The sociology of trench warfare 1914–18†

This paper has two objectives. The first aim is to describe and analyse an instance of mass war—namely trench warfare during 1914–18. The second aim is to subsume the phenomena to be described below under general propositions developed in the areas of organization theory and the sociology of alienation. Mass or total war may be defined as a type of armed conflict between large nation states in which populations and resources are rationally and extensively organized for conquest. It is important to note that populations are mobilized both in terms of activities and psychological states; the former implies comprehensive military and civilian conscription; the latter implies the systematic development of belligerent and hostile attitudes towards the enemy among all or most of the population.

The material used in this paper is drawn from three sources. Firstly, participant accounts of trench warfare. The latter include published memoirs, diaries and letters; in all thirty-seven have been examined. Secondly, material was taken from seven battalion histories. The dispatches and papers of members of the military elite served as a third source.

THE ECOLOGY OF TRENCH WARFARE

Many writers have drawn attention to one unique feature of the First World War. A system of trenches stretched from the Belgian coast to the Swiss frontier, behind which the opposing armies remained immobile for much of the war. Excepting local variations, the trench pattern that evolved was similar on both sides. The trench itself was either a breastwork or a long narrow ditch in the earth. If the ground was marshlike, as in Flanders, a breastwork built above ground level was favoured. Such a construction facilitated the solution of drainage problems. Typically the trench was six to seven feet in depth and six

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feet in width. A fire step ran laterally along the front of the trench; this was mounted by the soldier to repel attacks or to observe the enemy.

In order to localize the blast and shrapnel effects of mortars and shells which fell into the trench, a series of traverses at ten-yard intervals was built. Dugouts or recesses were built into both sides of the trench; these provided protection and places of rest. In front of the trench, on the enemy side, barbed wire entanglements gave protection against direct frontal assault. A system of communication and reserve trenches connected the front line trench to the rear military formations. No-man’s-land may be defined as an unoccupied area of disputed territory existing between the trenches of the opposing armies. The depth of no-man’s-land varied between twenty to a thousand yards. Typically, however, this distance was between one hundred and three hundred yards.

Offensive activity in trench warfare included mining. Mining companies burrowed under each other’s trenches to detonate large quantities of explosive. Sometimes large craters erupted in no-man’s-land; the former became the object of immediate attention on both sides. Typically, neither side could hold these craters in their entirety. A compromise was often reached with each side holding that lip of the crater nearest to its front line. A trench led from the front line to this lip, and here each side established sentry posts. In such a situation soldiers from opposing armies were often but ten yards from each other.

The above description of the ecology of the trench system is extremely brief. However, it draws attention to physical features of significance to the interaction between soldiers of opposing sides. It is clear, that, as in many situations the distance separating the trenches was small, it was possible in a physical sense for soldiers to communicate with each other. Direct communication of friendly sentiments was not uncommon. It was stimulated, no doubt, by the fact that in each trench one could hear within the other, the noises associated with everyday living. ‘Tommy’ knew when ‘Jerry’ was eating his breakfast and vice versa. He could hear the rations coming up. Laughter, singing and talking were sometimes audible.

The second factor to note is that the physical structure of the trench ensured that the activities of the ordinary soldier, for some part at least, were not visible to their officers. Soldiers in groups of five manned the front line. These groups were located between traverses. Junior officers in the front line had command of up to fifty men. These men might be distributed over a front of between one and two hundred yards. These two facts ensured that the front-line soldier was protected against over vigorous surveillance by his officers.

A brief list is given below of some of the weapons used in trench
warfare. These included the rifle, machine gun, the cannon, the rifle grenade, hand bombs of various types and the trench mortar. The rifle, machine gun and hand grenade need no further description. The rifle-grenade was a modified rifle into the barrel of which a rod was inserted. At the end of the rod a grenade or bomb was attached. The weapon was then ready for use. The trench mortar, although not a rifle, operated on a similar principle. It had, however, a greater destructive power. The above is not a complete enumeration of weapons, but it is a list of weapons typically found in the trenches.

THE FORMAL STRUCTURE OF RELATIONSHIPS: THE NORM OF OFFENSIVENESS

What follows is a description of the formal norms defining the relationship of the soldier to his enemy. In the first instance it should be mentioned that for appreciable periods armies were immobile within trench-systems. Large scale offensives were relatively infrequent. Immobility did not entail non-offensiveness for Sir Douglas Haig—Commander-in-Chief of the British armies in France, 1915–18—early adopted an active-front policy for the intervening periods. It is quite clear that Haig both intended this policy to be implemented and believed in fact that it was. Thus in his government dispatches Haig writes: ‘On the British front no action on a great scale . . . has been fought during the past five months, nevertheless our troops have been far from idle or inactive. Although the struggle in a general sense has not been intense, it has been everywhere continuous . . .’. Elsewhere in the same dispatch Haig refers to ‘a steady and continuous fight [which] has gone on, day and night above ground and below it’. This was the less spectacular side of the general policy of attrition; it involved continuous offensive activity of a minor and local nature.

The military organization required that interaction between the soldier and his adversary be governed exclusively by the norm of offensiveness. The latter applied to both battle and routine line holding operations. In all situations the soldier was expected to use the weapons at his disposal for aggressive action against the enemy. The exemplary soldier, in terms of elite values, was the soldier who, on his own initiative, instigated action likely to cause the enemy deprivation. The object of war was to eliminate the enemy both physically and morally. In short the soldier should be saturated with what in military jargon was termed the ‘offensive’ or ‘fighting’ spirit. Offensive activity was the product of the soldier; as far as the military organization was concerned, offensive activity was to be restricted or limited only by fatigue, orders to the contrary or the shortage of weapons and ammunition.

Although the internalization of the offensive norm is part of the
socialization of the soldier, and is in a general sense implicit in that role, military elites were concerned to present it explicitly and to ensure the implementation of the norm in front line activity. This was accomplished by a variety of means. Thus infantry base depots (more notoriously known as Bull-Rings) through which new and convalescent soldiers passed for technical instruction before going into the line, served an additional purpose. Robert Graves, himself an instructor at Harfleur, observes that 'the principal objective of the Bull-Ring was to inculcate the offensive spirit'. Secondly, Army, Corps, and Divisional ‘schools’ were instituted for the instruction of officers and N.C.O.’s in their various combatant duties. In these schools the latter were exposed to lectures aimed at the inculcation of the offensive spirit. Thus for example an infantry subaltern attending such a school records: ‘a lecture given by a divisional staff captain . . . [who] is talking about the necessity for keeping the initiative and pointing out the many ways in which troops holding the line may show themselves master of the situation. . . . Our one objective should be to prevent the enemy from ever feeling comfortable. . . . Morale is the great factor and by keeping the initiative we shall help to destroy the German morale.’ It was also the practice of divisional commanders to lecture officers and N.C.O.’s upon the necessity of maintaining the offensive spirit. Members of the staff would on occasion visit the front line to satisfy themselves of the fighting spirit of the troops. At the battalion level the offensive norm was often made the subject of a conference between the battalion commander and his subordinate officers preparatory to a tour in the trenches. Junior officers at the company training level were expected to lecture their men on the offensive spirit. One officer refers to a pamphlet circulated by the staff to front line commanders entitled Am I being offensive enough?—Notes for Junior Commanders. The trench diary of Brigadier-General Jack provides many illustrations of the manner in which a battalion commander could impart the offensive norm to his troops.

The offensive norm constrained the soldier to initiate aggressive activity. However, should the enemy be the instigator, the prescribed reaction was unequivocal—he was to retaliate immediately. This is well-illustrated in General Jack’s diary where he observes: ‘I have gained the impression that the troops formerly here allowed the Germans to get the upper hand too easily. One must always hit back as hard and as often as one can; to do less is to invite bullying to continue.’ Not only was retaliation mandatory, but in addition it was to be with interest, thus Blunden speaks of the staffs’ vicarious motto: ‘Give them three for every one.’

In summary then, an active front policy was explicitly adopted by Haig, minor offensive activity was to be continuous on all parts of
the front; the relationship of the soldier to his foe as defined by the military organization was one of conflict and unmitigated hostility. Secondly, the offensive norm was frequently presented to combatant officers and other ranks within formal face-to-face situations.

THE INFORMAL STRUCTURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

With one or two exceptions all the material contains numerous references to quiet or, in terms of soldier jargon, 'cushy' sectors in the front line. A cushy line was one in which offensive activity was either moderate or absent. Excluding battle situations, 'cushy' front lines were by no means uncommon. Within such quiet sectors interaction between opposing armies was not regulated by the offensive norm. While it is probable that in some sectors the lack of offensiveness was a consequence of fatigue, shortage of weapons or ammunition, it is certain that other quiet sectors were a consequence of what Blunden calls 'the Live and Let Live Principle, one of the soundest elements in the trench war'. The Live and Let Live principle was an informal and collective agreement between front-line soldiers of opposing armies to inhibit offensive activity to a level mutually defined as tolerable. This understanding was tacit and covert; it was expressed in activity or non-activity rather than in verbal terms. The norm was supported by a system of sanctions. In the positive sense it constituted a system of mutual service, each side rewarded the other by refraining from offensive activity on the condition, of course, that this non-activity was reciprocated. Negatively, violations of the norm were sanctioned in ways to be described below.

Two types of evidence demonstrate the existence of the norm in a front-line sector. In the first type an author makes an explicit reference to the principle of Live and Let Live or some equivalent term. In the second case an author, while making no direct reference, records particular incidents which imply the operation of the norm. The literature used in this paper includes 44 participant accounts of the trench war, 20 of these contain one or more direct references to Live and Let Live or a synonym. Only in a few accounts are illustrations of the second type absent. Some illustrations drawn from the first category are given below. The following selection demonstrates the diffusion of the norm through a range of separate offensive activities and throughout different armies and theatres of war.

The first item has interest on two accounts. It suggests an extreme case in which all offensive activity is absent from the front. Secondly, the author is a staff captain, a member of the military elite, and his recorded reactions indicate the elite attitude to this phenomenon. ‘We were astonished to observe German soldiers walking about within rifle range behind their lines. Our men appeared to take no
notice. I privately made up my mind to do away with that sort of thing when we took over; such things could not be allowed. These people evidently did not know there was a war on. Both sides apparently believed in the policy of Live and Let Live. Patrolling was a form of nocturnal warfare in which small bodies of soldiers sought to establish undisputed possession of no-man's-land. A battalion moving into the line was expected to establish such offensive ascendancy by taking prisoners and inflicting casualties on hostile patrols and working parties. Such patrolling was highly valued by Haig and mentioned by him in dispatches. The following item clearly shows the operation of the norm in this sphere of offensive activity. ‘All patrols—English and German—are much averse to the death and glory principle, so on running up against one another . . . both pretend that they are Levites and the other is a good Samaritan, and pass by on the other side, no word spoken. For either side to bomb the other would be a useless violation of the unwritten laws that govern the relations of combatants permanently within a hundred yards’ distance of each other. . . .’ The sniper played a crucial role in the trench war; without him, as one author observes, ‘both sides would be sitting . . . upon their parapets regarding one another with frank curiosity’. Sniping, however, like other offensive activity was on occasion regulated by the Live and Let Live principle. In the example below an artilleryman is in the trenches with an infantryman as guide. His mission is to take him within 20 yards of the German line. He is cautious upon hearing this until his guide assures him ‘that they [the battalion holding the line] had a complete understanding with the Hun infantry and that we should not be sniped’. The norm was not confined to the Western front or to infantry formations as the following illustration makes clear. The location is Macedonia, the enemy the Bulgarians. The author describes the situation and activities of the artillery in this sector: ‘The batteries’ gun positions were dug in on the skyline and directed on targets far below in the bottom of the valley. The Bulgars on the hills on the opposite side of the valley were similarly situated . . . whenever one of our batteries dropped some shells that fell too close for the Bulgars’ comfort, they would promptly respond with a salvo of their own shells, which would fall uncomfortably near to the British battery just to let us know that they had no intention of putting up with that kind of thing. Here, as on the Struma, the Bulgars had demonstrated their willingness to pursue a Live and Let Live policy; but if we preferred to be unpleasant then they could be unpleasant too.’ In short many offensive activities were regulated by Live and Let Live. In addition the norm regulated activities of a non-offensive nature; thus by mutual agreement working parties between the lines were often unmolested—these might include soldiers who emerged in daylight to
cut grass in front of their trenches. Similarly each side would often allow the other to deliver the front-line rations without interference. One infantryman observes that 'it is only common courtesy not to interrupt each others' meals with intermittent missiles of hate', while on occasion game was shot in no-man's-land and retrieved with complete confidence in daylight. Further instances of the informal norm are contained in the following section.

**The Ritualization and Routinization of Offensive Activity**

**The Communication System and Sanctioning Process**

It is clear that if the norm of Live and Let Live regulated offensive activity the front line was quiet. There were, however, degrees of quietness. A front line could be marked by the absence or near-absence of activity; alternatively a moderate amount might exist. It seems that where activity was moderate, it was often ritualized and routinized. If offensive activity occurred in this perfunctory and predictable manner, any deviation from the mutually defined moderate and acceptable would be immediately recognized and negatively sanctioned. The ritualization of offensive activity was implicit in the illustration above relating to the Bulgarian and British artillery. Numerous illustrations occur in the literature. Those given below illustrate ritualization in the different spheres of offensive activity. Firstly, sniping: 'The only activity with which the battalion had to contend was sniping . . . not all of this was in deadly earnest. On the left the Germans amused themselves by aiming at spots on the walls of cottages and firing until they had cut out a hole....' Secondly, in relation to machine-gun operations, an infantryman observes, 'all was quiet save for the stammer of a Lewis gun firing at the enemy's rear line to conceal our lack of activity'. Finally, an unusual example in which ritualization occurs by explicit verbal contact. 'Some of our saps are less than ten yards apart. At first we threw bombs at each other, but then we agreed not to throw any more . . . if a Frenchman had orders to throw bombs several times during the night he agreed with his "German comrade" to throw them to the left and right of the trench.' In these examples, the form of offensive activity was duly observed yet clearly the spirit was absent.

From the perspective of the informal structure, such ritualization may be viewed as an adaptive response to the demands of the formal organization. While not disturbing the Live and Let Live principle unduly, it allowed local commanders to demonstrate to the staff that the line was active. Although the staff were rarely present in the trenches a close scrutiny on activity was exercised. For example, daily
front line reports on which all offensive activity was recorded were obligatory. These, however, did not discriminate between ritualized and non-ritualized activity.

Ritualization was often accompanied by routinization. Offensive activity would often follow a regular and unvarying pattern in terms of time and volume. A certain amount of ritualized and predictable activity was mutually accepted without the application of negative sanctions. Such episodes were referred to as the ‘morning hate’ or the ‘evening strafe’. A typical description of a routinized front is as follows: ‘in the middle of the morning a dozen or so 5·9 shells come over at regular half-minute intervals, and then the front nearly always remains quiet until stand-to at sunset, when there is usually some rifle-firing and a machine gun in Gommecourt shows us what it can do.33

We have here a curious and paradoxical situation in which a ritualized and routinized structure of offensive activity functioned within the informal structure as a means of indirect communication between antagonists. The intention to Live and Let Live was often communicated by subtle yet meaningful manipulation of the intensity and rhythm of offensiveness. The tacitly arranged schedule which evolved established a mutually acceptable level of activity. To the uninitiated observer such a front line would appear to show a degree of offensive activity compatible with officially prescribed levels; for the participants, however, such bombs and bullets were not indicators of animosity but rather its contrary.

The violation of the level of activity institutionalized by Live and Let Live was negatively sanctioned by raising offensiveness to the formally prescribed and maximum level. This sanctioning process is illustrated in the example given above referring to the Bulgarian and English artillery. The following illustrates the same process between infantry formations; the incident related occurred during an uncertain period during which the Germans appeared to be exceeding the existing level of offensiveness. ‘The Germans about this time also fired minenwerfers34 into our poor draggled front line; this inhumanity could not be allowed and the rifle grenades that went over no-man’s-land in reply, for once almost carried out the staffs’ vicarious motto: give them three for every one. One glared hideously at the broken wood and clay flung up from our grenades and trench-mortar shells in the German trenches, finding for once that a little hate was possible.’35 The arrival of the minenwerfer made clear the violation of the norm. The term ‘inhumanity’ is either a reference to the informal norm or else it is meaningless. The sanction was immediate: the maximum and officially prescribed offensiveness. The author, however, makes clear that such retaliation was not the rule.

The latter example refers to the sanctioning mechanism which
operated between opposing armies. Negative sanctions also operated within the respective armies. These usually took the form of group disapproval expressed against those individuals whose activities were defined as too offensive. A typical illustration is as follows: ‘The most unpopular man in the trenches is undoubtedly the trench mortar officer, he discharges the mortar over the parapet into the German trenches . . . for obvious reasons it is not advisable to fire a trench mortar too often, at any rate from the same place. But the whole weight of public opinion in our trench is directed against it being fired from anywhere at all.’

To summarize briefly. A ritualized and routinized structure of offensive activity emerged on the quiet front. It constituted a level of offensiveness below that defined by military elites as ideal. It was based on the norm of Live and Let Live and maintained by a system of sanctions. In the positive sense, each side rewarded the other with the inhibition of offensive activity to a tolerable level. Negatively, deviation from the norm was sanctioned by a return to the maximum and formally prescribed level of offensiveness. Within the respective armies, the ‘rate-busters’ were restrained by the disapproval of their peers.

The alienation of the soldier

The first part of this paper consists of a description and analysis of the informal structure of relations between combatants. The second part attempts to specify some conditions associated with the emergence of the latter phenomenon. One condition refers to a crucial conflict of interest between the superordinate and controlling military elite, and the subordinate group of front-line combatants. The nature and significance of this conflict will be specified below. The second condition refers to the alienation of the soldier from some essential aspects of his military role. Generally it is true that if individuals fail to identify with, or are non-involved in their role, role performance will be inefficient and irresponsible. Clearly tacit co-operation with the enemy is neither efficient nor responsible. It will be argued below that many individuals experienced a form of alienation, namely self-estrangement, during enactment of the combatant role, and further that this experience attenuated the process of role identification necessary for responsible role performance. In the analysis which follows the military and certain other roles will be compared and basic similarities between each outlined.

According to Seeman alienation conceived in psychological terms resolves into five dimensions: meaninglessness, powerlessness, isolation, normlessness and self-estrangement; he observes that research should specify the social conditions which produce the variants of
alienation and their behavioural consequences. This paper will focus on the notion of self-estrangement. Seeman suggests that the basic idea contained in the notion of self-estrangement is the loss of intrinsically meaningful satisfactions derived from work; self-alienation is a condition in which the performance of an activity is to a high degree dependent on future rewards that are external to the activity itself.39

Self-estrangement may have many antecedents; one such has been specified by C. W. Mills and Marvin Scott40 in their respective analyses of two service occupations: the salesman and the prostitute. This alienative condition is constituted by the admixture of Gemeinschaft motives within a Gesellschaft context. Parsons specifies the meaning of this conjunction; thus Gemeinschaft relations ‘constitute particular modes of expressing more fundamental and permanent attitudes. This means ipso facto that they take on a symbolic significance in addition to their intrinsic significance. There can be no doubt of the enormous importance of this fact in social life. Sentiments cluster about such acts. They acquire a meaning for those who perform them.’41 Parsons examines societal attitudes towards extramarital sexual relations. All are to some extent condemned. The most vehement disapproval attaches, however, to prostitution, for the latter involves behaviour symbolic of the Gemeinschaft in an impersonal Gesellschaft context. Less condemned are those illicit sexual relations occurring within the context of friendship for the activity and context are, in this case, more congruent. The institution of modern salesman-ship is analysed in similar terms by C. W. Mills.42 The relationship between salesman and client is of an instrumental and impersonal kind, while the salesman’s role requires that he personalizes himself with his client. Personalization refers to institutionally prescribed ‘pseudo-Gemeinschaft’. The salesman or girl must manipulate the client by using a range of behaviours symbolic and expressive of the Gemeinschaft. Friendliness, concern are simulated in a specific relationship. Thus, C. W. Mills comments: ‘In the normal course of her work because her personality becomes the instrument of an alien purpose, the salesgirl becomes self-alienated.’ In short the mixture of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft—pseudo-Gemeinschaft—involves the actor in self-estrangement; little intrinsic gratification is derived from role-performance, the latter is contingent to a high degree on rewards external to the activity itself. It will be argued here that the soldier experiences a similar self-estrangement and that this is the consequence of a like disunion to that institutionalized in salesman-ship.

As we have seen, Parsons comments that Gemeinschaft relations are manifestations of the fundamental and permanent attitudes; in the role of the salesman these were of a benign and benevolent nature. Some fundamental sentiments are, however, of a different kind; these
are the malevolent sentiments—the contraries of the above. Thus while some people may love each other, others may organize a relationship around mutual hatred, while hostility and enmity may replace affection and regard. The appropriate expression of benevolent sentiments occurs within the Gemeinschaft while behind these sentiments lies a history of common interests, values, experience and mutual aid. In a parallel fashion, the expression of malevolence occurs within a type of conflict relationship. The range of behaviour essentially and meaningfully related to these malevolent sentiments includes such acts of violence as killing and inflicting physical or other injury. Similarly to behaviours expressive of the Gemeinschaft these acts are invested with a symbolic significance. An example of such a relationship is the vendetta. Members of the antagonistic family groups are socialized into a relationship of mutual hatred. Conflict becomes a crucial part of the individual's life experience. The acts of violence which emanate from this relationship are for the participants fully meaningful things. Violence has the emotional support of all involved; it is perceived as deriving from, and both expressive and symbolic of, a conflict of long duration. It is in short a situation of personalized violence, in which an act of violence is to some extent a meaningful extension of one's personality; its performance does not involve self-estrangement and there exists no disjunction between emotion and activity.

In a similar manner to extra-marital sexual relations, society discriminates between acts of violence. While all such acts are generally condemned, some are less so than others. Thus retributive violence, although legally proscribed, may have a degree of emotional support in the mores. The most virulent disapprobation is reserved for the one who kills impersonally in 'cold blood', or for reasons of material interest. The correspondence between the roles of the soldier and the salesman now emerges. In both cases, behaviours relating to and expressive of basic feeling states are alienated from their appropriate object and displaced onto an institutionally prescribed surrogate. Whereas in the role of salesman a 'pseudo-benevolence' or Gemeinschaft is institutionalized, a 'pseudo-malevolence' is institutionalized in the role of the soldier. Thus intimate and personal behaviour, that is killing, is estranged from the soldier and systematically and rationally mobilized by elites in support of state and military goals.

The experience of this form of self-estrangement is lucidly recorded in the illustration below. The author, an infantry subaltern, has just attended a lecture on the offensive spirit at a divisional school; this has been given by a staff captain who has been advancing the merit of the trench-raid.43 ‘It is not until the lecture is over that one reflects on his advice in terms of actuality. Then one sees the raid as a foul, mean, bloody, murderous orgy which no human being who retains
A. E. Ashworth

a grain of moral sense can take part in without the atrophy of every human instinct. I've a desire to go back and tell this gallant gentleman that unless he can infuse into my blood hatred such as I seem psychologically incapable of feeling towards an unknown enemy, . . . I honestly don't see how it's to be done." The experience of the disjunction between the sentiment and prescribed activity and the implication for role-performance is explicit in the above item. Further examination of the literature supports the view that inability to hate the enemy was not an isolated or idiosyncratic phenomenon. In fact, the evidence suggests that the soldier, after battle experience, defined his foe as a fellow sufferer rather than a fiend. The following comment seems not untypical: 'Hatred of the enemy, so strenuously fostered in training days, largely faded away in the line. We somehow realized that individually they were very like ourselves, just as fed-up and anxious to be done with it all." One function of propaganda during the socialization of the soldier was to bridge the disunion between emotion and institutionally required behaviour. Thus one dimension of propaganda emphasized the threat to the soldiers' primary groups should the enemy realize his intentions, the latter would kill or injure one's family, friends and rape one's women and so on. At this prospect the soldier initially defined violence as an appropriate reaction to his foe. The motivation thus provided was, however, of a surrogate nature, it was not based on actual experience of such deprivation and often eroded in the front line; consequently the original disjunction re-asserted itself.

If the above theoretical analysis is valid, activities involving impersonal violence are not likely to be experienced as intrinsically meaningful or satisfying. Self-alienation is, therefore, inherent in the military role. Society at war typically accords high esteem to combatant status and to bellicosity in general. Estrangement from the military role, therefore, implies isolation from society values. The resentment shown by many combatants to those on the 'home-front' who disseminated such bellicosity may be interpreted as a symptom of the former's isolation from the goals and standards of society at war. These two variants of alienation, it is suggested in this paper, were related to the emergence of the informal structure of relationships often found in the front line.

Seeman observes that the concept of self-alienation often 'invokes some explicit or implicit human ideal' or 'idealized human condition'. No such assumptions are intended here. It is suggested that many combatants experienced the form of self-estrangement outlined above. This, however, does not follow from the violation of a human nature conceived as inherently benign, but rather from the violation of internalized and socially derived attitudes relating to the inviolability of persons. The fact that such attitudes are 'normal' in most
The sociology of trench warfare 1914–18

societies is a consequence of systemic need. It is probably true that only if societies institutionalize such attitudes relating to the inviolability of individuals will they survive, otherwise co-operation, the essence of society would be impossible. Those individuals inadequately socialized in this respect would not experience such self-alienation; the order to kill would involve no restructuring of self.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEMAND AND GROUP RESPONSE

Much empirical research has shown the existence of informal structures which invariably establish themselves within formal bureaucratic contexts; in various ways such structures operate to modify the goals and purposes of the formal organization. Many organizations are composed of a controlling or administrative elite and a larger subordinate group of individuals. The latter are subject to demands and constraints imposed by the former. These elite defined demands are primarily determined by organization goals and may conflict with the felt needs and interests of the subordinate group. In such a situation the latter may spontaneously evolve an informal structure or ‘defence mechanism’ which operates to control, in some measure, the group’s conditions of existence and thus secure protection and satisfaction of its own needs. Such structures might have functional and/or dysfunctional consequences for the professed goals of organizations. Thus the classic study in this field, that of Roethlisberger and Dickson, showed how the informal structure within a factory impeded the realization of maximum output. Similarly in academic organizations Coleman has demonstrated the existence of norms within the student culture which functions to inhibit academic output to a level collectively defined by the majority of students as tolerable. It is argued here that the situations of workers, students and soldiers are in certain essential respects similar. In each case a subordinate group is subject to elite demands which conflict with felt needs and in each case the group response is similar, that is the evolution of a defence mechanism which in operating to protect these needs impedes the attainment of organizational goals. In short, all are instances of informal output controls. Aside from this crucial similarity the three situations differ in many particulars. Thus the nature of the product differs in each organizational context. The products of the worker and the student are familiar enough; the product of the soldier is offensive activity, that is to kill, injure or capture his enemy. Secondly, the notion of informal organization between opposing armies within a context of total conflict may present a certain novelty; if this is so it merely demonstrates the lack of a sociological orientation in our approach to the study of war. Finally, and more significantly, in the school and factory the line between the controlling elite and
the subject group is relatively clear. Therefore one might expect the officer, other ranks dichotomy to have similar significance in the trenches. However, this was not absolutely so. The military staff was the important locus of decision relating to offensive activities. Although the latter were comparable to front-line officers in terms of authority, one crucial dissimilarity remained; the military staff were non-combatants located in areas far from conflict, whereas combatant officers together with other ranks shared a situation of danger in the front line. The staff when making demands involving offensive activity did not thereby implicate themselves in any degree of physical danger. Should the front-line officer make similar demands upon his men, he would almost inevitably involve himself in a degree of risk as will be shown below. Therefore in the front line common interest transcended the institutionally defined difference between officers and other ranks; together they constituted a quasi-group with a common purpose in resisting the demands of the military staff.

The realization of elite defined levels of offensiveness would have involved the soldier in situations which he defined as intolerable. This was so because each item of offensive activity was almost inevitably reciprocated. The soldier early experienced the fact that each bullet would call forth a bullet, a bomb a bomb and so on. Such retaliation was institutionally prescribed, as we have already seen. Retaliation, however, involved the instigator of the initial offensive item in deprivation. The item he received in return could obviously kill, injure or otherwise cause discomfort to both himself and his peers.

The informal structure perhaps derives ultimately from the soldier’s realization that if he refrained from offensive activity, the enemy would in all likelihood reciprocate. The soldiers on both sides had a vested interest of a biological sort in the perpetuation of such a situation. The attenuation of offensive activity offered each combatant both a greater chance of survival and a diminution of discomfort, whereas to gear offensive activity to the institutionally prescribed level would be to maximize the probability of death and discomfort.

This experience of tacit co-operation with the enemy had significant consequences for the evolution of the indigenous culture of the soldier group. Most probably it stimulated an emphatic process in which soldiers redefined their situation in terms of actual front line experience. During the socialization process the state and military organizations had equipped the soldier with an image of the enemy which, as we have seen, provided a surrogate motive for violence. Thus the enemy was defined as a sub-human thing capable of all conceivable crimes, from the crucifixion of prisoners to the killing and raping of women and children. The organization image was
designed, in short, to maximize the differences between the soldier and his foe. The experience of tacit co-operation came as a reality shock to combatants. It demonstrated to each side that the other was not the implacably hostile and violent creature of the official image. The latter eroded and was replaced, as we have seen, by an indigenous definition based on common experience and situation. This deviant image stressed similarities rather than differences between combatants. The institutionally prescribed and dichotomous WE and THEY dissolved. The WE now included the enemy as the fellow sufferer. The THEY became the staff.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is as well to be exact about the propositions advanced in this paper. It is not claimed that in all routine trench-holding situations interaction between armies was regulated by the informal norm; many trench tours were miniature battles, each side strictly observing the policy of harassing the enemy. However, it is clear that on many occasions tacit agreements existed between the opposing troops to restrict offensive activity in the manner described. In such cases the aims of the military elite were qualified in two senses: in that offensive activity was restricted, and indirectly in that co-operation both attenuated the fighting spirit and the resolve to prosecute the war with zeal. In the latter respect it is interesting to speculate on the relationship between the informal structure and the general course and conduct of the war. In one case it could perhaps be argued that the informal system was a factor in the radical reformulation of military goals. The French army was finished as a fighting force after the mutinies of 1917; French soldiers were willing to man the trenches but would not attack or act offensively. These mutinies have been explained variously as a consequence of heavy casualties and of a loss of confidence in the military elite. The British army also endured heavy casualties—especially on the Somme, and it has still to be demonstrated that the British soldiers had confidence in their generals, yet the British remained relatively reliable throughout the war. One significant difference between the British and French armies was that the latter did not adopt an active-front policy; as a consequence the informal organization was allowed an unimpeded development. This led to some most unwarlike situations. Thus one author records how a British artillery battery visiting the French was challenged by the latter to a shooting match; the British naturally ranged their guns on the German line but were stopped by the French who did not want to break the peace. The target finally chosen was a field empty of life. One might argue that such situations involving
continuous and overt co-operation would increase the soldiers' isolation from both the war in general and the aims of the state and military, and therefore be of a significance to an understanding of the 1917 mutinies.

Notes

2. J. H. Boraston, Sir Douglas Haig's Dispatches, London, J. M. Dent, 1920, pp. 3–4. Sir John French, Haig's predecessor, ordered the same policy. In the initial phases of the trench war he issued a memorandum urging all soldiers to use every opportunity possible to harass the enemy; see The History of the 5th Battalion, the Cameronians, Glasgow, Jackson & Son, 1936, p. 60.
13. Ibid., p. 192, see also p. 154.
15. See D. Jones, In Parenthesis, London, Faber, 1963, p. 195. Jones defines 'cushy' as 'used of any easy time, or comfortable place; but primarily of any sector where the enemy was inactive'.
16. Some quantitative evidence—of an approximate nature only—can be offered for this assertion. The trench-tours of two battalions—7th Royal Sussex and 2nd Royal Welch—were enumerated. Sectors were classified into quiet or active. Battle situations were excluded. During the period June 1915–January 1918, the 7th Sussex occupied approximately 21 sectors; of these 10 were quiet, 4 were active, while of 7 nothing conclusive was recorded. From November 1914 to December 1916, the 2nd Welch occupied 39 sectors; 14 were recorded as quiet, 10 as active, while of 15 there is nothing conclusive. The information was taken from Owen Rutter (ed.), History of the 7th Battalion the Royal Sussex Regiment, London, Times Publishing Co., 1934, and The War the Infantry Knew, op. cit.
17. Blunden, op. cit.; in the most recent edition of this book the words 'one of the soundest elements in the trench war' have been omitted.
22. Ian Hay, The First Hundred
The sociology of trench warfare 1914–18

24. Charles Packer, Return to Salona
27. See The War the Infantry Knew,
op. cit., p. 145.
30. See The War the Infantry Knew, p. 98.
31. Llewellyn Griffiths, Up to Mame
ez, London, Faber, 1931, p. 147; for a good general account of routiniza
tion and ritualization, see p. 71.
32. A. F. Wedd (ed.), German Students' War Letters, Methuen, 1929, p. 182.
33. Mark Seven, op. cit., p. 79.
34. Minenwerfer, a particularly large and lethal bomb.
36. Another clear example of this process is found in B. Adams, Nothing of Importance, New York, MacBrine, 1918, p. 145. Adams describes a quiet afternoon in the trenches which is interrupted by the arrival of rifle grenades. These are counted. 'It was just about touch and go whether we replied. If they [the rifle-grenades] went on up to about half a dozen . . . the bombing corporal . . . [would] let loose twenty in retaliation. But no . . . and the afternoon slumber was renewed. . . . Here between 1-5 rifle-grenades are defined as compatible with Live and Let Live. The formally prescribed reaction is to reply immediately with between 15-20. Such reaction is, however, inhibited. Twenty grenades is appropriate only where the initial activity violated the informal norm.
39. Seeman, ibid.
40. Scott, op. cit.
42. C. W. Mills, White Collar, New York, Oxford University Press.
43. 'Trench raid', an offensive activity of a minor and local character during which a small group of soldiers, under cover of night, silently crossed no-man's-land, entered the enemy trench and in a short, sharp, violent action committed the maximum destruction possible.
44. Mark Seven, op. cit.
eral Staff, London, Collins, 1920, p. 50, speaks of a 'common sympathy that is irresistible' between front fighters.
46. Isolation—this variant of aliena-
tion is defined by Seeman (op. cit.) as the situation in which the individual assigns low reward values to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued by society.
47. The press in particular was singed out as an object of resentment. Thus journalists were held to mis-
represent both the nature of the war and the sentiments of those engaged in the fighting. For a typical comment see S. Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer, London, Faber, 1930, p. 262.
48. J. Coleman, 'Academic Achieve-
ment and the Structure of Competi-
52. See Guy Chapman, The Passionate Prodigality, p. 146; see also pp. 41, 70.