n.d., <http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/>

Niederwalddenkmal, which stood for German unity, was financed by the war veterans association and was an important pilgrimage destination and a place for popular national festivals.⁵¹ Those places were created and locally manifested the national traditions.

Where traditions and symbols were not invented, they were appropriated. This can be seen with the example of 'Germania', the depiction of Germany and a most prominent national symbol. The picture of the Germania throning over the National Assembly in the *Paulskirche*, Frankfurt in 1848/49 by Phillip Veit (to view click [here](#)) has nothing of the military determination that can be seen in Wislicenus' Germania after the war against France (to view click [here](#)). Veit's Germania of the March Revolution is valorous yet peace-loving, holding a sword together with a hemp branch, and symbolises German unity freed from shackles. The appropriation of Germania as a symbol after 1871, shown in Wislicenus' figure, jealously guards the Rhine with sword and full armour. Although oak leaves (symbols of German strength) still crown her head, she wears the Prussian *Pickelhaube* army helmet. The Prussian eagle on the shield also directly links her to the Prussian military as protector of Germany against France. After 1871 a truly national culture emerged reflected by public monuments, public ceremonies and symbols - most of these, however, portrayed a martial character. German symbolism had indeed become military symbolism.

As symbolism is usually interdependent with reality, there is reason to believe that the strong prominence of military symbolism is due to and reinforced by the fact that the military had a tangible presence in people's everyday lives as militarism and soldierly virtues permeated into German life and culture. Firstly, there was the army as an institution. 'Every German' - and that was meant to be understood as every German male - had the constitutional duty to serve in the army for twelve years (seven years in the standing army with at first three years later two, active service, followed by the reserve) [§§57, 59 of the Constitution '*Reichsverfassung*', 1871].⁵² This rigorous system was directly taken from the Prussian constitution - in effect a result of the position of the Prussian king within the Empire, as *Kaiser*, and of the Prussian army that had showed itself most capable in the wars of unification. Wilhelm I had fought acrimoniously with the Prussian parliament about the three-year service in 1862. He did not want 'civilians in a soldier's frock', he wanted to instil blind obedience in the 'soldier civilian' and through military drill the army was to become the 'school of the nation'.⁵³ Recruits were mainly from rural areas and during their service had only limited access to civilian life, however, they were also shown something beyond the parish pump, building comradeship and taking pride in having it 'made through' the harsh drill.⁵⁴ Otto Fechner, a plumber from regional Saxony received the below certificate 'In memory of my service' (Figure 4) where he is shown in the centre, looking proud in his uniform. This was an official acknowledgement of his service, but he now also owed a commitment to the state to defend the fatherland. It reads if 'the fatherland calls us again - as reservist or Landwehrman - we will lay down our work and faithfully follow the flag', thus emphasising the importance of the military service to the fatherland. Although faded, the serviceman in the middle is framed by the Saxon (green/white) and Imperial (black/white/red) flags, integrating federal state and *Reich*.

sub_image.cfm?image_id=1701&language=English, accessed 21 May 2012.

51 Baeumer, 'Imperial Germany as Reflected in Its Mass Festivals,' 67.

52 Gesetz betreffend die Verfassung des Deutschen Reiches vom 16. April 1871, in *documentArchiv.de*, revised 03.03.2004, <http://www.documentarchiv.de/ksr/verfksr.html>, accessed 21 May 2012.

53 Wolfram Siemann, *Gesellschaft im Aufbruch, Deutschland 1849-71*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 204ff.

54 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 379.



Figure 4 – Army Service Certificate 1908⁵⁵

The German public and public institutions held a high respect and admiration for the army, the 'architects of unification'.⁵⁶ Officers and soldiers enjoyed various privileges and were generally preferred for posts in the strictly hierarchical bureaucracy.⁵⁷ The uniform carried a lot of power - politicians and nobles were hardly seen without their uniforms and decorations and the public had a special affinity for uniforms as well. As a Turkish diplomat in Berlin remarked, 'Prussian ladies never tire of seeing soldiers'.⁵⁸ Just how successful wearing a uniform could be in instilling 'blind obedience' can be illustrated by an incident in 1906, where a mere unemployed artisan, Wilhelm Voigt, made a fool of the mayor of Köpenick (near Berlin). Dressing up in a stolen captain's uniform, Voigt ordered some soldiers to arrest the mayor. The 'Captain of Köpenick' made off with 5,000 Marks and became a folk hero.⁵⁹ This shows how far the indoctrination of military obedience, that was also propagated throughout officialdom, had reached, but also how the German public did see the humour in Voigt exploiting this '*blinden Gehorsam*'.

Habituation to military behaviour and values began early in life: until the late 19th century, Germany was nearly the only producer of tin soldiers. Although only toys, they were believed to be

55 Juliane Siegel [photograph] Military service certificate of Mr Fechner, 6 May 2012, used with permission.

56 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 375.

57 *Ibid.*, 379.

58 Gerhard Ritter, *Staatkunst und Kriegshandwerk: Das Problem des Militarismus in Deutschland*, Vol. 2, (München: Verlag R. Oldenburg, 1960) 126.

59 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 375.

instrumental in encouraging loyalty to the flag and educating the soldiers of tomorrow.⁶⁰ Children at school were conditioned into obedience, discipline and military behaviour: the correct answer to the question ‘What do you want to be?’ was nothing but ‘Soldier, Sir!’⁶¹ At school in history lessons and at university, conservative, pro-Prussian historians such as Sybel or Treitschke were setting the tone, apotheosising war, ‘*die göttliche Majestät des Krieges*’ (‘divine majesty of war’) and legitimising blind obedience as character-forming.⁶² Once this character was built, veterans’ and military leagues were formed, counting numerous members (i.e. 1.6 million people were in the veterans’ league in 1914).⁶³ These associations had a huge impact in particular on rural communities where, through popular festivals and ceremonies, they created a culture in which military parades and bands also familiarised women and children with military practices and ideals.⁶⁴ Through *Kaiserparaden*, public ceremonies, monuments, local festivities but even regular day-to-day activities like going to school or to the post office, German society had been accustomed to the omnipresence of the military and military values. Society was well militarised from above through military and semi-military institutions as well as from below through associations, public ceremonies and everyday life. German culture was to equal military culture to the extent that at the outbreak of the First World War we read in the following “‘The Appeal of 93 ‘To the Civilized World!’” from leading German artists and intellectuals: ‘Were it not for German militarism, German culture would long ago have been eradicated.’⁶⁵

An exemplary case of the above-mentioned military form of culture-building is the Imperial Navy. Although separately administered and funded from the army (there were even some funding disputes and rivalry), the navy was nonetheless a militaristic institution fighting for Germany and ‘Germanness’ beyond the waves. A German navy was intended as early as 1848 by the Frankfurt Parliament and was thus linked to liberal values and national unity.⁶⁶ Similarly to the army, it stretched across all social strata, however, unlike the army it did not insist on the aristocracy of its officers, attracting a large number of middle-class men with ambitions to become officers.⁶⁷ However, the present importance of the navy is not as an institution but as a ‘national metaphor’, to use Jan Rüger’s term.⁶⁸ The navy apparatus made conscious gestures of integrating the always troublesome Southern states when launching battleships such as the ‘*München*’, ‘*Schwaben*’ or ‘*Elsass*’, drumming up local support in the media and giving the privilege of launching the vessel to the respective local dignitary.⁶⁹ Navy parades and ship launches were public spectacles of national military prowess but could also be used to fit the agenda of local governments and citizens’ committees and even made for good stories in local magazines, if only for the purposes of celebrity

60 Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 141.

61 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 374.

62 Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk*, ii, 125.

63 Vogel, ‘Central European History,’ 495.

64 *Ibid.*, 495, 502.

65 Bernhard vom Brocke, “Wissenschaft und Militarismus”: Der Aufruf der 93 “an die Kulturwelt!” und der Zusammenbruch der internationalen Gelehrtenrepublik im Ersten Weltkrieg’ [“Scholarship and Militarism”: The Appeal of 93 “to the Civilized World!” and the Collapse of the International Republic of Letters in the First World War’], in *Wilamowitz nach 50 Jahren [Wilamowitz 50 Years Later]*, ed. William M. Calder, III, (trans. Jeffrey Verhey and Roger Chickering), (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 718. German History Docs, n.d., http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1721, accessed 1 April 2012.

66 Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945*, 303.

67 *Ibid.*

68 Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*, 197.

69 *Ibid.*, 147, 152.

spotting or to discuss the latest fashion.⁷⁰ Navy uniform, the *Matrosenanzug*, became fashionable children’s wear, and toy ships and war games were also popular, as were the public miniature boat displays *Marineschauspiele* for young and old.⁷¹ The navy Cabinet however used advertising and propaganda to reach all classes and ages, not only through newspapers, youth literature but also university lectures and school visits by officers.⁷² The navy strongly connected with nationalist themes: it was to represent ‘honour’, ‘strength’ and German culture and identity.⁷³ German values like virility, bravery and steadfastness were projected onto the navy - as they were onto the army - but also reflected back onto society. As Rüger says, it was not only a military instrument but also developed into a cultural tool and more than a mere ‘invented tradition’.⁷⁴ The ‘naval theatre’ is an example *par excellence* of Hobsbawm’s ‘exercises in social engineering’ that a nation inevitably undertakes. The German nation celebrated itself in the navy: it celebrated the technological strength brought to them by Krupp steel, and it connected to past military victories and those that were due to come as the navy exemplified the ‘youthful strength of united Germany’.⁷⁵

A lot has been said about the importance of the military as a symbol and cultural agent, however, the German army - particularly in the Wilhelmine era - gained substantial political power. Benedict Anderson describes a ‘nation as imagined political community’.⁷⁶ In the case of Germany, the army and the navy influenced the political community to a great degree. The elevated position of the army has already been touched on, yet its special rank was also anchored in the constitution, the *Reichsverfassung*: Paragraph 63 put the army under the control of the *Kaiser* alone thus protecting it from civilian oversight.⁷⁷ The only faint influence the parliament could wield was when debating the army budget every seven (later every five) years. Such budgetary discussions were fierce, yet always resolved in favour of the army, for example through reiteration of the need for protection due to Germany’s vulnerable geographical location. In the Wilhelmine era, *Weltpolitik* and *Flottenpolitik* were political drawcards that assured support for the army. With the help of the army and navy, Germany was to secure itself a ‘*Platz an der Sonne*’ (‘place in the sun’). Some politicians like Friedrich Naumann saw in the fleet and colonial policies a means for social integration, especially of the proletariat.⁷⁸ Naumann was a liberal but sought to reduce the rift between the bourgeois and working classes through using government policy to bring benefits to the masses.⁷⁹ Politically, this may have painted the idea of the army as benign hero of Germany on the waves and in the faraway lands, yet reality was different. In the colonies, the struggle between civilian and military representatives highlighted the autocratic behaviour of military leadership: circumventing any civilian control of the local colonial governor, General v. Trotha ordered the genocide of the Herero and Nama people in Southwest Africa. Only due to public outcry and requests from the then Chancellor v. Bülow did the *Kaiser* and Chief of Staff Schlieffen revoke v. Trotha’s policy.⁸⁰ But also at home the dark face of the political power of the army had come to

70 *Ibid.*, 48, 99.

71 *Ibid.*, 58.

72 Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945*, 307.

73 Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*, 163.

74 *Ibid.* 27.

75 Helmuth v. Moltke, quoted in Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*, 163.

76 Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983), 5-7.

77 Gesetz betreffend die Verfassung des Deutschen Reiches vom 16. April 1871, in *documentArchiv.de*, revised 03.03.2004, <http://www.documentarchiv.de/ksr/verfksr.html>, accessed 21 May 2012.

78 Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945*, 276.

79 *Ibid.*, 185.

80 Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell

light in the so-called Zabern affair. A young army officer had insulted the Zaberners in a speech using derogative language.⁸¹ The military reacted harshly to the subsequent local protests, deeming it to be an attack on the army and chiefly besieged the town and arrested the protesters.⁸² Civilian jurisdiction of the incident was ruled out when the *Kaiser* asserted his *Kommandogewalt* ('command power') and even the Chancellor v. Bethmann-Hollweg told the parliament that 'even in this serious and in many respects very sad case, that the military has the right to protect itself against direct attacks. And it has not only the right; it also has the duty to do so.'⁸³ Zabern caused outrage in the parliament but also in the German public.⁸⁴ The power and political inviolability of the army became obvious in cases like the Zabern affair or Southwest Africa. Here the military proved a unifying force by turning public opinion against the army.

Less than one year later in 1914, the public anti-military sentiments seemingly had abated and Germany was at war. Since unification, the German people had been primed for a war. As early as 1888, Bismarck makes it clear that Germany needs to be prepared for war

because of our geographical position [...] and the lesser degree of cohesiveness, which until now has characterized the German nation in comparison with others. The pikes in the European carp-pond are keeping us from being carps. [...] By nature we are rather tending away, the one from the other. But the Franco-Russian press within which we are squeezed compels us to hold together, and by pressure our cohesive force is greatly increased. This will bring us to that state of being inseparable which all other nations possess, while we do not yet enjoy it.⁸⁵

Bismarck's statement also foreshadowed the hope of unity that was held for the war in 1914. Although Blackbourn and Verhey warn us that there was no unambiguous support and enthusiasm for the war in the August days, especially amongst the working class, the 'Burgfrieden' ('civil truce') created a visible achievement toward the overcoming of political, social and cultural differences.⁸⁶ The *Kaiser* proclaimed in a speech to the people: 'I no longer recognize any parties or any confessions; today we are all German brothers and only German brothers'⁸⁷ and the *Reichstag* including the Social Democrats had approved the financing of the war. In his parliamentary speech on 4 August 1914, the Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg reiterated:

We are fighting for the fruit of our peaceful labour, for the heritage of a glorious past and for our future. The 50 years have not yet passed, of which Moltke said that we would stand ready to defend the achievements of 1870. [...] Behind us stands the entire German nation.

University Press, 2005), 63-65.

81 Sagarra, *An Introduction to 19th Century Germany*, 164.

82 Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945*, 298.

83 Stenographic Reports on Reichstag Proceedings. XIII. Legislaturperiode. I. Session 1913. Stenographic reports, vol. 291 (Berlin, 1914), 6155-6157, in *German History Docs*, Parliament Debates the Zabern Affair (1913), n.d., http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1283&language=english, accessed 23 May 2012.

84 Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, 12.

85 Otto v. Bismarck 'We Germans Fear God and Nothing Else in the World!' in *The Age of Bismarck: Documents and Interpretations*, ed. Theodore S. Hamerow (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 290-93.

86 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 461-462. Steffen Bruendel 'Die Geburt der „Volksgemeinschaft“ aus dem „Geist von 1914. Entstehung und Wandel eines „sozialistischen“ Gesellschaftsentwurfs,' in *Zeitgeschichte-online: Fronterlebnis und Nachkriegsordnung. Wirkung und Wahrnehmung des Ersten Weltkriegs*, May 2004, www.zeitgeschichte-online.de/md=EWK-Bruendel, accessed 27 March 2012.

87 Wilhelm I, Original German text reprinted in *Deutsche Quellen zur Geschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges [German Sources on the History of the First World War]*, ed. Wolfdieter Bihl, trans. Jeffrey Verhey, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1991), 49.

(Loud and repeated applause and clapping on all sides of the house and in the stands). The speaker repeated the last words as he reaches out with emphasis to the Social Democrats, *the German people ... are in unison.*

Wir kämpfen für die Früchte unserer friedlichen Arbeit, um das Erbe einer grossen Vergangenheit und um unsere Zukunft. Die 50 Jahre sind noch nicht vergangen, von denen Moltke sprach, dass wir gerüstet dastehen müssten, um die Errungenschaften von 1870 zu verteidigen. [...] Hinter uns steht das ganze deutsche Volk. (Stürmischer, sich immer wiederholender Beifall und Händeklatschen auf allen Seiten des Hauses und auf den Tribünen). Der Redner wiederholt die letzten Worte indem er mit Emphase auf die Hand zur Sozialdemokratie ausstreckt, das ganze deutsche Volk ... ist einstimmig.⁸⁸

Bethmann's words connecting the 'heritage of a glorious past' the current situation and the 'future' ostensibly trace Ernest Renan's argument that 'To have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have done great things together and to wish to do so again, these are the essential conditions for being a people.'⁸⁹ Different fractions of the *Reichstag* supported the war for different reasons, such as democratic progress amongst the left and territorial expansion amongst the right.⁹⁰ But for some there was also hope that the war would lead to emancipation from the rigid Wilhelmine regime, to an end of the marginalisation of Catholics, Jewish citizens and women.⁹¹ There was an honestly felt belief that the war would unite the nation into a new solidarity, into a 'people's community' (*Volksgemeinschaft*) - these were the 'Ideas of 1914'.⁹² Mobilisation and the widespread enthusiasm, the 'Spirit of 1914' as it became to be known, that was either felt or publicised in the media created a feeling of unity. In those early days of the war, the military seemingly succeeded in uniting the German *Volk* in the war effort. By 1917, however, the military tried to force this unison by ousting the Prime Minister Bethmann-Hollweg and established a quasi-military dictatorship under Ludendorff.⁹³ During the war, Germany put 13 million men - or one in five citizens - in uniform.⁹⁴ The impact of the war was felt by all Germans, either through surviving the horrors of the front, through losing loved ones or through scarcity and hunger. How the developments of the Great War impacted the character of the German nation after World War I is beyond the scope of this essay. It has however become clear that throughout the 'long nineteenth century' the military played a decisive role in building the German nation.

The victory of a united German army against the hereditary foe France concluded a series of military achievements that established a formal unity. It was this victory of 1871 and the history of effort and sacrifice that formed the building blocks with which the new nation invented its traditions: celebrations such as the Sedan-Fest were of ostensibly military character as were other public ceremonies. A continuation of history can also be traced in monuments such as the *Hermannsdenkmal* or the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* that, like national symbols, portrayed a strong militaristic character. The German psyche became infused with military values, rituals and behaviour through the military's omnipresence in public life through the display of uniforms and also in personal experiences during military service. German culture as an interpretation

88 Theobald v. Bethmann-Hollweg, parliamentary speech 4 August 1914, quoted in I.R. Wilhelm and Max Walter 'Das deutsche Volk in Waffen gegen eine Welt von Feinden', *Monatshefte für deutsche Sprache und Pädagogik*, Vol. 15, No. 7, (1914), 230.

89 Renan, *What is a Nation?*, 7.

90 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 469.

91 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 462. Bruendel 'Die Geburt der „Volksgemeinschaft“,' 3.

92 Bruendel 'Die Geburt der „Volksgemeinschaft“,' 4-8.

93 Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany*, 488.

94 *Ibid.*, 466.

of military culture found its justification in military accomplishments in the wars of unification and also the navy became a powerful symbol for the German nation. This also cleared the way for the army to achieve a powerful and independent position in the Reich outside civilian oversight as evidenced by the Zabern and Trotha affairs. With the benefit of hindsight we can trace these fatalistic developments which culminated in the First World War, yet paradoxically, while many Germans hoped for a rebirth of the nation and the overcoming of differences, they hoped for the army to be their saviour once again.
