RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

The Second World War

John Keegan

Contents

About the Author

John Keegan was for many years Senior Lecturer in Military History at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, and is now Defence Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*. He is the author of many books, including *The Face of Battle, The Mask of Command, Six Armies in Normandy, The Battle for History, Battle at Sea* and *A History of Warfare*, which was awarded the Duff Cooper Prize. *The Second World War* is his sixth book to be published by Pimlico.

John Keegan is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and received the OBE in the Gulf War Honours List.

The Second World War

John Keegan

PIMLICO

FOREWORD

The Second World War is the largest single event in human history, fought across six of the world's seven continents and all its oceans. It killed fifty million human beings, left hundreds of millions of others wounded in mind or body and materially devastated much of the heartland of civilisation.

No attempt to relate its causes, course and consequences in the space of a single volume can fully succeed. Rather than narrate it as a continuous sequence of events, therefore, I decided from the outset to divide the story of the war into four topics – narrative, strategic analysis, battle piece and 'theme of war' – and to use these four topics to carry forward the history of the six main sections into which the war falls: the War in the West, 1939-43; the War in the East, 1941-3; the War in the Pacific, 1941-3; the War in the West, 1943-5; the War in the East, 1943-5; and the War in the Pacific, 1943-5. Each section is introduced by a piece of strategic analysis, centring on the figure to whom the initiative most closely belonged at that time – in order, Hitler, Tojo, Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt – and then contains, besides the appropriate passages of narrative, both a relevant 'theme of war' and a battle piece. Each of the battle pieces has been chosen to illustrate the nature of a particular form of warfare characteristic of the conflict. They are air warfare (the Battle of Britain), airborne warfare (the Battle of Crete), carrier warfare (Midway), armoured warfare (Falaise), city warfare (Berlin) and amphibious warfare (Okinawa). The 'themes of war' include war supply, war production, occupation and repression, strategic bombing, resistance and espionage, and secret weapons.

It is my hope that this scheme of treatment imposes a little order for the reader on the chaos and tragedy of the events I relate.

PROLOGUE

ONE

Every Man a Soldier

The First [World] War explains the second and, in fact, caused it, in so far as one event causes another,' wrote A. J. P. Taylor in his *Origins of the Second World War*. 'The link between the two wars went deeper. Germany fought specifically in the Second War to reverse the verdict of the first and to destroy the settlement that followed it.'

Not even those who most vehemently oppose Mr Taylor's version of inter-war history will take great issue with those judgements. The Second World War, in its origin, nature and course, is inexplicable except by reference to the First; and Germany – which, whether or not it is to be blamed for the outbreak, certainly struck the first blow – undoubtedly went to war in 1939 to recover the place in the world it had lost by its defeat in 1918.

However, to connect the Second World War with the First is not, if the former is accepted as the cause of the latter, to explain either of them. Their common roots must be sought in the years preceding 1914, and that search has harnessed the energies of scholars for much of this century. Whether they looked for causes in immediate or less proximate events, their conclusions have had little in common. Historians of the winning side have on the whole chosen to blame Germany, in particular Germany's ambition for world power, for the outbreak of 1914 and hence to blame Germany again – whatever failing attaches to the appeasing

powers – for that of 1939. Until the appearance of Fritz Fischer's heretical revision of the national version in 1967, German historians generally sought to rebut the imputation of 'war guilt' by distributing it elsewhere. Marxist historians, of whatever nationality, have overflown the debate, depicting the First World War as a 'crisis of capitalism' in its imperialist form, by which the European working classes were sacrificed on the altar of competition between decaying capitalist systems; they are consistent in ascribing the outbreak of the Second World War to the Western democracies' preference for gambling on Hitler's reluctance to cross the brink rather than accept Soviet help to ensure that he did not.

These views are irreconcilable. At best they exemplify the judgement that 'history is the projection of ideology into the past'. There can indeed be no common explanation of why the world twice bound itself to the wheel of mass war-making as long as historians disagree about the logic and morality of politics and whether the first is the same as the second.

A more fruitful, though less well-trodden, approach to the issue of causes lies along another route: that which addresses the question of *how* the two World Wars were made *possible* rather than why they came about. For the instances of outbreak are themselves overridingly important in neither case. It was the enormity of the events which flowed from the upheavals of August 1914 and September 1939 that has driven historians to search so long for reasons to explain them. No similar impetus motivates the search for the causes of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 or the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, critical as those conflicts were in altering the balance of power in nineteenth-century Europe. Moreover, it is safe to say that had Germany won the critical opening battle of the First World War, that of the Marne in September 1914, as she might well have done – thereby sparing Europe not only the agony of the trenches but all

the ensuing social, economic and diplomatic embitterment – the libraries devoted to the international relations of Germany, France, Britain, Austria-Hungary and Russia before 1914 would never have been written.

However, because it was not Germany but France, with British help, who won the Marne, the First – and so the Second – World War became different from all wars previously fought, different in scale, intensity, extensiveness and material and human cost. They also came, by the same measure, closely to resemble each other. It is those differences and those similarities which invest the subject of their causation with such apparent importance. But that is to confuse accident with substance. The causes of the World Wars lay no deeper and were no more or less complex than the causes of any other pair of conjoined and closely sequential conflicts. Their nature, on the other hand, was without precedent. The World Wars killed more people, consumed more wealth and inflicted more suffering over a wider area of the globe than any previous war. Mankind had grown no more wicked between 1815, the terminal date of the last great bout of hostilities between nations, and 1914; and certainly no sane and adult European alive in the latter year would have wished, could he have foreseen it, the destruction and misery that the crisis of that August was to set in train. Had it been foretold that the consequent war was to last four years, entail the death of 10 million young men, and carry fire and sword to battlefields as far apart as Belgium, northern Italy, Macedonia, the Ukraine, Transcaucasia, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Africa and China; and that a subsequent war, fought twenty years later by the same combatants over exactly the same battlefields and others besides, was to bring the death of 50 million people, every individual and collective impulse to aggression, it might be thought, would have been stilled in that instant.

That thought speaks well for human nature. It also speaks against the way the world had gone between 1815 and

1914. A sane and adult European alive in the latter year might have deplored with every fibre of his civilised being the prospect foretold to him of the holocausts that were to come. To do so, however, he would have had to deny the policy, ethos and ultimately the human and material nature of the state – whichever state that was – to which he belonged. He would even have had to deny the condition of the world which surrounded him. For the truth of twentieth-century European civilisation was that the world it dominated was pregnant with war. The enormous wealth, energy and population increase released by Europe's industrial revolution in the nineteenth century had transformed the world. It had created productive and exploitative industries – foundries, engineering works, textile factories, shipyards, mines – larger by far than any at which the intellectual fathers of the industrial revolution, the economic rationalists of the eighteenth century, had guessed. It had linked the productive regions of the world with a network of communications – roads, railways, shipping lanes, telegraph and telephone cables – denser than even the most prescient enthusiast of science and technology could have foreseen. It had generated the riches to increase tenfold the population of historic cities and to plant farmers and graziers on millions of acres which had never felt the bite of the plough or the herdsman's tread. It had built the infrastructure – schools, universities, libraries, laboratories, churches, missions – of a vibrant, creative and optimistic world civilisation. Above all, and in dramatic and menacing counterpoint to the century's works of hope and promise, it had created *armies*, the largest and potentially most destructive instruments of war the world had ever seen.

The militarisation of Europe

The extent of Europe's militarisation in the nineteenth century is difficult to convey by any means that catch its

psychological and technological dimensions as well as its scale. Scale itself is elusive enough. Something of its magnitude may be transmitted by contrasting the sight Friedrich Engels had of the military organisation of the independent North German city-states in which he served his commercial apprenticeship in the 1830s with the force which the same German military districts supplied to the Kaiser of the unified German Reich on the eve of the First World War. Engels's testimony is significant. A father of Marxist theory, he never diverged from the view that the revolution would triumph only if the proletariat succeeded in defeating the armed forces of the state. As a young revolutionary he pinned his hopes of that victory on the proletariat winning the battle of the barricades; as an old and increasingly dispirited ideologue, he sought to persuade himself that the proletariat, by then the captive of Europe's conscription laws, would liberate itself by subverting the states' armies from within. His passage from the hopes of youth to the doubts of old age can best be charted by following the transformation of the Hanseatic towns' troops during his lifetime. In August 1840 he rode for three hours from his office in Bremen to watch the combined manoeuvres of the armies of Bremen, Hamburg, Lübeck free city and the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. Together they formed a force a regiment – say, to err on the side of generosity, 3000 – men strong. In the year of his death in 1895 the same cities provided most of the 17th and part of the 19th Divisions of the German Army, together with a cavalry and artillery regiment – at least a fourfold increase. That accounts for only first-line troops, conscripts enrolled and under arms. Behind the active 17th and 19th Divisions stood the 17th and 19th Reserve Divisions to which the Hanseatic cities would contribute an equal number of reservists – trained former conscripts – on mobilisation. And behind the reserve divisions stood the *Landwehr* of older ex-conscripts who in 1914 would provide half of another

division again. Taken together, these units represent a tenfold increase in strength between 1840 and 1895, far outstripping contemporary population growth.

This enormous multiplication of force was nevertheless in the first instance a function of demographic change. The population of most states destined to fight the First World War doubled and in some cases tripled during the nineteenth century. Thus the population of Germany, within the boundaries of 1871, increased from 24 million in 1800 to 57 million in 1900. The British population increased from 16 million in 1800 to 42 million in 1900; but for the Irish famine and emigration to the United States and the colonies, producing a net outflow of about 8 million, it would have tripled. The population of Austria-Hungary, allowing for frontier changes, increased from 24 million to 46 million; of Italy, within the 1870 frontiers, from 19 million to 29 million, despite a net outflow of perhaps 6 million emigrants to North and South America. Belgium's population grew from 2.5 to 7 million; that of European Russia between the Urals and the western frontier of 1941 nearly tripled, from 36 to 100 million. Only two of the combatant states, France and the Ottoman empire, failed to show similar increases. The French population, once the largest in Europe, rose only from 30 to 40 million and chiefly through extended longevity; the birthrate remained almost static – the result, in Professor William McNeill's view, of Napoleon's returning warriors bringing home techniques of birth control learned on campaign. The population of Turkey within its present frontiers scarcely increased at all; it was 24 million in 1800 and 25 million in 1900.

The French and Turkish cases, though falling outside the demographic pattern, are nevertheless significant in explaining it. The increased longevity of the French was due to improved standards of living and public health, the outcome of the application of science to agriculture, medicine and hygiene. The failure of the Turkish population

to increase had an exactly contrary explanation: the poor yields of traditional farming and incidence of disease in a society without doctors ensured that population, despite high birth-rates, remained at a static level. Whenever increased agricultural output (or input) combined with high birth-rates and improved hygiene, as they did almost everywhere in Europe in the nineteenth century, the effect on population size was dramatic. In England, the centre of the nineteenth-century economic miracle, it was spectacular. Despite a massive emigration of the population from the countryside to the towns, overcrowded and often jerry-built, the number of the English increased by 100 per cent in the first half and by 75 per cent in the second half of the century. Sewer-building, which ensured the elimination of cholera from 1866 and of most other water-borne diseases soon after, and vaccination, which when it was made compulsory in 1853 eliminated smallpox, sharply reduced infant mortality and lengthened the life expectancy of the adult population; death from infectious disease declined by nearly 60 per cent between 1872 and 1900. Improved agricultural yields from fertilised and fallowed fields, and, in particular, the import of North American grain and refrigerated Australasian meat, produced larger, stronger and healthier people. Their intake of calories was increased by the cheapening of luxuries such as tea, coffee and especially sugar, which made grain staples more palatable and diet more varied.

The combined effect of these medical and dietary advances on growing populations was not only to increase the size of the contingents of young men liable each year for conscription (*classes*, as the French labelled them) – by an average of 50 per cent, for example, in France between 1801 and 1900 – but to make them better suited, decade on decade, for military service. There is an apparently irreducible military need for a marching soldier to bear on his body about 50 lb of extraneous weight – pack, rifle and

ammunition. The larger and stronger the soldier, the more readily can he carry such a load the desirable marching norm of twenty miles a day. In the eighteenth century the French army had typically found its source of such fit men among the town-dwelling artisan class rather than the peasantry. The peasant, physically undernourished and socially doltish, rarely made a suitable soldier; he was undisciplined, prone to disease and liable to pine to death when plucked from his native heath. It was these shortcomings which prompted Marx a hundred years later to dismiss the peasantry as ‘irredeemable’ for revolutionary purposes. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the peasant populations of Germany, France, Austria-Hungary and Russia had so much improved in physique that they were regularly supplying to their national armies a proportion of new conscripts or *classes* large enough to give Marx the lie. His analysis may have been skewed by his standpoint in England, where large-scale emigration to the towns left only the least enterprising under the thumb of squire and parson. In the continental lands, which were industrialising more slowly than England – the German rural population in 1900 was still 49 per cent of the total – it was the countryside which yielded the *classes* of large, strong young men out of which the great nineteenth-century armies were built.

If the new population surplus yielded by better diet, drugs and drains increased the European armies’ recruiting pool, it was the nineteenth-century states’ enhanced powers of head-counting and tax-gathering which ensured that recruits could be found, fed, paid, housed, equipped and transported to war. The institution of regular census-taking – in France in 1801, Belgium in 1829, Germany in 1853, Austria-Hungary in 1857, Italy in 1861 – accorded recruiting authorities the data they needed to identify and docket potential recruits; with it died the traditional expedients of haphazard impressment, cajolery, bribery and press-

ganging which had raised the *ancien régime* armies from those not fleet enough of thought or foot to escape the recruiting sergeant. Tax lists, electoral registers and school rolls documented the conscript's whereabouts – the grant of the vote and the introduction of free education for all entailed a limitation as well as an enlargement of the individual's liberties. By 1900 every German reservist, for example, was obliged to possess a discharge paper specifying the centre at which he was to report when mobilisation was decreed.

The enormous enlargement of European economies was meanwhile creating the tax base by which the new armies of conscripted recruits were supported; the German economy, for example, expanded by a quarter between 1851 and 1855, by a half between 1855 and 1875 and by 70 per cent between 1875 and 1914. From this new wealth the state drew, via indirect and direct revenue, including the resented institution of income tax, an ever-increasing share of the gross domestic product. In Britain, for example, the government's share of consumption rose from 4.8 per cent in 1860-79 to 7.4 per cent in 1900-14 and in Germany from 4 per cent to 7.1 per cent; rises were proportionate in France and Austria-Hungary.

Most of this increased revenue went to buy military equipment – in the broadest sense. Guns and warships represented the costliest outlay; barracks the more significant. The *ancien régime* soldier had been lodged wherever the state could find room for him, in taverns, barns or private houses. The nineteenth-century conscript was housed in purpose-built accommodation. Walled barracks were an important instrument of social control; Engels denounced them as 'bastions against the populace'. The sixteenth-century Florentines similarly regarded the building of the Fortezza de Basso inside the gates of their city as a symbol of the curtailment of their liberties. Barracks were certainly a principal means of guaranteeing

that ready availability of force by which the Berlin revolt of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871 were put down.[fn1] However, barracks were not only the precinct-stations of the contemporary riot police. They were also the fraternity houses of a new military culture in which conscripts learnt habits of obedience and forged bonds of comradeship which would harden them against a battlefield ordeal more harrowing than any which soldiers had known before.

The new-found wealth of the nineteenth-century state enabled the conscript not only to be housed and equipped but also to be transported to the battlefield and fed amply when he arrived. The soldier of the *ancien régime* had been scarcely better supplied than the Roman legionary; flour ground in the regimental hand-mills, supplemented by a little beef driven on the hoof, was his staple. The nineteenth-century conscript was fed in the field on preserved food; margarine and canning were both the products of a competition founded by Napoleon III to invent rations that would not rot in the soldier's pack. However, the necessity for him to carry his own supply of rations was in any case sharply diminished by the subordination of the burgeoning railway system to military uses. Troops were transported by rail as early as 1839 in Germany. By 1859, when France fought Austria in northern Italy, deployment by rail seemed commonplace. In 1866 and 1870 it underlay Prussia's victories against Austria and France. In the latter year the German rail network, only 469 kilometres in 1840, had increased to 17,215; by 1914 it would total 61,749 kilometres, the greater part of it (56,000 kilometres) under state management. The German government, heavily prompted by the Great General Staff, had early grasped the importance for defensive – and offensive – purposes of controlling the railway system; much of it, particularly in such sectors of low commercial use as Bavaria and East Prussia, had been financed by state-raised loans and laid out at the direction of the General Staff's railway section.[fn2]

Railways supplied and transported the soldier of the steam age (at least as far as the railhead; beyond, the old marching and portering imperatives persisted). The technology that built the railways also furnished the weapons with which the soldiers of the new mass armies would inflict mass casualties on each other. The development of such weapons was not deliberate, at least not at the outset; later it may have been. Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the first successful machine-gun, is alleged to have given up experiments in electrical engineering in 1883 on the advice of a fellow American, who said: ‘Hang your electricity! If you want to make your fortune, invent something which will allow those fool Europeans to kill each other more quickly.’ Initially, however, the reason for the appearance of the faster-firing, longer-range and more accurate weapons that equipped the conscript armies between 1850 and 1900 was the particular conjunction of human ingenuity and industrial capability which made their production feasible.

Four factors were significant. The first was the spread of steam power, which supplied the energy to manufacture weapons by industrial process. The second was the development of the appropriate process itself, originally called ‘American’ by reason of its origin in the 1820s in the factories of the Connecticut Valley, which were chronically short of skilled labour. This industrial process resulted in ‘interchangeable parts’, machined by a refinement of the ancient pantographic principle, and achieved an enormous surge of output. The Prussian manufacturer, Dreyse, inventor of the revolutionary ‘needle-gun’ (in which a bolt-operated firing-pin struck a metal-jacketed cartridge), managed to turn out only 10,000 units a year by traditional methods in 1847, despite holding a firm contract from the Prussian government to re-equip its whole army. By 1863, in contrast, the British Enfield armoury, rejigged with automatic milling machines, turned out 100,370 rifles, and

in 1866 the French government re-equipped the armoury at Puteaux with ‘interchangeable parts’ machinery capable of producing 300,000 of the new Chassepot rifles each year.

Advances in metal engineering would have been pointless without improvements in the quality of the metal to be worked; that was assured by the development of processes for smelting steel in quantity – notably by the British engineer Bessemer after 1857 (he also was encouraged by a prize offered by Napoleon III). Bessemer’s ‘converter’ marked the third significant advance. With similar furnaces, the German cannon-founder, Alfred Krupp, began in the 1860s to cast steel billets from which perfect cannon-barrels could be machined. His breech-loading field-guns, equivalents on a larger scale of the rifles with which all contemporary infantrymen in advanced armies were now issued, proved the decisive weapons of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1. The fourth ingredient of the firepower revolution was supplied shortly afterwards by European chemists, notably the Swede Alfred Nobel, who developed propellants and bursting-charges which drove projectiles to a greater distance and detonated them with more explosive effect than ever before. The effective range of infantry weapons, for example – a function equally of engineering and propellant developments – increased from a hundred to a thousand yards between 1850 and 1900. When the recuperation of chemical-energy discharges was applied to the mechanism of small arms and artillery in the period 1880-1900, it produced the machine-gun and the quick-firing artillery piece, the ultimate instruments of mass death-dealing at distance.

Surplus and war-making capacity

Long-range, rapid-fire weapons constituted the threat by which all the increments of offensive force assembled by the industrial and demographic revolutions of the nineteenth century were to be negated. There lay an irony. The material

triumph of the nineteenth century had been to break out of the cycle of recurrent lean and plenty which had immemorially determined the condition of life even in the richest states, and to create permanent surplus – of food, energy and raw materials (though not of capital, credit or cash). Market fluctuations perpetuated boom and recession in the peaceful life of states. Surplus transformed their war-making capacity. War at any level above the primitive ritual of raid and ambush had always required surplus for its waging. However, accumulated surpluses had rarely been large enough historically to fund wars that culminated in the decisive victory of one side over another; self-funding wars, in which the spoils of conquest sustained the impetus of a victorious campaign, had been rarer still. Extraneous factors – gross disparity in the opposed technologies of war-making or in the dynamism of opposed ideologies, or, as Professor William McNeill has suggested, susceptibility to unfamiliar germ strains transported by an aggressor – had usually explained one society's triumph over another; and they certainly underlay such military sensations as the Spanish destruction of the Aztec and Inca empires, the Islamic conquests of the seventh century and the American extinction of Red Indian warriordom.

In the warfare of Europe between the Reformation and the French Revolution, waged between states occupying a level plateau of war-making skills, will to war and resistance to common disease, such extraneous factors had played no decisive part; while the surpluses available for offence had been heavily offset by the diversion of funds into means of defence, particularly siege engineering. A great deal of such siege engineering had been dedicated to the destruction of the feudal strongholds from which local magnates had defied central authority once the fashion for castle-building seized the European landholding class in the eleventh century. It was extremely costly; and to the costs had been added those of replacing local with national fortifications in

the frontier zones throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Investment in siegecraft, destructive and constructive, had the collateral effect of securing under-investment in civil infrastructures – roads, bridges and canals – which might otherwise have made the passage of armies on offensive campaigns swift and decisive. As late as 1826, for example, while the British road network – much of it in Scotland deliberately built for military purposes after the Jacobite revolt of 1745 – extended to over 21,000 miles, that of France (three times the size) was no greater, while Prussia, which occupied much of the most strategically significant terrain in northern Europe, had a road network of only 3,340 miles, most of it in her Rhineland provinces. Her eastern lands were virtually roadless, as Poland and Russia were to remain – to Napoleon's and then Hitler's cost – well into the twentieth century.

The surplus created by the economic miracle in nineteenth-century Europe cancelled out the effects of under-investment in road-building and over-investment in frontier fortification. Mass armies, transported and supplied along the new infrastructure of railways, swamped strategically significant territory as if by tidal force in an era of changed sea levels. In 1866 and 1870 the armies of Prussia overflowed the frontier regions of Austrian Bohemia and French Alsace-Lorraine without hindrance by the costly fortifications that guarded them. Strategic movement in Europe achieved a fluidity equivalent almost to that which had characterised the western campaigns of the American Civil War, fought by mass armies in a landscape free from artificial obstructions of any sort. Regions disputed by Habsburg and Bourbon generals in two hundred years of toothpick campaigning for advantage in each cavity and crevice of each other's borderlands went under the hammer of steam power in a few weeks of brutal resculpturing. It seemed that a second 'military revolution', equivalent to

that brought about by gunpowder and mobile cannon at the dawn of the Renaissance and Reformation, stood at hand. Blood, iron and gold – available in quantities more copious than any of which the richest king had ever disposed – promised victories swifter and more total even than those which had been achieved by Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan.

Such victories were promised but could not necessarily be delivered; for the greatest material riches do not avail if the human qualities necessary to animate them are lacking. But here too the nineteenth century had wrought a sea-change. The eighteenth-century soldier had been a poor creature, the liveried servant of his king, sometimes – in Russia and Prussia – an actual serf delivered into the state's service by his feudal master. Uniform was, indeed, a livery, which reigning monarchs conspicuously did not wear. Those who did bore it as a mark of surrendered rights. It meant that they had succumbed to 'want or hardship', the most common impulse to enlistment; that they had changed sides (turncoat prisoners of war formed large contingents in most armies); that they had accepted mercenary service under foreign colours (as tens of thousands of Swiss, Scots, Irish, Slavs and other highlanders and backwoodsmen did throughout the *ancien régime*); that they had 'plea-bargained' out of imprisonment for petty crime or attachment for civic debt; or simply that they had failed to run fast enough from the press-gang. The volunteer was almost the rarest if the best of soldiers. Because so many of his comrades-in-arms were unwilling warriors, the penalties for desertion were draconian and the code of discipline ferocious. The eighteenth-century soldier was flogged for infractions of duty and hanged for indiscipline, both sorts of offence being loosely interpreted.

The nineteenth-century soldier, by contrast, was a man who wanted to be what he was. A willing, often an enthusiastic, soldier, he was usually a conscript but one who

accepted his term of (admittedly short) service as a just subtraction from his years of liberty, to be performed with cheerfulness as well as obedience. This was the case at least from mid-century onwards and in the armies of the most advanced states – Prussia first and foremost, but also France and Austria, with the smaller and more backward hurrying to follow suit. Such a change of attitude is difficult to document but real enough nevertheless. Perhaps its most tangible manifestation was the appearance of the regimental souvenir which began to be manufactured in tens of thousands towards the end of the nineteenth century. The souvenir, typically in Germany a china drinking mug, decorated with pictures of regimental life, usually bore the names of the conscript's fellow platoon members, some couplets of doggerel verse, a salutation to the regiment – 'Here's to the 12th Grenadiers' – and the universal superscription 'In memory of my service time'. The young soldier who had been sent off garlanded with flowers by his neighbours – a strikingly different farewell from that given to the Russian serf conscript of the eighteenth century, for whom the village priest said a requiem mass – bore back his souvenir when his service time was over to stand in a place of honour in the family home.

This remarkable change of attitude was literally revolutionary. The roots of the change were manifold, but the three most important led directly to the French Revolution and the principal slogans of its ideology: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

Military service became popular in the nineteenth century first because it was an experience of *equality*. 'Cook's son – Duke's son – son of a belted Earl,' Rudyard Kipling wrote of the army Britain sent to fight the Boers in 1900, with some accuracy. Popular enthusiasm for the war did sweep all classes into the ranks as common soldiers; but they were, of course, volunteers. Universal conscription in the European armies took all classes willy-nilly – in Prussia from 1814, in

Austria from 1867, in France from 1889 – and bound them to service for two or three years. There were variations in the proportion of annual *classes* enlisted and fluctuations in the length of service. There were alleviations of obligation for the better educated; typically, for example, high-school graduates served only one year and were then transferred to the reserve as potential officers. Yet the principle of universal obligation that generally held good was also accepted as persisting. Reservists during their early years of discharge returned annually to the colours for retraining; as they grew older they moved to a wartime reserve (*Landwehr* in Germany, Territorial Army in France); and their final years of able manhood were spent on the list of the Home Guard. Reserve training was borne with good humour, even regarded as a sort of all-male holiday. Freud, a reserve medical officer in the Austrian army, writing to a friend from manoeuvres in 1886, observed that 'it would be ungrateful not to admit that military life with its inescapable "must" is good for neurasthenia. It all disappeared in the first week.'

Conscription was also relatively egalitarian in its outreach. Jews, like Freud, were as liable as Gentiles and in the Habsburg army automatically became officers if educationally qualified; in the German army, Jews could become reserve officers but were barred by regimental anti-Semitism from holding regular commissions, though Bismarck's financier, Bleichroder, managed to get his son a regular commission in the household cavalry. The officer who recommended Hitler for his Iron Cross 1st Class was a Jewish reserve officer. This was 'emancipation' in its military aspect, and it applied not only to Jews. The universality of conscription swept up every nationality in the Habsburg lands, Poles and Alsace-Lorrainers in Germany, Basques, Bretons and Savoyards in France. All, by being soldiers, were also to be Austrians, Germans or Frenchmen.

Conscription was an instrument not only of equality but also of *fraternity*. Because it applied to all at the same

moment of their lives and in principle treated all in the same way, it forged bonds of brotherhood young Europeans had never before felt. Universal compulsory education, a simultaneous innovation, was currently taking children outside their families and plunging them into a common experience of learning. Conscription took young adults from their locality and plunged them into the experience of growing up – confronting them with the challenge of separation from home, making new friends, dealing with enemies, adjusting to authority, wearing strange clothes, eating unfamiliar food,[fn3] shifting for themselves. It was a genuine *rite de passage*, intellectual, emotional and, not least of all, physical. Nineteenth-century armies, told that they were 'schools of the nation', took on many of the characteristics of contemporary schools, not only testing and heightening literacy and numeracy but also teaching swimming, athletics and cross-country sports as well as shooting and the martial arts. Turnvater Jahn, the pioneer of physical education in Germany, was a potent influence on Prussian military training; his ideas were propagated in France through the specialist athletics instructors of the Bataillon de Joinville, while in Italy Captain Caprilli founded a school of military horsemanship which was to transform the art of riding throughout the Western world. The healthy outdoorsmanship of military life, lived round the campfire and under canvas, would eventually develop into the ideals of the German youth movement and the code of the Boy Scouts and so make its way back into social and military life by a convergent route.

The *rite de passage* of universal conscription was not a liberating experience for all. As Professor William McNeill has pointed out, individuals drafted into the army from a society which was rapidly urbanising and industrialising, marching them away from the plough and the village pump,

> found themselves in a simpler society than the one they knew in civil life. The private soldier lost almost all personal responsibility. Ritual and routine took care of nearly every working hour. Simple obedience to the orders that punctuated that routine from time to time, and set activity off in some new direction, offered release from the anxieties inherent in personal decision-making – anxieties that multiplied incontinently in urban society, where rival leaders, rival loyalties and practical alternatives as to how to spend at least part of one's time competed insistently for attention. Paradoxical as it may sound, escape from freedom was often a real liberation, especially for young men living under very rapidly changing conditions, who had not yet been able to assume fully adult roles.

Even when allowance is made for the force of this percipient observation, however, the ultimate importance of universal conscription in changing attitudes to military service was that it ultimately connected with *liberty*, in its political if not its personal sense. The old armies had been instruments of oppression of the people by kings; the new armies were to be instruments of the people's liberation from kings, even if that liberation was to be narrowly institutional in the states which retained monarchy. The two ideas were not mutually contradictory. The French National Convention had decreed in 1791 that 'the battalion organised in each district shall be united under a banner bearing the inscription: "The French people united against tyranny".' That decree encapsulated the idea inherent in the United States Constitution that 'the right to bear arms', once made common, was a guarantee of direct freedoms. Two years earlier the revolutionary leader, Dubois-Crance, had articulated the congruent proposition: 'Each citizen should be a soldier, and each soldier a citizen, or we shall never have a constitution.'

The tension between the principles of winning freedoms by revolutionary assault and extracting them in legal form by performance of military duty was to transfix European political life for much of the nineteenth century. The excess of freedom won by force of arms in France provoked the reaction of Thermidor and diverted the fervour of the

extremist *sans-culottes* into conquest abroad. The victories of the 'revolutionary' armies (after 1795 firmly under the control of their officers, many of them, ironically, returned monarchists) then had the effect of provoking their enemies, particularly the Prussian and Austrian kings, into decreeing a variation of the *levée-en-masse* or general conscription, the original manifestation of the French Revolution in its military form. Such conscription produced popular forces – *Landwehr, Landsturm, Freischützen* – to oppose the French on their home territories.

Landwehr and *Freischützen* became an embarrassment as soon as their work was done. With Napoleon safely on St Helena, Prussia and Austria consigned these popular forces, with their liberal-minded bourgeois officers, to the status of reserve contingents, and intended never to call on their services again. Nevertheless they survived until 1848, 'year of revolutions', when their members actively participated in the street battles for constitutional rights in Vienna and Berlin – where the uprising was put down by the Prussian Guard, the ultimate bastion of traditional authority. They had meanwhile been replicated in France, whose National Guard would keep alive the 'liberal' principle in military life under the Second Empire and, after the withdrawal of the Prussians from Paris in 1871, rise against the regular army of the conservative Third Republic in a bloody Commune which would cost the lives of 20,000 of its members.

'No conscription without representation'

The struggle of these citizen forces with the armies of reaction, though ending in physical defeat, nevertheless indirectly exerted the pressure which extracted constitutional and electoral rights from the conservative European regimes. The demand for such rights was in the air; and the *impôt du sang* – 'blood tax', as conscription laws were called in France – could not be levied if constitutional rights continued to be refused, particularly when neighbour

states were enlarging their armies and reserves through the process of conscription. Prussia, the military pace-setter, granted a constitution in 1849, as a direct result of the fright it was caused by armed revolutionaries the previous year. By 1880 both France and the German Empire had introduced universal male suffrage, and France would institute a common three-year term of service as a *quid pro quo* in 1882. Austria extended the vote to all males in 1907; even Russia, most autocratic of states and most exigent in its conscription laws, which imposed a term of four years, had created a representative assembly in 1905, following the defeat of its army by the Japanese in Manchuria and the subsequent revolution of that year.

'No conscription without representation' had, in short, become an unspoken slogan of European politics in the half-century before the First World War; since conscription is indeed a tax, on the individual's time if not money, it exactly echoed the American colonists' challenge to George III in 1776. Paradoxically, in the states where votes were granted to all, or most, free men but where military service was still restricted to those fettered by 'want or hardship' – the United States and Britain – a strange passion for volunteer soldiering seized their citizenry during the great era of military expansion through conscription in nineteenth-century Europe. The opening stages of the American Civil War could not have been fought without the prior existence of a network of entirely amateur regiments, with names like the Liberty Rifles of New Jersey, the Mechanic Phalanx of Massachusetts, the Republican Blues of Savannah, Georgia, and the Palmetto Guard of Charleston, South Carolina. In 1859 a nationwide war scare caused by French naval expansion had brought into being a similar though much larger network in Britain. Tennyson's stirring verses, *Form, Riflemen, Form*, had helped to call 200,000 civilians into amateur military service. This was a serious embarrassment to the government, which could not stop them designing