

## **Diagnosing Dissent: Hysteria.**

### **Conscientious, Objection, and German Wartime Psychiatry, 1914 to 1918**

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Though much has been written about psychology, psychiatry and war, the literature has largely ignored the medicalization of Conscientious Objection in Germany. Elsewhere, CO's were frequently jailed, though states like Britain sometimes recognized legitimate objection. Instead of mainly criminalizing conscientious objection (as the NS-regime also later did), imperial Germany foremost dealt with it medically: individuals refusing service underwent institutional, psychiatric examination to determine the underlying disorder. This story is largely unexplored.

Though CO numbers were small, understanding their treatment does not merely illuminate a side story but cuts to the heart of scholarly considerations on the nature of German wartime psychiatry. This topic has largely been considered from the data concerning hysterical soldiers, and most analysis has focused on the darker side of these interventions, whether that was due to rationalizing efforts within wartime psychiatry or to a beginning descent into later NS-period depravity. Hence, research highlights psychiatrists' attention to national (versus patient) interests and the harsh manner in which soldiers were diagnosed and treated that ultimately called into question the very legitimacy of their illness and their manhood. Similarly, the focus has been on the downfall of Oppenheim's views in September 1916, the publications of leading experts like Gaupp, the electroshock treatments of hysterical soldiers, and the lack of pensions. Certainly, the treatment of CO's could also illuminate similar dark events. Yet this is only part of the story. Recent research on shell-shocked soldiers by scholars Peckl and Hermes has begun to question the extent to which this harsh treatment was routine by focusing on the difference between the official rhetoric concerning hysterics and the reality of treatment. While a good beginning, their analysis only scratches the surface of the larger issues. For example, not only did soldiers diagnosed with neurasthenia and hysteria often share similar treatment regimens, but the very etiological implications of those diagnoses (and others) were often less distinct and far less delegitimizing when read within the actual contexts of individual patient files than the secondary literature suggests. (Indeed, I argue that even the common interpretation of the official published literature on *Kriegszitterer* needs reexamination on this point.) The allegedly pivotal moment of September 1916 was in reality less important. The literature has also

overlooked the agency that soldier-patients had in negotiating their treatment and time in institutions. And, of course, the treatment of COs has been overlooked.

Arguing for the necessity of analyzing the wartime handling of dissent and its diagnosis (i.e. its medicalization) on a full spectrum that ranges from cases of hysteria to the extreme of full Conscientious Objection, this paper focuses on the Tuebingen Reserve-Lazarett, where Gaupp — a vocal expert on hysterics and Cos — practiced. Here, if anywhere, one expects to find soldiers treated in the harsh manner prescribed in official writings. One would imagine finding little sympathy for COs. Yet, the reality was far less harsh and delegitimizing than the secondary literature suggests. Likely less than half the hysterics diagnosed there were sent onwards to the infamous, specialized clinics. (Furthermore, many were not shunted off into work details afterwards.) Indeed, when treating soldiers, physicians recognized the damaging effects of war service on good men and the restorative results of rest and vacations home. Similarly, this attitude carried over to CO's, who were not simply dismissed as crazies and for whom Gaupp had real sympathy too.

With this analysis I will argue for a stark reappraisal of German wartime psychiatry.

This paper stems from my manuscript *Diagnosing Dissent: Hysterics, Deserters, and Conscientious Objectors in Germany during World War One*. Based on research from the psychiatric patient files of (literally!) thousands of soldiers — in both civilian and military hospitals — and published medical journals, the book was supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation and owes particular thanks to the Institut for Geschichte und Ethik der Medizin (Heidelberg) and Haus 5 (LVR-Klinik Dueren).