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Chapter 7

Café Colonels and Whizz Bangs

Tad Tuleja

Most of the songs that are commonly associated with World War I fall into two categories. In one category are the patriotic anthems—often used as recruiting tools—like the British "Let's Put the Kibosh on the Kaiser," the German "Watch on the Rhine," and George M. Cohan's "Over There." In the United States alone, of the nearly 90,000 songs copyrighted during the war years, more than a third fell into this flag-waving category (Vogel 1995 45). In the second category are sentimental ballads like "The Long Long Trail," "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," and the German lounge standard "Lily Marlene." Many of these commercial songs were popular with soldiers. The most comprehensive catalog of songs sung by the British Tommies contains numerous examples of hymns and music hall favorites. Its compiler--a Tommy himself--recalls his mates' best-loved songs being the tear-jerkers "Annie Laurie" and "Home Sweet Home" (Nettlingham 1917).

But the musical tastes of World War I soldiers was not confined to the uplifting and comforting products of professional songsmiths. Running alongside--or one might say underneath--this public musical expression was the private and less salubrious expression of occupational folksong. In this chapter I will look at one small slice of this underground repertoire: English-language songs popular with soldiers that expressed a critical rather than positive attitude toward the war. Even more narrowly, I'll focus on a small but well-known body of songs that depicted soldiers' superiors--sergeants, colonels, generals--as cowardly or inept.

"Far, Far from Wipers"

The most transparent of the negative songs described the many miseries of life at the front. Often these acquired their bite by parodying sentimental favorites from back home. "My Little Wet Home in the Trench," for example, adopted the tune of the music hall ballad "My Little Grey Home in the West," while the darkly humorous "Bombed Last Night" was a take-off on another music-hall number, "Drunk Last Night and Drunk the Night Before." "When Very Lights Are Shining" (Very lights were flares used to illuminate No Man's Land) borrowed the tune of "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling." The lullaby "Hush, Here Comes the Dream Man" evoked the macabre riposte "Hush, Here Comes a Whizz Bang," a whizz-bang being a German

shell. And the well-known hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy" generated a spoof with verses that began "grousing, grousing, grousing," "raining, raining, raining," and "marching, marching, marching."

Close in sentiment to these "grousing at death's door" songs were songs that spoke of home with wistful desperation. One professional example was "I Want to Go Home," written in 1915 by Gitz Rice. It began:

> I want to go home, I want to go home
> I don't want to go in the trenches no more
> Where the whizz-bangs and shrapnel they whistle and roar
> Take me over the sea, where the Alleyman can't get at me
> Oh my, I don't want to die
> I want to go home (Arthur 2008: 72)

Another was a parody of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," which had been adapted during the American Civil War as "When This Lousy War Is Over" and which became, in Tommy's voice, "When This Bloody War Is Over":

> When this bloody war is over
> No more soldiering for me
> When I get my civvie clothes on
> Oh how happy I shall be
> No more church parades on Sunday
> No more putting in for leave
> I shall kiss the Sergeant-Major
> How I'll miss him, how he'll grieve (ibid. 97)

An especially poignant example of this genre was "Far, Far from Wipers I Long to Be," set to the tune of a 1915 ballad called "Sing Me to Sleep." The Belgian town of Ypres, commonly mispronounced as *Yeeprez* or *Wipers*, was the site of one of the war's most terrible campaigns, resulting in hundreds of thousands of casualties. The parody begins with the same line as the original but is quickly highjacked by reality:

> Sing me to sleep where bullets fall
> Let me forget the war and all
> Damp is my dugout, cold are my feet
> Nothing but bully and biscuits to eat
> Over the sandbags helmets you'll find
> Corpses in front and corpses behind

And then the chorus:

Far far from Wipers I long to be
Where German snipers can't get at me
Deep is my dugout, cold are my feet
Waiting for whizz-bangs to send me to sleep (ibid., 70)

Some songs, reflecting a more general cynicism, adopted a tone of humorous self-deprecation. The most popular example was "Fred Karno's Army." Karno was a music-hall performer prone to slapstick and studied incompetence, so to own membership in his army was to suggest the humorous futility of the war effort. The tune was adapted from the hymn "The Church's One Foundation":

We are Fred Karno's army, the ragtime infantry.
We cannot fight, we cannot shoot, what earthly good are we?
And when we get to Berlin, the Kaiser he will say,
Hoch hoch, mein Gott, what a bloody fine lot
Are the ragtime infantry! (Brophy and Partridge 28).

A similar slap at the idea of noble purpose was embedded in the circular lyrics of "We're Here Because We're Here." Sung to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne," this became a grimly sardonic comment on the sense of an ending which, to soldiers on the Western Front, must have seemed a constant invitation.

"If You Want to Know Where the Privates Are"

Cynicism also informed songs that questioned the way the war was being managed by those in command. In these songs--and in occasional verses from songs with other themes--we hear a drumbeat of resentment at the privileges of rank, at injustices endured at the hands of superiors, and at officers and NCOs who are seen as unfair, incompetent, cowardly, or all three.

Not all superiors are tarred with the same brush. In *The Long Trail*, their classic study of World War I song and slang, John Brophy and Eric Partridge observe that the greatest animus was directed toward colonels--"the supreme authority the private soldier knew"--and sergeants, who were "close at hand." "Officers generally escaped satire," they write, "not that the private failed to recognize that they had a much more comfortable time than he, but because they belonged to the excessively privileged class, the barons, so to speak, of the anachronistic feudal system in which the private soldier was serf, scullion and load-carrier" (1972: 19).

The qualification "generally" is well-advised, for there are, even in Brophy and Partridge's own collection, some quite tart examples of anti-officer sentiment. In addition, while they are certainly right that the sergeant is a frequent target of satire, that satire is often couched in terms not of anger or rebelliousness, but rather of a grumbling resignation to the realities of the situation, in which NCOs--sergeants, sergeant-majors, "top kicks"--even as they were seen as the enforcers of discipline, also faced the same muck and shrapnel as their subordinates. When

sergeants are attacked, therefore, it is rarely because they are seen as removed from the private's own world, but rather because, in that world, they are responsible for enforcing its privations, and so come symbolically to embody them.

"Never Mind," for example, was a sentimental tune from 1913 (Murdoch 93). In a popular trench parody, it complains about shelling, gas, and barbed wire, but in the print versions at least it usually begins with a verse about a sergeant's abuse of authority.

> If the sergeant steals your rum, never mind
> If the sergeant steals your rum, never mind
> Though he's just a bloody sot, let him take the lot
> If the sergeant steals your rum, never mind. (Brody & Partridge 49)

Not surprisingly, this song is often indexed under the alternate title "If the Sergeant Steals Your Rum." The habitually inebriated NCO makes his appearance in other songs as well. In one we find him "lying on the canteen floor," in another "mentioned in dispatches for drinking the privates' rum." At one level this is merely slapstick: an evocation of the comic boozer who is a staple of music hall caricature. But given the importance of the rum ration in British military life, there's a serious bite to it as well: An NCO who can be seen, however humorously, as stealing his men's daily allotment of alcohol is being shown as selfishly subverting an ancestral right. There is a gravity to such an offense that humor barely mitigates.

But stealing rum is a minor offense compared to what many of Tommy's tunes see as the sins of the officer class. In a song entitled "Grasshopper" or "Leapfrog," the target is military ambition. It was sung to the tune of "John Brown's Body."

> They were only playing leapfrog
> They were only playing leapfrog
> They were only playing leapfrog
> When one staff officer jumped over another staff officer's back

What's implicit here is that, in their zeal to get ahead, senior staff officers--the brass hats, the red tabs, the swagger sticks--are remote from the carnage and indifferent to the suffering of their men. That conviction animates so many of the songs that it seems to be a central "folk idea" of the soldiers' worldview (Dundes 1971).

Some of the anti-officer songs followed a kind of "chain" structure, with each verse devoted to the purportedly typical experience of a different rank or position. Such songs often (not always) began at the bottom, with the privates, and worked their way up, with appropriate satire, to the general staff. A mild example was an adaptation of the nursery rhyme "Old King Cole," where every private "had a great thirst," every sergeant "a loud voice," every adjutant "a pair of fine spurs," every major "a big swear," and every general "two red tabs" (Nettleingham 1971: 32-35). A more acerbic example was "If You Want to Know Where the Privates Are,"

sometimes known by its chilling final verse “Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire.” Here is the first verse of the variant given by Brophy and Partridge:

> If you want to find the sergeant, I know where he is,
> I know where he is, I know where he is
> If you want to find the sergeant, I know where he is,
> He’s lying on the canteen floor.
>> I’ve seen him, I’ve seen him,
>> Lying on the canteen floor;
>> I’ve seen him, I’ve seen him,
>> Lying on the canteen floor.

In subsequent verses, we hear that the “quarterbloke” is “miles and miles and miles behind the line”; that the sergeant major is “boozing up the private’s rum’: that the CO is “down in the deep dugout”; and that the “old battalion”--that is, the company of common soldiers--is “hanging on the old barbed wire.”

This song was popular with U.S. troops as well as British, and in his wonderful collection *The Songs My Mother Never Taught Me*, folklorist John Jacob Niles, who had served with the American Expeditionary Force, recorded a version in which the privates are “up to their ears in mud,” it’s the Captains who are drinking their rum, and the Generals are “back in gay Paree.” The contrast between officers and men is deftly shown in “Wally” Wallgren’s illustrations for that volume (see Figures 7.1 and 7.2). “There is a lot more truth in this song,” Niles comments, “than one is likely to suspect, official reports of Army Operations to the contrary notwithstanding” (1929: 59).

We also hear anti-officer attacks in the occupational gem that Niles calls “the folk song of the war,” “Mademoiselle from Armentieres.” The structure is well known from its signature verse:

> Mademoiselle from Armentieres, parlez vous
> Mademoiselle from Armentieres, parlez vous
> Mademoiselle from Armentieres,
> Hasn’t been kissed in forty years
> Hinky dinky parlez vous

This particular song--evidently more popular with doughboys than with the British--elicited dozens, perhaps hundreds, of verses, in many of which the name of a French location (like Armentieres) anticipates a clever, not infrequently bawdy, rhyme. “Mademoiselle from Villet le Duc,” for example, sets up an obvious profanity, while ‘Mademoiselle from St. Nazaire” leads to the less obvious “Couche avec moi pour pomme de terre?”

A sub-theme to this erotic play complicates the picture. Liaisons between soldiers and French women occurred, for the most part, far behind the front lines, that is, in areas secure from whizz bangs. These were areas that the trench soldier was sometimes allowed to visit. But they were also areas, precisely because they were safe, that acquired in the soldiers' worldview a mixed reputation. "Gay Paree" in particular took on an aura of undeserved pleasure, of ill-gotten release from the common travail. Those who frequented such places--those temporarily relieved from the horrors of battle--may have been envied, but they were also, to judge from the songs, seen as shirkers who could not stick it out at the front. In several "Hinky Dinky" verses, we hear reference to characters who, while Bert the Tommy or Johnny the Doughboy is repairing parapets and dodging mortars, is sampling wine and women out of harm's way. I will call this archetypal shirker the Café Colonel. He is an early prototype of the character that American soldiers today call the "REMF," or "rear echelon mother-fucker" (see Levy 2012).

The image of those who pass down orders but do no fighting themselves is a frequent leitmotif in the "Hinky Dinky" corpus. Sometimes these officers--known by their distinctive headgear--are condemned en masse:

> The brass hats have a hell of a time
> Twenty miles behind the line

Other verses single out individuals, or at least individual ranks, beginning with the officer closest to the men:

> The Captain's gone to gay Paree
> We know he's on an awful spree

Occasionally the target is the military police who, by virtue of their authority, may be seen as surrogates for unfair officers:

> The damned MPs behind the line
> Screwing the women and drinking the wine

Still other verses snap at the highest and most remote of superiors, the generals:

> The General made a front-line tour
> 'Twas after the armistice, to be sure

Occasionally the boulevardiers and café colonels get their comeuppance, as the high-life in gay Paree delivers poetic justice in the form of venereal disease:

> Oh the Sergeant went to gay Paree

And came back with crabs and gonorrhee

The General slept with Mademoiselle
And now he's giving the doctor hell

Finally, in a verse that combines suspicion of French women with resentment at the privileges of rank, we see an officer who "falls" not in battle but in amorous and presumably contagious contact.

X marks the spot where our Captain fell
He tried to out-hug the Mademoiselle

All of this seems direct enough, but also a bit velvet-gloved. For a more venomous take on superiors, we may turn to a song that Niles says "explains itself--and how!" "What Do the Colonels and Generals Do" condemns those in authority for keeping their own hands clean--and their persons safe--while men in the line performed on their behalf a "dirty little job for Jesus." The song opens with a broad, nationalist perspective:

Colonel said that Kaiser William surely was a pest
Dirty little job for Jesus
Said I ought to lay the Kaiser's hips to rest
Dirty little job for Jesus
Oh what do the Generals and Colonels do
I'll tell you, I'll tell you
Figger out just how the privates ought to do
The dirty little job for Jesus

"I'll tell you, I'll tell you" echoes the more widely known "If You Want to Know Where the Privates Are," and as in that song there's a stated divide between those who direct the war and those who fight it. The refrain "dirty little job for Jesus," however, introduces a poignant complication, as the work of the warrior is identified both as morally problematic ("dirty") and as morally permissible--the privates are killing other privates in Jesus's name.

The Great War was widely endorsed as a spiritual enterprise, but I don't see the ambiguity of this verse as especially theological, or even conventionally Christian. The tone suggests either an outrage against hypocrisy or (which I think is more likely) a decent person's confusion about performing a service which he knows from experience to be heart-rendingly brutal but which those on high--whether speaking from a headquarters or a pulpit--have told him is laudable. The song's second verse suggests that, faced with this dilemma, the soldier wants to flee, indeed, that he imagines his escape:

Now when I run away they said I was afraid to die
Dirty little job for Jesus
I said the only reason why I ran was 'cause I couldn't fly
Dirty little job for Jesus

Here in fantasy the soldier evades both the brutality of the war and his own conflicted complicity, as the officers, in the refrain, continue their work of "figgering out" how the privates can continue to fight.

And of course to die. The song's final verse reflects somberly on this reality, condemning not only religious support for the war but also its supposed democratic impulse--and, once again, the different levels of investment and of sacrifice that the war is exacting from officers and from men.

Fifty thousand privates died for democracy
Dirty little job for Jesus
Twenty major generals got the DSC
Another dirty little job for Jesus

The DSC was the Distinguished Service Cross, a medal established by President Wilson in 1918 to honor conspicuous bravery in battle. It was awarded to slightly more than 6000 Americans who served in World War I, most of them U.S. Army. In suggesting that the DSC was a "brass hat" commendation, the verse echoes a trope that appears frequently in these songs: the idea that the senior officers were given undue credit--in the form of medals such as the DSC and the French Croix de Guerre--for the sacrifices that were made by their men. We encounter the characterization, for example, in two verses of "Mademoiselle from Armentieres" (Cary 1934: 371):

The General won the Croix de Guerre
But the son of a bitch wasn't even there

Oh, the CO wants a Croix de Guerre
For sitting around in an office chair.

It appears also in the final verse of "Oh, It's Drive the General's Car, My Boy," where the "back area tin hat generals" (Niles) spend most of their time posturing in a Paris café:

Oh, they hang around the Crillon and 'tis there they do their stuff
Then click their heels together and they spread a mighty bluff
But they've never seen the trenches nor the bloody enemy
But they'll get more credit for the war than either you or me (Niles 112)

Class Distinctions

If we were to judge troop morale simply on the basis of the "café colonel" repertoire, we might conclude that, on the whole, the British soldier in World War I harbored fierce resentment at his superiors and felt himself a victim of their abuse and neglect. That was certainly my sense of things when I first heard these songs. They seemed obviously driven by class antagonism--the sardonic and righteous anger of working-class blokes who obeyed their superiors under duress and saw their brass hat commanders as feckless martinets.

That there were class distinctions at play in the trenches is beyond dispute. British officers as a rule had a public-school (that is, what we would call a private-school) education, and while there they absorbed, as a matter of course, a sense of entitlement. Infantry Captain Graham Greenwell, reflecting on his upward trajectory as a public-school boy--first fag, then house prefect, finally school prefect—believed that this experience had fitted him for command. "I think it was Mrs. Sydney Webb," he mused, "who said, 'There are people in England who are born to give orders and there are people who are born to take them.' It's true, isn't it?" (Arthur 2002: 148). It was a rumination typical of that social class from which, in Lord Kitchener's "New Army," the higher ranks were drawn.

And rank had its privileges. Some, like higher pay and better lodgings, were the presumably "pragmatic" perks one expects in a hierarchy. Montague Cleeve, a lieutenant with the Royal Garrison Artillery, invited to dinner by a brigadier commander, recalled the event with a mixture of awe and shame:

> There was a terrible din from the machine-guns and shells bursting all around us, but he insisted on having an old-fashioned mess dinner at 7 o'clock promptly. And we sat at a large table in his dugout, and the wine was brought round in decanters. This was a bit of a contrast to trench life (Arthur 2002: 136).

Similarly, at a time when privates' diet consisted of bully beef, Lieutenant Edwin Vaughan's diary describes one officers' dinner in which "we sent up several of our servants to assist. .. and the champagne flowed very freely" (108) and another which consisted of seven courses but which--alas!--lacked mayonnaise (111).

Other class markers were symbolic and petty. Paul Fussell makes much of these in discussing the "wide, indeed gaping distinction between officers and men."

> In London an officer was forbidden to carry a parcel or ride a bus, and even in mufti--dark suit, white collar, bowler, stick--he looked identifiably different from the men. When a ten-minute break was signaled on the march officers invariably fell out to the left side of the road, Other Ranks to the right (1977: 82).

Inane as this particular form of segregation may seem, some high-ranking officers saw it as critical to discipline. When Vaughan's platoon, halted in a narrow defile, falls out on both sides of the road, he is upbraided and reported to his CO by an outraged brigadier (1988: 111).

The few consolations of life in the trenches were also demarcated by rank. The traditional rum ration of the Royal Navy, for example, was part of the daily allotment for men on the line, while their officers had access to--and the means to acquire--such tonier drinks as whiskey and brandy. Whiskey became such a comfort for Second Lieutenant Edwin Vaughan that his family feared the war had made him an alcoholic (Cowley 1981: xvi). Access to another soldiers' comfort--prostitution--was also segregated. While French brothels in general may have been open to all with the requisite *sou*, the officially sanctioned ones were identified as Blue Lights for officers and Red Lights for "other ranks" (Fussell 1977: 270).

Siegfried Sassoon mentions an additional privilege of rank which must have been seen as particularly galling. If an officer succumbed to "funk," if he "crumpled up" under the pressures of the war, Sassoon's superior simply "sent him home as useless, with a confidential report." "But if a man became a dud in the ranks, he just remained where he was until he was killed or wounded. Delicate discrimination about private soldiers wasn't possible" (44). Sassoon writes this disapprovingly, and yet it is this very unwritten policy of coddling officers over their men that removed him from harm's way later in the war, as his eloquent condemnation of the war got him sent to a military hospital, where he was treated for shell shock.

Stubborn Facts

There's no question, then, that the socioeconomic rigidity of Edwardian England carried over into the trenches. It might seem to follow that the disdain for authority that one hears in the songs reflected class resentment at patrician privilege. This reading seemed obvious to me when I first heard the "café colonel" songs. It took some deeper listening, and some parallel reading, to realize that, seduced by my own social bias, I had been reading the Great War through the same lens that Richard Attenborough and his colleagues brought to their 1967 antiwar farce *Oh What a Lovely War*. This film used some of the same songs I've mentioned to condemn militarism (at the height of the Vietnam War) and the British class system of which Attenborough himself was a product. But this class-based, quasi-Marxist reading leaves some stubborn facts unexplained.

Facts, for example, like the actual social relations on the Western front. To judge from the normative trench ballad, privates did the war's dirty work and were sacrificed in droves; sergeants stole their rum; COs hid out in fortified bunkers; and senior officers--the café colonels and tin-hat generals--lounged in bistros and brothels far from the action until they were given the rewards--DSCs, for example--that should have been given to the soldiers. But is that vivid picture a picture of reality?

To answer that question systematically, we would have to compare the picture suggested by the "café colonel" repertoire with other contemporary evidence such as memoirs, trench newspapers, letters, and other songs, that is, sources in which officers appear as competent or courageous. To test the specific conceit that officers both avoided battle and were

disproportionately rewarded for their service, we could turn to regimental casualty lists and see what percentage of each rank was killed or wounded and what percentage received a DSC or similar commendation. I must leave to more patient souls the number-crunching that such research would require, and provide here merely a general impression based on the writings of British soldier "informants" such as Sassoon and Vaughan.

The consensus of these sources is that the antagonism suggested by the "café colonel" songs was more a rhetorical caricature than a snapshot of reality, and that with regard to the hazards of battle in particular, officers suffered at least as much as the men. In fact, Cambridge historian J.M. Winter, noting the preponderance of middle class men among British enlistees, argues that especially at the outset, "officer casualty rates were significantly higher than casualty rates among the men in the ranks," perhaps twice as high (Winter 1989: 121, 147). In terms of gross numbers, of course, the men paid far greater prices; but as they outnumbered the brass by many orders of magnitude, that is to be expected. I do not have data from these sources about the distribution of medals.

Another type of fact to investigate is the degree to which the songs, whether "accurate" or not, expressed soldiers' dominant attitudes toward their commands. Here again comparative analysis of vernacular sources is in order--and those sources provide mixed evidence. Winter, for example, notes in a trench newspaper a humorous definition of a "dud" as an officer who "draws a big salary and explodes for no reason. These are plentiful away from the fighting areas" (137); but he also points to evidence that "many privates felt a bond of shared experience with officers with whom they served in the trenches, and whom they followed whatever the dangers" (147).

Max Arthur's collection of the war's "forgotten voices" reveals that this sense of comradeship could be reciprocal; a lieutenant offered a post at Brigade Headquarters recalls, "It was very tempting but I didn't want to go. There was something about the relationship with the men that one didn't want to break. One would somehow have felt rather a traitor to them, so I refused it and stayed with them" (Arthur 2008: 200; cf. Vaughan 1988, 53, 196). You hear the same sense of military noblesse oblige throughout Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* and in his famous "Declaration," condemning the war not as a conscientious objector but as "a soldier who believes he is acting on behalf of soldiers" (1930, 288). Sassoon stands out because of his later celebrity, but he was certainly not alone in feeling fellowship with his men.

Indeed, many British soldiers seemed to have regarded at least some of their superiors—Sassoon again is a notable example—with respect, admiration, even in some cases a kind of worshipful awe. We actually do get this picture from certain "lost voices of the Great War." (Arthur 2002). If you look for evidence of relationships between men and officers, you find a great variety, and one that tends generally towards a recognition of common struggle, common humanity. For every instance of a soldier disgusted by the privileges of rank, there's an instance of genuine admiration. It's only by selective viewing of the evidence that you can find the class animosity that I originally suspected was universal.

Further complicating the picture, we have some quite puzzling facts about Tommy's behavior--specifically, about his readiness to follow the orders of those allegedly despised

superiors. We know, for example, that in the four terrible years between the guns of August and the 1918 Armistice, there is no record of a single British mutiny, as there were in other armies (Winter 1989, 158-159). In addition, the rates of court martial for desertion or cowardice are bewilderingly low: In the entire conflict, barely 3000 British soldiers were tried for these crimes, and only 346 of them were executed. Niall Ferguson notes correctly that this was a "minute percentage" of the total enlistment: 5.7 million (1999: 346-347).

And finally, there is the gruesome evidence of many battles in which, on command, soldiers walked steadily into no man's land to the sound of German machine guns scything their ranks. On dawn on the first day of the Somme offensive, for example, the advancing British infantry numbered 100,000. By nightfall one in five of them were gone--and similar losses mounted on the Somme for the next four months (Keegan 1999: 299). Scott Fitzgerald, in speaking of that offensive, writes, "The land here cost twenty lives a foot that summer" (1934). It sounds like poetic hyperbole, but if you do the math, you find he was eerily precise. I suggest that this kind of disciplined dedication to mission, this suicidal willingness to follow the plans of tin hat generals, is not the product of a force that despises its commanders.

Embracing Victimization

And yet the songs are there. Given the more nuanced battlefield picture I've laid out here, how do we explain that? If resentment at command was not, as the songs suggest, a universal attitude, how do we explain the popularity of a song cycle that so pungently celebrates it? In short, why did World War I soldiers sing these songs?

Given their literal content, that is, their texts, it seems natural to consider them as laments or cries of outrage: These would be the logical responses of injured parties to situations that they see as victimizing them. Given the absence of overt resistance to that victimization, though, this "direct" reading of the evidence becomes problematic. What might resolve the contradiction between the resentment expressed in the songs and the dutifully "soldierly" behavior of their singers?

While acknowledging the obvious--that the songs are narratives about victimization--we might begin by considering what we mean by that term. In everyday parlance, to be a victim is to have an undesirable identity--what Erving Goffman (1986) called a "stigmatized"--identity. But, as I have suggested elsewhere (Tuleja 2012), victimhood can also have psychological value. It can reduce complex events to neat, linear scenarios of right versus wrong, where the messy collusion of social interaction becomes a simple collision of Us versus Them.

In World War I, millions of young men who in August 1914 had been turning a lathe or driving a cab found themselves only months later in the midst of a nightmare unlike any the world had seen before. By January 1915, the high hopes for a rapid end to the conflict had been laid to rest in the scarlet banks of the Marne, and an entire generation of optimistic Edwardians entered what would become four years of whizz bangs, shrapnel, mutilated bodies, mustard gas, and shell shock. I want to suggest that, in this environment, when soldiers sang about their victimization, they may have been doing so in a spirit not of complaint but of ironic celebration.

Singing about whizz bangs and café colonels was a way of taking collective ownership of their powerless status--and thus of making their very victimization a badge of honor.

In his study of Jody calls--the cadence chants first used in the U. S. Army during World War II--Rick Burns (2012) notes that the adulterous "Jody" antihero of the chants allowed soldiers not simply to vent their frustrations at this back-door victimizer but also to acknowledge their own complicity in his assault on fidelity. I wonder if the victimizers in these World War I songs served a similar function for the soldiers who sang them.

In ridiculing the boozing sergeant, the craven captain, and the whoring general, might the beleaguered privates not be simultaneously relishing their own victimhood and acknowledging that, if given the opportunity, they would be just as quick as their superiors to become the victimizers? Might not the subtext of these "complaint" songs be that, brass hats or no, we're all in this together, and bound for hell. And might not the only way to confront that existential monstrosity be to celebrate it in a voice of exuberant fatalism? In this sense the songs, as Brophy and Partridge put it, "poked fun at the soldier's own desire for peace and rest, and so prevented it from overwhelming his will to go on doing his duty. They were not symptoms of defeatism, but strong bulwarks against it" (1972: 18).

Of course we don't know what these songs sounded like as they came from Tommy's throat, and perhaps "celebration" goes too far. But listen again to Sassoon, who commanded an infantry platoon through the hell of the Somme. On the way to that nightmare, he reflects on what he sees as a disjunction between the horrors his men have already seen and their seemingly placid demeanor on a reprieve between battles.

> It was queer how the men seemed to take their victimization for granted. In and out; in and out; singing and whistling, the column swayed in front of me, much the same length as usual, for we'd had less than a hundred casualties up at Bazentin. But it was a case of every man for himself, and the corporate effect was optimistic and untroubled (1930: 120).

"Less than a hundred casualties." "Optimistic and untroubled." How does one reconcile those two phrases? How does one explain why soldiers should be singing and whistling *anything* as they trudge toward an encounter with machine guns where "a tragic slaughter was inevitable" (71)? "Therapy" and "celebration" may point us toward an answer, although not one that coordinates easily with resentment of officers. The answer itself, perhaps, will remain as elusive for us as it was on that awful day in 1915 when 19,000 singing Tommies met their deaths on the Somme.

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