



“Give me the Scotsman Every Time:” Exploring Scottish National Identity Through World War I Prisoner of War Experiences

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“Give me the Scotsman Every Time:” Exploring Scottish National Identity Through
World War I Prisoner of War Experiences

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Abstract

This research examines the Scottish experience in World War I, emphasizing the ways in which the Great War experience magnified questions of identity, including how Scottish soldiers viewed themselves and how they were viewed by others, particularly their German adversaries. Among the research questions explored are: did captured Scottish soldiers identify as primarily Scottish or British or both? Were they treated differently than their British counterparts as a result of their Scottishness? If so, how? Did the war impact feelings of either Scottish differentiation or kinship, or both, as part of their greater British identity? If so, how?

This thesis further highlights the under-researched experience of Scottish prisoners of war (POWs) who were held in German prison camps and explores how their time in captivity affected questions of national identity. Ultimately, the Scottish experience in WWI was largely comparable to that of other Britons; however, patterns of Scottish POWs being singled out for humiliation, harsher treatment, and, paradoxically, curiosity and recruitment did exist and suggest a reinforcement of Scottish, rather than British, identity.



“I could see the men who were being thrown into the fire wore kilts; I could see plainly the kilt as they were being swung into the fire.”

Lance Corporal Richard Law, Cameron Highlanders, 4 June 1917

Original artwork depicting kilted soldiers being thrown in a fire by Daniel Stirling-Talbert

Dedication

To my great-grand uncle, Private Kenneth John Maclean, of the Gordon Highlanders, POW, 1914-1918—your legacy lives on. And to my adored children, Lucy, Mae, and Owen, you can do hard things.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Flynn Cratty for believing in me and in this project from the beginning. Your confidence in me means more than you'll ever know. Thank you for your time, positivity, ideas, and shared passion for Scottish history. I would like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Ariane Liazos, whose unwavering support and expertise have been invaluable since my first class at Harvard Extension. Your patience and exceptional teaching have been instrumental in my success in this program.

Special thanks to Josephine Dixon at the National Records of Scotland and Jennifer Marshall at the Black Watch Museum for helping me dig deep in the archives to uncover and share the stories of Scottish prisoners of war. My sincere appreciation also goes to Sue Gilroy, the ultimate librarian, for your indispensable assistance early in this project, and to Dr. Maura Henry, whose encouragement and confidence made me feel empowered to pursue this endeavor.

My deepest gratitude to my Uncle Gord. I will forever cherish the time we spent together during this program. Our conversations about Cambodia, the G.I. Bill, the Cold War, and Scottish prisoners of war were the highlight of the last five years. I hope we never stop learning and having fun together. Gang forward!

Lastly, to my family. Thank you for believing in me.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

Chapter I introduces the key questions explored in this thesis: did WWI Scottish soldiers identify as primarily Scottish or British, or both? Were Scottish POWs treated differently than their English counterparts because of their identity as Scots? If so, how? Did the war create or enhance feelings of Scottish otherness? This chapter offers an overview of the historiography of Scottish military and national identity, the Scottish experience in WWI, and WWI prisoners of war. It outlines the sources used, including government interviews of repatriated British POWs, along with government reports and newspaper archives. Limitations of the research, involving destroyed records and absence of living survivors is also discussed. Chapter I concludes with the assertion that this thesis contributes to the scholarly discussion by adding new insights into the experience of Scottish prisoners in WWI.

In 2014, Scotland held a national referendum posing the question: “Should Scotland be an independent country?” Nearly 45% of Scottish voters voted in favor of independence while 55% voted to stay within the United Kingdom. Several variables help explain the support for Scottish independence, but a principal, recurring variable is a sense of deep-rooted Scottish national identity.¹

¹ Charles Pattie and Ron Johnston, “Sticking to the Union? Nationalism, Inequality and Political Disaffection and the Geography of Scotland’s 2014 Independence Referendum,” *Regional & Federal Studies* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 83–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2016.1251907>.

One hundred years prior to the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, Scotland struggled with the same dilemma, questioning whether it would be better ruled by a Scottish Parliament. Scottish MP (Member of Parliament) William Cowan introduced a Home Rule Bill in the British Parliament in 1913, arguing, “We have a right, with all our separate national characteristics, to manage our own affairs in our own way.”² World War I broke out shortly after the Home Rule Bill received a second reading in Parliament in May 1914, causing the question of Scottish home rule to be tabled in Parliament and suspended in the national mind amidst post-war political instability and the economic downturn of the 1920s.³

Nevertheless, existing, but limited, research indicates that WWI did not dampen, but instead, strengthened notions of Scottish national identity—an identity largely built on a revived sense of Scottish military distinctiveness earned in prior centuries.⁴ Moreover, the specific experiences of numbers of Scottish prisoners of war likely strengthened their Scottish identity, separate from that of their fellow Britons. Through examination of personal accounts, newspaper archives, correspondence, government reports, and most pertinently, official government interviews of repatriated British

² Jamie Ross, “Scottish Independence: The Parliament That Never Was,” *BBC News*, September 16, 2014, sec. Scotland politics, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-29048884>.

³ Ross, “Scottish Independence: The Parliament That Never Was.”

⁴ Stuart Allan and Allan Carswell, *The Thin Red Line: War, Empire and Visions of Scotland* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 2004); Hew Strachan, “Scotland's Military Identity,” *Scottish Historical Review* 85 (2006): 329, <https://doi.org/10.3366/shr.2007.0026>; Hew Strachan, “The Scottish Soldier and Scotland, 1914-1918,” in *A Global Force: War, Identities, and Scotland's Diaspora* by Wendy Ugolini and David Forsyth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Thomas Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts: The Highland Soldier in the Great War* (Warwick: Helion & Company Limited, 2019); Gill Plain, ed., *Scotland and the First World War: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Bannockburn* (Lewisburg, PA: Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press; The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2017); Wendy Ugolini and David Forsyth, *A Global Force: War, Identities and Scotland's Diaspora* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

prisoners of war, I contend that the Scottish experience in WWI, and notably that of Scottish prisoners of war (POWs) in Germany, reinforced a unique Scottish identity.

Historiography

The topic of Scottish prisoners of war in World War I is not treated at length in any existing literature but is briefly touched on as part of larger studies of three distinct topics: the Scottish experience in World War I, the connection between Scottish military identity and Scottish national identity, and prisoners of war in World War I. The centenary of the beginning of World War I in 1914 yielded new scholarship regarding these three specific topics. However, these topics have yet to be linked to each other in the literature as they pertain to whether and how the Scottish WWI POW experience had an impact on Scottish national identity.

The most extensive collection of research regarding the topic of Scottish POWs in World War I was a National Records of Scotland (NRS) 2018 centenary exhibit entitled, “For You the War is Over.” The exhibit featured the experiences of four Scottish WWI POWs held in Germany and displayed photographs, letters, maps, and audio recordings of the repatriated prisoners. The exhibit largely focused on the escape attempts of Lieutenant Colin Campbell.⁵ To date, this is the only aggregation of research to focus solely on the Scottish prisoner of war experience in the Great War. This thesis builds on previous accounts of Scotland in WWI, while examining with more depth the war’s impact on Scottish military and national identity. It provides new research that shows

⁵ “For You the War is Over,” National Records of Scotland, last modified December 2024, <https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20241128124626/https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2018/for-you-the-war-is-over>.

how Scottish POWs in German captivity were singled out for their Scottishness and examines the impact of those experiences.

Scholarship concerning various aspects of the Great War accelerated in the years leading up to, and during, the centenary of the war (2014-2018). To that point, there had been major gaps in the study of small-scale topics relating to Scotland's role in the war.⁶ Scotland's military role in World War I received academic attention, although that topic is often included in broader studies of British and other Allied contributions to, and actions in, the war effort. Similarly, several books include sections or chapters devoted to Scotland's role in World War I as part of more comprehensive studies, but few historians made it the subject of an entire book until the one-hundred-year anniversary of the war.⁷ E.W. McFarland notes, "it is unfortunate, if understandable, that the Scottish experience is seldom disaggregated in these British and international overviews. Indeed, Scottish historians themselves have been slow to give concentrated attention to the impact of the Great War."⁸ This began to change in the late twentieth century as more Scotland-specific research was undertaken. Two academic symposia produced books that summarized each symposium's findings regarding the Scottish experience in World War I: *Scotland in the*

⁶ Catriona MacDonald cites two notable exceptions: Christopher Harvie's 1981 *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, with an emphasis on the political and economic consequences of World War I on Scotland, and Stewart J. Brown's 1991 religious study "'A Solemn Purification by Fire': Responses to the Great War in the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, 1914-19." Catriona M. M. MacDonald and E. W. McFarland, *Scotland and the Great War* (East Lothian, Scotland: Tuckwell Press, 1999), 6.

⁷ The 1996 book *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, edited by Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle, includes a chapter by Edward Spiers titled, "The Scottish Soldier at War." Richard Finlay's 2004 book, *Modern Scotland, 1914-2000*, touches on the subject of World War I as it pertains to modern Scottish history, whereas Niall Ferguson's 1998 book, *The Pity of War: Explaining WWI* exclusively focuses on the causes and outcomes of the Great War. The Scottish element of the war is not a focus for Ferguson, though he makes the highly contested claim that a disproportionate number of Scotsman (26.4%) were killed in the war, and that "only the Serbian and Turkish armies sustained such severe casualties. Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining WWI* (Basic Books, 1999), 20.

⁸ Catriona M. M. MacDonald and E. W. McFarland, *Scotland and the Great War* (East Lothian, Scotland: Tuckwell Press, 1999), 4.

Great War, by Catriona M.M. MacDonald and E.W. McFarland (1999) and *Scotland and the First World War: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Bannockburn*, edited by Gill Plain (2017).

Scotland in the Great War is largely a compilation of secondary sources concerning the impact of the Great War on Scotland, but even as such, functions as one of the earliest exclusive studies of the impact of WWI on Scotland. A comprehensive set of topics relating to the Scottish war experience including economic and political repercussions, the anti-war movement, recruitment and military experience, anti-German sentiment, religious culture, and construction of the Scottish National War Memorial provides a foundational study from which to further examine specific topics. Perhaps most significantly, the work of MacDonald and McFarland, as noted by Hamish Fraser, underscores the ways in which the Great War furthered a unique Scottish identity (separate from the English), “in spite of nearly 300 years of shared experience.”⁹

In contrast, *Scotland and the First World War* editor Gill Plain used a transhistorical approach in her study of World War I Scotland, arguing the need to view Scotland’s military experience through the prism of Scottish historic myths and cultural themes of Scottish history. From Scottish literature, Plain, along with author Michael Brown, studies “the formation of the narratives that would so powerfully shape Scottish culture in 1914.”¹⁰ Plain provides valuable insights into how Scotland’s military tradition, particularly the Battle of Bannockburn, has influenced Scottish national identity. She

⁹ W. Hamish Fraser, review of *Scotland and the Great War*, by Catriona M. M. MacDonald and E. W. McFarland, *American Historical Review* (October 2000): 1392, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1086/ahr/105.4.1392>.

¹⁰ Plain, *Scotland and the First World War*, xx.

argues that the enduring belief in Scottish martial prowess—whether rooted in myth or reality—served as a powerful motivator for Scots to fight in World War I, shaping both their mindset and actions throughout the conflict.

In 2019, Thomas Greenshields published the preeminent work to date on Scottish Highland regiments in World War I in *Those Bloody Kilts: The Highland Soldier in the Great War*. Greenshields's depth of sources, including letters, pictures, diaries, military records, and interviews, provides the most extensive, current collection of primary source evidence relating to the Scottish military experience in WWI.¹¹ The study of the various kilted Highland regiments demonstrates that "Highland" regiments were most commonly comprised of both Highland and Lowland Scots—making Greenshields' work more expansive than his title suggests, while also showing how the Highland martial tradition permeated the Scottish population as a whole.¹² Although Scottish identity is not the sole focus of Greenshields's work, his chapters "Identity" and "Self-Image and Reputation" are particularly insightful. Greenshields includes many firsthand accounts of Scottish soldiers conveying how they viewed themselves. From his exhaustive research, Greenshields contends that Scottish kilted regiments possessed a distinct identity, whether they were comprised of authentic Highland soldiers or even based in Scotland. This identity played a significant role in shaping military culture and morale in World War I.

¹¹ *Those Bloody Kilts* is based on primary sources found in the Imperial War Museum, the Liddle Collection (University of Leeds), the National Library of Scotland, and regimental museums throughout Scotland.

¹² Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 19.

Greenshields's work builds on the foundations of World War I historian Hew Strachan and military historian Edward Spiers, both of whom published multiple studies on Scottish military history and identity. Strachan's scholarship includes specific articles relating to the Scottish military experience in World War I but also traces the ancient roots of Scottish military identity and its connection to Scottish national identity. For his study of the Scottish soldier in WWI, Strachan derived much of his primary source material from written accounts and poetry of Scottish authors and soldiers—works that Strachan suggests were so closely associated with government war propaganda that they were undervalued by historians for decades as being suspect.¹³ Author Trevor Royle similarly examines Scottish literature and poetry stemming from the Great War but emphasizes the ways in which shared experiences failed to result in shared ideologies.¹⁴

Ultimately, Strachan connects Scottish military experience and identity with Scottish national identity, arguing that, “after 1918, as opposed to before 1914, many more Scots had military experience, and much of it had been acquired through wearing the cap badge of a famous Scottish regiment, which in turn ensured that regimental identity became the vessel for national identity.”¹⁵

Like Strachan, Edward Spiers significantly enhances the understanding of Scottish military history but emphasizes the British role in instilling and operationalizing the idea of a special Scottish military identity during the Victorian era. Additionally, Spiers examines the subsequent export of the Scottish military identity throughout the

¹³ Strachan, “The Scottish Soldier and Scotland,” 58.

¹⁴ Trevor Royle, *In Flanders Fields: Scottish Poetry and Prose of the First World War* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Pub., Co., 1990).

¹⁵ Strachan, “The Scottish Soldier and Scotland,” 62.

British Empire. Spiers draws on Queen Victoria's correspondence and journals to demonstrate her fascination with Highland culture and explain why she, along with British Secretary of State Hugh Childers, imposed Highland traditions and dress on regiments from the Scottish Lowlands. This, while strengthening the manpower of Highland regiments and deploying them in defense of the Empire.¹⁶

Spiers points to the writing of Scottish soldiers fighting in the Crimean War and during the Indian Mutiny as playing a crucial role in disseminating the reputation of the Highland soldier as the enforcer of the Empire.¹⁷ He writes, "few studies have used the campaign correspondence of Scottish soldiers, much of it published in the provincial press on both sides of the border, to illustrate their findings."¹⁸ Spiers likewise emphasizes the imagery associated with Scottish soldiers during the late nineteenth century as being crucial to providing a visual component to the growing reputation of the Highland soldier. Songs, prints, paintings, illustrated engravings, and poems all helped establish the reputation of the Scottish soldier, according to Spiers.

In contrast to the foregoing authors who contend that World War I renewed Scottish military and national identity, Ewen Cameron takes a more skeptical approach in his assessment of the effects of the Great War on Scotland. Cameron suggests that WWI was the "site of several enduring myths" including "that Scotland contributed

¹⁶ Edward M. Spiers, "Forging Nationhood: Scottish Imperial Identity and the Construction of Nationhood in the Dominions, 1880–1914," in *A Global Force: War, Identities, and Scotland's Diaspora* by Wendy Ugolini and David Forsyth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 33-35.

¹⁷ Edward M. Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854-1902* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) 214.

¹⁸ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*, 1-2.

disproportionately in terms of volunteers and war deaths.”¹⁹ Cameron contests the notion that the Great War “can be seen as a watershed in cultural terms.”²⁰ Though not the focus of his 2010 book *Impaled Upon a Thistle: Scotland Since 1880*, Cameron argues that “the Scottish experience in the Great War was not particularly distinctive” and that there were only “variations at the margins.”²¹

Spiers agrees with Cameron to some extent, writing “in many respects the Scottish military experience largely mirrored that of their English counterparts.”²² However, Spiers does note a key difference, saying “the Highland battalions, the 9th battalions of the HLI [Highland Light Infantry] and the Royal Scots and some diaspora Scottish units had a distinctive trench experience by virtue of wearing the kilt.”²³ The physical distinction of the kilt was one of the animating factors in Scottish soldiers receiving differentiated treatment in German captivity and will be discussed later. The work of Spiers and Strachan underscores the uniqueness of the Scottish Great War experience in that it redefined Scottish national identity rooted in a revitalized military identity.²⁴

The historiography regarding WWI prisoners of war similarly saw renewed interest in the late twentieth century but shifted away from simply recounting the experiences of WWI POWs to the inclusion of more nuanced analyses of that experience.

¹⁹ Ewen Cameron, review of *Scotland and the First World War: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Bannockburn*, edited by Gill Plain, *First World War Studies* 13, no. 2–3 (2022): 193–94, doi:10.1080/19475020.2023.2254083.

²⁰ Cameron, review of *Scotland and the First World War: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Bannockburn*.

²¹ Ewen Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle: Scotland Since 1880* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 104.

²² Edward Spiers, “The Scottish Soldier at War,” in *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, ed. Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle (Cooper, 1996), 316.

²³ Spiers, “The Scottish Soldier at War,” 317.

²⁴ Spiers, “Forging Nationhood,” 58.

The work of Richard B. Speed stood as the most significant study of WWI POWs until the centenary of the war and examines the experience in the context of the then-prevailing international laws of war, assessing the legality of the belligerents' treatment of prisoners.²⁵

Drawing on previously untapped notes taken by neutral American diplomatic observers, Speed states plainly that, "despite the pressures of total war that drove the European powers to violate many traditional restraints during the Great War, on the whole, four of the five states under consideration treated military prisoners as well as could be reasonably expected."²⁶ (Russia was the exception; Speed argues that "Russia was simply not capable of caring for prisoners in its custody in accordance with the standards codified in international law.")²⁷ Speed's work contributes a foundational legal perspective on the WWI POW experience and provides a baseline study on which later scholars could build, especially through the incorporation of primary sources from outside the U.S., in addition to those from American diplomatic sources.

Like Speed, Heather Jones uses a legalistic approach in her comparative study of World War I prisoners of war. Jones expands on Speed's work by incorporating sources from German, French, and British archives into her study, similarly analyzing the degree to which belligerent nations adhered to Hague Convention standards. Jones adds considerable scholarship regarding the impact of POWs' forced labor, arguing that it was part of a radicalized system of reprisals by both sides. In addition to a scathing review of

²⁵ Richard B. Speed, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

²⁶ Speed, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War*, 3.

²⁷ Speed, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War*, 2.

German treatment of POWs in the latter half of the war, Jones concludes that “the key overlooked innovation of the First World War was the forced labour company.”²⁸

Although Jones emphasizes the more favorable treatment officers received than that of enlisted troops, she does not explore the differences in treatment experienced by soldiers of different nationalities, and rarely distinguishes among British nationalities. However, Jones's overarching thesis that the effects of total war led to brutalization of POWs lends relevance to the study of Scottish prisoners of war who endured these consequences.

A handful of modern works focus on the more personal day-to-day experience of POWs, particularly British POWs held in German prison camps. Michael Moynihan writes, “apart from a spate of firsthand accounts published in the 1920s and long since out of print, almost nothing has been written about the 6,482 British officers and 163,907 other ranks who were taken prisoner in the First World War.”²⁹ Moynihan sought to remedy the gap by exploring the diaries of seven British prisoners of war, including Captain Douglas Lyall Grant, of the London Scottish.³⁰ Tellingly, Moynihan discovered that the majority of POWs he studied wished to forget their experience as a POW and rarely spoke about it.

In a similar way, Richard Van Emden tells the story of ten British prisoners of war, with attention given to different aspects of the POW experience ranging from the moment of capture to reintegration into society upon repatriation.³¹ Based on interviews

²⁸ Heather Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War in the First World War: Britain, France, and Germany, 1914-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5.

²⁹ Michael Moynihan, *Black Bread and Barbed Wire: Prisoners in the First World War* (London: Cooper, 1978).

³⁰ Captain Grant was born in England to Scottish parents. Moynihan, *Black Bread and Barbed Wire*, 80.

³¹ Richard Van Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser: The Last POWs of the Great War*, United States: Pen and Sword Books, 2009.

with the surviving POWs, Van Emden's accounts offer a candor and richness that is often absent in the legal studies of the prisoner of war experience.

John Lewis-Stempel expanded on the work of Moynihan and Van Emden by making use of unpublished archives in the British National Archives and Imperial War Museum.³² Lewis-Stempel began to fill gaps in the examination of WWI British POWs—gaps that exists because, according to Lewis-Stempel, “the experience of the British prisoner of war became in the popular view, either unremarkable—or, if direly awful, a politically fabricated falsehood.”³³ Lewis-Stempel provides fresh research regarding previously underreported aspects of POWs' time in captivity, including the circumstances surrounding their transport to prison camps, the hardship of working in labor camps, and the seemingly shameless harsh treatment of the British by the Germans. Lewis-Stempel goes so far as to argue that British POWs were five times more likely to die in a German POW camp than their French counterparts when length of incarceration and absence of battlefield wounds are considered.³⁴ Though Lewis-Stempel provides an in-depth look at WWI British prisoners of war, he does not distinguish Scottish soldiers from other British soldiers. However, in relaying their names and regiments, the nationality of the soldier can be surmised and often verified.

Oliver Wilkinson similarly examines the British prisoner of war experience but he emphasizes “the centrality of identity” and perceptions of self among the physically

³² John Lewis-Stempel, *The War Behind the Wire: The Life, Death and Glory of British Prisoners of War, 1914-18* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014).

³³ Lewis-Stempel, *The War Behind the Wire*, xvii.

³⁴ Lewis-Stempel, *The War Behind the Wire*, 111.

marginalized British prisoners of war.³⁵ Although Wilkinson's study aligns with the work of this thesis, he focuses on the "overarching 'British' identity" of prisoners of war, while acknowledging that the approach "is not intended to imply that the British servicemen were a single, homogenous group who responded to captivity in a uniform manner."³⁶ Wilkinson argues that the stratified social structures of British society emerged within the prison camps, highlighting a crucial way in which wartime captivity did not function as the social equalizer often associated with war.³⁷ Wilkinson's focus on the combined British identity leaves room for further study of identity as it pertains to the specific nationalities of the United Kingdom.

Most recently, Rotem Kowner and Iris Rachaminov seek to address what they call the 'historiographical marginalization' of the World War I prisoner of war experience, contending that while chemical warfare and shell shock are often seen as the defining experiences of the war, the suffering of POWs was just as salient.³⁸ Their work seeks to establish internment as a key dimension of the Great War, arguing that, in many ways, discrimination against, and harsh treatment of, ethnic, racial, and nationality groupings during WWI laid the groundwork for the internment practices in World War II. They expand the study of WWI military prisoners of war to include civilian internees and political prisoners, examining the impact of those experiences that continue to this day.³⁹ While their study does not focus specifically on British prisoners of war, it adds

³⁵ Oliver Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War in First World War Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 269.

³⁶ Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War*, 12-13.

³⁷ Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War*, 77.

³⁸ Rotem Kowner and Iris Rachaminov, *Out of Line, Out of Place: A Global History of World War I Internments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), 2.

³⁹ Kowner and Rachaminov, *Out of Line, Out of Place*, 8.

considerable value in its attention to the non-military WWI prisoner or internment experience.

Academic literature regarding Scottish national identity as it relates to World War I has steadily increased since the centenary of the war in 2014. Likewise, research relating to British prisoners of war in WWI has seen renewed interest. Yet, work on Scottish prisoners of war during WWI remains limited, and there is no definitive consensus about the impact of that experience on their Scottish national identity.

Moreover, other pertinent questions remain unanswered, prompting further consideration: did the treatment of Scottish POWs change over time and as interactions between German and Scottish soldiers on the battlefield increased? Was there a reciprocal element in the German treatment of British POWs—that is, how did reprisals affect the POW experience for different nationalities? Were Scottish POW experiences overlooked or forgotten, as Lewis-Stempel suggests, because some POW experiences were used as propaganda? What were the unique POW experiences of the other British nationalities?

In this study, there is a concentrated exploration of whether and how the Scottish POW experience had an impact on Scottish national identity. Studying WWI Scottish soldiers through the lens of the POW experience—where questions of identity often were magnified—has yielded new insights that add to the historiography of Scotland in World War I.

Methodology and Sources

Memoirs, diaries, and correspondence serve as the principal primary source material from which knowledge of the individual Scottish soldier's experience in World War I is derived. These primary sources, combined with less personal but informative military records, provide context and insight into the daily life of a WWI Scottish soldier. Scholars do question, however, how much historical reliability may be granted to correspondence from soldiers. In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell dubs the stoic style of British letter-writing from the front to be "British Phlegm," explaining that, "to affect to be entirely unflappable; one speaks as if the war were entirely normal and matter-of-fact...the trick was to fill the page by saying nothing and to offer the maximum number of clichés."⁴⁰ Fussell argues that "clearly, any historian would err badly who relied on letters for factual testimony."⁴¹ This dilemma is not unique to British correspondence, as Martyn Lyons similarly notes in his study of French WWI correspondence where he remarks on "the danger of making too many assumptions about the value of personal correspondence."⁴²

Not only was correspondence between British troops and civilians back home largely void of any of the wartime trauma or seemingly authentic feelings from life in the trenches, but an official censorship system was applied by the British to troop correspondence, similar to the censorship employed by all other belligerent states. The British government censorship had several objectives, including the prevention of

⁴⁰ Paul Fussell and J.M. Winter, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196-198.

⁴¹ Fussell and Winter, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 217.

⁴² Martyn Lyons, "French Soldiers and Their Correspondence: Towards a History of Writing Practices in the First World War," *French History* 17 (2003): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/17.1.79>.

valuable intelligence being intercepted, the assessment of troop morale, and perhaps most importantly, control of the public's perception of the war.⁴³ Censorship was two-fold for British prisoners of war in Germany, as POW correspondence was also censored by German prison camp staff.

Wilkinson writes that the war and contemporary politics were prohibited subjects in POW letters sent or received, and that "scathing comments about the camp or captors were likely to find the censor's 'waste paper basket' and could lead to punishment for the writer."⁴⁴ A letter from a Scottish POW published in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* in December 1914 confirmed the proscription against war talk, stating, "When you write do not say anything about the war, as it is not allowed."⁴⁵ Thus, the letters of British POWs certainly still hold value, but are limited in that unfiltered details of life and feelings in German prison camps could not pass the censors.

Although the literature to date has been informed by memoirs, letters, diaries and military histories, as cited above, there remain valuable primary sources that have yet to be mined as they pertain to Scottish WWI POWs. The primary source material for this thesis stems from two archival collections found in the United Kingdom National Archives: War Office 161 series (WO161) and Foreign Office: Prisoners of War and Aliens: General Correspondence from 1906 (FO 383). WO161 reports on the experiences of over 3,000 British POWs, based on interviews conducted by the Committee on the

⁴³ Lewis-Stempel, *The War behind the Wire*, 112; Alexander M. Nordlund, "'Remember Me Most Kindly': Identity, Memory, and Mundanity in British Letter-Writing from the First World War" (PhD Diss., University of Georgia, 2020), 8, ProQuest, (2410466257); and David Englander, "Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War," *War in History* 1 (1994): 300–318, <https://doi.org/10.1177/096834459400100304>.

⁴⁴ Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War*, 231.

⁴⁵ "Dundee Man Prisoner of War," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, December 11, 1914, British Newspaper Archive.

Treatment of British Prisoners of War before the Armistice was signed in November 1918.

FO383 is more wide-ranging in scope, as it includes records relating to camp inspections conducted by neutral observers, interviews with repatriated or escaped POWs, parcel and mail delivery issues, investigations into the status of specific prisoners of war, legal issues relating to the death of prisoners, financial inquiries, and activity reports of relief organizations, among other topics.⁴⁶

Another government document, the “Report of the Transport of British PoWs to Germany between August 1914 and December 1914” discusses the specific treatment of British (including Scottish) POWs. The report is based on interviews of forty-eight British officers and seventy-seven NCOs (non-commissioned officers) and, abridged, became the 1918 booklet, *The Quality of Mercy*, featuring the experiences of several Scottish prisoners of war. Five other reports issued by the Government Committee on Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War also add perspective on the POW experience of British soldiers in Germany.⁴⁷

A significant limitation of the research for this thesis is the shortage of surviving records. The United Kingdom National Archives website explains that extensive portions of WWI records were destroyed in WWII, stating, “In September 1940, as the result of a

⁴⁶ “Foreign Office: Prisoners of War and Aliens Department: General Correspondence from 1906,” The National Archives, accessed December 8, 2024, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C7697>.

⁴⁷ Government Committee on Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War, Report on Typhus Epidemic at Gardelegen; Government Committee on Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War, The Horrors of Wittenberg; Government Committee on Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War, Behind the Firing Lines in France and Belgium; Government Committee on Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War, Report on the Employment in Coal and Salt Mines of the British POWs in Germany; National War Aims Committee, Prisoners of Prussia: Official Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War by the Enemy during 1918.

fire caused by an incendiary bomb at the War Office Record Store in Arnside Street, London, approximately two thirds of 6.5 million soldiers' documents for the First World War were destroyed. Those records which survived were mostly charred or water damaged and unfit for consultation and became known as the 'burnt documents'.”⁴⁸

Further limitations include limited access to and/or translation barriers with respect to non-English language sources, as well as the fact that there are no surviving former Scottish WWI POWs. However, despite these limitations, the primary sources available do shed new light on the principal questions of this research: how Scottish soldiers viewed themselves and how they were viewed by others, whether Scottish prisoners of war received differentiated treatment, and the extent to which the WWI Scottish POW experience contributed to a modern Scottish national identity.

Throughout the Great War, and in subsequent historical accountings, Scottish troops are systematically identified as British, suggesting a uniformity in experience, or at least, an experience so similar to that of all other UK soldiers as to not generally merit their own separate history. While acknowledging that, overall, the wartime experience was indeed similar for the composite nationalities fighting under the British flag—especially when compared to that of their French and Russian allies—there is little consideration given in the literature as to how the Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and English experiences in the war could vary from one another. This raises the question of how the Scots perceived themselves and their experience, and the impact of that experience. Personal accounts of Scottish soldiers lay open the contrast in wartime experiences

⁴⁸ “War Office: Soldiers' Documents, First World War 'Burnt Documents' (Microfilm Copies),” The National Archives, accessed December 8, 2024, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C14567>.

between the Scots on one hand, and the other British nationalities on the other—primarily because of the deeper and more intimate connective tissue between the Scots’ military and national identities.

Although fighting for the British army could have brought the British ethnicities/nationalities closer together and given prominence to cultural similarities, evidence suggests that, at times, it had the opposite effect. Highland regiments, with their kilts, bagpipes, and cultural traditions, were naturally distinguished from their English comrades. Scottish cultural nationalism—that is, the emphasis on shared traditions, peculiarities, and heritage—was strengthened by the Scottish experience in World War I.

Chapter II.

Scottish Soldiers: Self-Perception vs. German Perception

This chapter examines the roots of Scottish military identity by tracing the evolution of the Highland soldier and by analyzing England's role in developing Scottish military identity. The study of primary source materials considers Scottish perceptions of self and whether soldiers in Scots' regiments identified as Scottish, British, or both. This chapter also surveys German perceptions of Scottish soldiers. Although translated German primary source evidence is limited, German propaganda postcards, along with reported German intelligence documents, provide a better understanding of how the Germans viewed Scottish soldiers, particularly Scottish prisoners of war.

Thirty years prior to the outbreak of World War I, the Highland regiments of the British Army were unable to fill their single battalion regiments with Highland recruits.⁴⁹ By the Great War's end in 1918, the expanded Scottish regiments had more than twenty kilted battalions in total. The Scottish regiments not only featured prominently in the imagery of the British Army but served as the symbol of Scottish national identity—an identity partially built on a revived and reaffirmed version of the Scottish military distinctiveness developed centuries before. The history of how a Scottish Highland military identity was adopted as part of the greater Scottish national identity, and the subsequent export of this identity to other nation-states, is crucial to understanding how

⁴⁹ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 17.

the interwoven military and national identities impacted the Scottish experience in World War I.

Scotland's geography is characterized by two major geographic areas: the Highlands and the Lowlands. The Scottish Highlands are traditionally recognized as the territories northwest of the Highland Boundary Fault and are known for their sparsely populated, harsh, mountainous landscapes. As early as the twelfth and, possibly even eleventh, century, a clan system emerged in the Scottish Highlands in which family units, under the leadership of a clan chief, ruled portions of the territory.⁵⁰ In addition to internal fighting among rival clans for wealth and land, the Highlanders' principal adversaries were the English, who continuously sought to conquer their northern neighbor.

The notion of Scottish Highlanders as a "martial race" or, the idea of an inherent Scottish fighting spirit and capability, derived largely from the English, the Highland Scots' most frequent enemy for the better part of 400 years. Strachan explains that it was English perceptions of the Highlanders' ethnicity and character, rather than governing power, that led to the belief that Highlanders were natural fighters. He writes, "the characteristics of the martial races were threefold: they were northern, not southern; they came from mountains, not from the plains; they were rural peoples, not urban."⁵¹

In contrast, Scottish Lowlanders were viewed as being "preoccupied with commerce and industry, with law and learning."⁵² Ian Whyte argues that, "The difference

⁵⁰ Martin MacGregor, "Clans of the Highlands and Islands," in *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History*, ed. Michael Lynch (Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199234820.001.0001/acref-9780199234820-e-54>.

⁵¹ Strachan, "Scotland's Military Identity," 316.

⁵² Strachan, "Scotland's Military Identity," 316.

in language, culture, and social structure between the Highlands and the Lowlands engendered mutual distrust and suspicion which made the Highland Line perhaps the sharpest cultural and economic barrier in Britain.”⁵³ The reputation of the Highlanders as an inherently martial people was further burnished by landmark Scottish victories against the English, most notably the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314.

Despite some notable battlefield successes, Scotland overall did not have an impressive military track record against the English. Yet, as TM Devine says, “there is much truth in the old saying that Scotland was born fighting,”⁵⁴ and nowhere was this more evident than in the movement of the seventeenth-century Scottish Covenanters. The Covenanters fought against royal authority in the name of Scottish religious and political freedom. Although the Scots could not match English political and fiscal resources, their relentless fighting spirit, coupled with the commitment to Scottish Protestantism, was a driving force in the Covenanters’ ability to raise a formidable army that was able to dictate terms to the English monarch.⁵⁵

Ultimately, however, the power of the English crown, and the idea of economic security the Crown could help provide, prevailed. The 1707 Act of Union united Scotland with England and reduced the conflict between Scotland and England, but did not

⁵³ Ian D. Whyte, “Economy of the Highlands and Islands,” in *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History*, ed. Michael Lynch (Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199234820.001.0001/acref-9780199234820-e-97>.

⁵⁴ Allan and Carswell, *The Thin Red Line*, 8.

⁵⁵ Allan and Carswell, *The Thin Red Line*, 51.

extinguish it entirely.⁵⁶ The English perception of the Highlanders as inherently warrior-like deeply permeated English and, later, British thinking.

The eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment pushed back against the perception of the Highlanders as a martial race. Scottish Enlightenment scholars rejected notions of Scotsmen as natural soldiers and argued that Scots should pursue more productive interests.⁵⁷ Enlightenment thinking was not the only contributing factor in the decline of the perception of the indomitability of the clan-based Highland warrior. The Highlanders suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the English at Culloden in 1746. This was followed by the Highland Clearances (1750-1860), a period in which large-scale population displacement from the Highlands significantly depleted the manpower available for the Highland regiments. Many Highlanders emigrated to North America or moved to urban areas of Scotland in search of employment.⁵⁸ From the mid-eighteenth century until the start of WWI, Scottish recruits in the British army fell disproportionately below their ten percent share of the United Kingdom's population.⁵⁹ On the eve of WWI, the army had to recruit outside the Highlands to fill the five kilted, single-battalion "Highland" regiments that remained a part of the British army.⁶⁰

Despite the dilution of the Highland regiments with non-Highlanders in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, and the overall decline in Scottish military enlistment, perceptions of the Scots' martial character persisted. This idea was enhanced by actual

⁵⁶ The eighteenth-century Jacobite risings attempted to restore the Stuart line to the British throne but ended in defeat at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. This was the last major battle between England and Scotland. Allan and Carswell, *The Thin Red Line*, 55.

⁵⁷ Strachan, "The Scottish Soldier and Scotland," 54.

⁵⁸ Spiers, "Forging Nationhood," 33-34.

⁵⁹ Strachan, "The Scottish Soldier and Scotland," 54.

⁶⁰ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 17.

battlefield heroics. Crucial Scottish contributions to victories on behalf of the British Empire were recognized in the Napoleonic Wars (Egypt, the Peninsula, Waterloo), the Crimean War, and the 1857 Indian Rebellion.⁶¹ Spiers argues that “as the empire approached its zenith in the late nineteenth century, the fighting reputation of the Scottish soldier attained fresh heights in achievement, reportage and imagery.”⁶² Scottish soldiers became emblematic of the British Empire and helped foster a sense of distinct achievement and belonging for Scots, while also securing widespread recognition of their value within the empire. Strachan argues that “Scots now acted out their warrior identity, and in doing so confirmed their Unionism, and even more their identification with the empire.”⁶³

The symbol predominantly associated with the Highland soldier was the kilt, exclusively worn by Highland regiments up to this point. To the kilt was added the image of the Highland bagpiper following the Battle of Dargai Heights in 1897. The battle was part of the British Tirah campaign in which Gordon Highlanders successfully captured the Indian territory of Dargai after two English regiments failed to do so. An image from the battle came to be imprinted on the English and international psyche—a lone, injured bagpiper—George Findlater of the 1st Gordons, bravely playing the bagpipes under fire to inspire his fellow soldiers to advance in battle.⁶⁴ Findlater, continuing to play the pipes, propped against a boulder, unable to walk after sustaining a broken ankle, was widely

⁶¹ Spiers, “Forging Nationhood,” 32.

⁶² Spiers, “Forging Nationhood,” 32.

⁶³ Jenny Macleod, “‘By Scottish Hands, with Scottish Money, on Scottish Soil’: The Scottish National War Memorial and National Identity,” *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 1 (2010): 73–96. doi:10.1086/644535.

⁶⁴ Spiers, “Forging Nationhood,” 36.

pictured in the press and helped account for the Highland soldier becoming emblematic of the Empire.

A perception of the extraordinary fitness and physical stature of soldiers in the Highland regiments also set them apart. British Major-General Sir Frederick S. Roberts noted in 1880 that, “It was impossible not to be struck with the splendid appearance and peculiarly fine physique of the Highland regiments: their chest measurement, muscular development, and the bronzed hues of sun and wind giving them a martial appearance beyond all the other corps.”⁶⁵ Although not likely that every Scottish soldier embodied these physical attributes, the image of the fit Scottish soldier persisted.

All of the battlefield achievements and widely-held perceptions of Highland military superiority led British Secretary of State Hugh Childers in 1881 to implement regimental reforms. The number of Scottish “Highland” battalions was doubled—this, in spite of the fact that it would not be actual Highlanders filling the ranks.⁶⁶ Strachan observes how “Queen Victoria herself made the Scottish soldier the beau idéal of imperial defence, and after 1881 even the Lowland regiments had to adopt the trappings of ‘Highlandism’: tartan trews, broadswords and bonnets.”⁶⁷ The insistence of British leadership on doubling the number of Highland battalions and requiring the use of the traditional Highland kit reflected a conceptual objective that these regiments would adopt the fearlessness and reputation associated with Highland soldiers.

⁶⁵ Spiers, “Forging Nationhood,” 32.

⁶⁶ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 17.

⁶⁷ Strachan, “The Scottish Soldier and Scotland,” 54.

Stuart Allan and Allan Carswell point out that the nineteenth century “rebranding” of Scottish regiments “required the Scots themselves to accept and embrace the idea of the highland soldier as a desirable national symbol.”⁶⁸ This, after Highlanders had been long viewed by lowland Scots as “alien, backward, and to be feared.”⁶⁹ Thus, the English perceptions of the Highland soldiers penetrated general Scottish perceptions, too. The Highland regiments became the personification of Scottish national identity and the real and symbolic defenders of the British Empire.

Perhaps it should not be surprising that it was the English constituency of the United Kingdom, the Scots’ neighbors and centuries-long foe, who were instrumental in instilling and operationalizing the idea of a special Scottish military identity – strengthening the manpower of Highland regiments and deploying them in defense of the Empire in Highlander dress. The English had successfully transformed the Scottish from a threatening neighbor to a loyal partner.

It was not only the Scottish and English who incorporated Highland martial tradition, but so, too, did several nations of the British Empire. The export of Scottish military identity to other territories associated with Great Britain is further evidence of the unique and compelling nature of Scottish military tradition and identity. Wendy Ugolini argues that “during the 19th century, a military Scots identity was reinvented and forged at the colonial periphery,” going on to say that “the ‘appropriation of outwardly Scottish accoutrements’, such as bagpipes, kilts and tartans, was an important way in which diasporic units overseas could access and utilise the inspirational narrative of the

⁶⁸ Allan and Carswell, *The Thin Red Line*, 21.

⁶⁹ Allan and Carswell, *The Thin Red Line*, 21.

highlander, a phenomenon increasingly independent of whether or not recruits were actually Scottish-born.”⁷⁰ The successful export of Highland military tradition to other nations—including South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia—is one of the fundamental ways that Scottish military identity distinguishes itself from that of any other state.

The years preceding the Great War saw two profound changes in Scottish identity. The first was the transformation of the Scottish Highlander from perceived barbaric northern outcast to the romanticized national symbol of Scotland. The second was Scotland’s shift from being a longstanding enemy of the British throne to being the defender of the Empire. At the outset of hostilities in 1914, the lore and legend connected to the Highland Scot soldier was promoted by the British government, who reaped the benefits during WWI, in which the fearsome reputation of the Highland soldier would only be further amplified.

How Scots Viewed Themselves

The notion of Scottish Highlanders as a “martial race” or, the idea that they had an inherent fighting spirit and capability, came from historic Scottish military prowess and more recent battlefield achievements on behalf of the Empire. As more of Scotland began to accept Highland military tradition as national tradition, so too, was the reputation of the Highland soldier extended to all Scottish soldiers, whether or not they

⁷⁰ Wendy Ugolini, “Scottish Commonwealth Regiments” in *A Military History of Scotland* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 485–505, <https://doi.org/10.3366/j.ctv2f4vpf3.25>.

were kilted. The bulk of this research, however, focuses on the experiences of kilted Highland regiments.

No one came to believe in Scottish martial superiority more than the Scots themselves and this was a principal way Scottish soldiers distinguished themselves from their English counterparts in WWI. As noted by Spiers, the correspondence of Scottish soldiers abroad in the late nineteenth century helped spread the notion of the indomitable Highland warrior on a global scale. That reputation was enhanced by similar self-promotion throughout the Great War. The Scots did not conclude from their battlefield experience that their capabilities and martial spirit were matched by any of those they fought with or against. Instead, the testimony of Scottish soldiers reflects a strengthened belief in their innate fighting ability and superiority.

In Major Norm McQueen's forward to the history of the 10th Argylls, he wrote that the men of the regiment "were possessed of the love of battle for its own sake, which is the heritage of the true Scotsmen through the ages."⁷¹ This sentiment reveals the conviction that the fighting spirit was not limited to past generations, but an enduring birthright of all Scotsmen. Chaplain Coll MacDonald of the 8th Black Watch wrote a letter to his wife in 1918, illustrating supreme confidence in Scottish arms, saying, "If only we had plenty of kilties, the map would read very differently."⁷² Scottish military leaders drew on Scottish fighting lore to inspire troops before battle and boost morale.

⁷¹ Herbert G. Sotheby, *The 10th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 1914-1919* (London: John Murray, 931), xvii-xviii.

⁷² Coll MacDonald letter to wife Mary, 18 November 1918, BW45/1/36/1, BW45 Rev. Coll Macdonald Collection, Black Watch Museum, Perth Scotland.

The history of the Fifth Camerons provides an account of Colonel Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel addressing his troops before the Battle of Loos,

Reminding them that as in the old days, there were few troops in Europe who could boast of having stood up to a Highland charge, so it was for them to prove on the morrow to the Germans that they, in these latter days, had not fallen in any way short of the fighting spirit of their ancestors.⁷³

During WWI combat, Scottish troops were notably reluctant to surrender.⁷⁴ Similarly, the Scots were known for not taking prisoners, preferring to leave their enemy dead. Sergeant Robert Pinkerton of the London Scottish gave evidence for this reputation in his 1918 memoir, *Ladies from Hell*:

I do not believe I am telling anything amiss when I say that since the battle for Lille we Scottish have taken few, if any prisoners. You will remember how the Black Watch went over the top and at the German trenches. You will remember how some thirty of them reached the Teuton lines, and how they returned, stripped of all accoutrements, to be shot down like rats. With such a picture ever before us, is it any wonder that the Scottish do not find it in their hearts to take German prisoners?⁷⁵

Likewise, many Scottish soldiers believed that their kilts (and its implication of ferocity) instilled fear in the enemy. The kilt served as the key distinguishing feature of all Highland regiments, in addition to battalions in the Royal Scots, Highland Light Infantry, and diaspora units.⁷⁶ Norman MacLeod stated, “with reference to morale, I believe that the association of the kilt with the great deeds of valour on the part of the Highland Regiments inspires their members. I know of no inspiration to be got from

⁷³ John F. McEwen, *The Fifth Camerons* (David Macdonald, 1921), 46.

⁷⁴ Lewis-Stempel, *The War behind the Wire*, 306.

⁷⁵ Robert Douglas Pinkerton, *Ladies from Hell* (New York: Century, 1918), 161. Thomas Greenshields also cites several primary accounts of Scottish soldiers being advised before battle not to take prisoners, along with numerous admissions of Scottish soldiers not taking prisoners. These accounts are found in chapter 15, “Ferocity and Compassion,” *Those Bloody Kilts*, 410.

⁷⁶ Spiers, “The Scottish Soldier at War,” 317.

trousers.”⁷⁷ Thomas Lyon of the Glasgow Highlanders wrote of his experience encountering a German soldier climbing out of a dugout: “the German’s unsuspecting eyes suddenly lit on the kilt of his enemy. A look of incredulous bewilderment overspread his features—a look that changed to one of horror and fear as his eyes travelled slowly upward and over the khaki tunic...he fell on his knees and whined and babbled for mercy.”⁷⁸ This story and others like it, whether accurate or exaggerated, encouraged the belief and confidence among Highland Scottish regiments that they were greatly feared by German soldiers.

In another instance of Scots using German behavior to reinforce their own thinking, Captain Claud Low of the 1st London Scottish wrote in a 1915 letter to his wife that, “The French Company I relieved captured a German scout in the corn before our arrival and found on him a picture of abuse relating to ourselves. We were described as WOMEN OF HELL.”⁷⁹ Though it remains unknown whether Germans coined this appellation or if the Scots simply attributed its origins to the Germans, it was widely adopted by Scottish soldiers and serves as the title of Sergeant Robert Pinkerton’s 1918 memoir. Regardless of the provenance or intention behind the nickname “Women from/of Hell,” Scottish soldiers viewed it as a sign of their fierce reputation and gladly incorporated it into their military and national legacy.

Primary sources note the widespread belief among the Scots in their own feats of arms, coupled with a contempt for English soldiery. Greenshields goes so far as to say

⁷⁷ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 160.

⁷⁸ Thomas M. Lyon, *More Adventures in Kilt and Khaki: Sketches of the Glasgow Highlanders and Others in France* (Kilmarnock: The Standard Press, 1917) 117-118.

⁷⁹ Private Papers of Major Claude John Low, 18 May 1915, Documents 6702, World War I Collection, Imperial War Museum, London, UK. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030006553>.

that part of the Scottish identity “was the frequent, though not universal, tendency to show disdain for English soldiers.”⁸⁰ John Cooper of the 1/6th Black Watch was taken prisoner in March 1918 and said of his capture, “The general impression amongst us was that we had been badly let down by the [English] 6th Division which was on our left” allowing German soldiers to overrun the Black Watch position.⁸¹ Similarly, Jock Macleod noted that Englishmen were “slow on the uptake, compared with the Scotsmen who formed my M.G. [machine gun] section in the 2nd Camerons.”⁸²

The self-interested Scottish were not the only ones to observe such patterns in combat capability and valor. Major Charles Murray served with the South African Field Ambulance and lamented, “Never have Scottish or Colonial troops given in like the English, and I feel very little reliance can ever be placed in them again. Our failures in every case have been due to the cowardice of the English.”⁸³ In hindsight, microscopic battle histories may disprove such statements, as assigning blame to others is common practice. However, there is enough primary evidence to suggest a recurring contempt for English troops amongst Scottish soldiers.

A complicating, but compelling factor of note is the lack of distinction given by soldiers, both British and otherwise, when referencing various nationalities within the British Army. Scottish, Irish, and Welsh soldiers were routinely referred to as English in primary source testimony, while German sources consistently refer to all nationalities of

⁸⁰ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 399.

⁸¹ John Cooper, *Domi Militiaeque the experiences of a private soldier during the latter half of the Great War of 1914-1918* (A.F. Cooper, 1982) 223. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1500034635>.

⁸² Private Papers of Jock Macleod, 27 March, 1917, Liddle Collection, World War I, General Section 1027, Brotherton Library, Leeds University, Leeds, England.

⁸³ Diary of Charles Murray, March-May 1918, Liddle Collection, World War I, General Section 1153, Brotherton Library, Leeds University, Leeds, England.

the United Kingdom as “Englander.”⁸⁴ In a handful of instances, Scottish soldiers described being called “Schottlander” by German captors.⁸⁵ Scottish soldiers enjoyed their own unique nickname of “jock,” while “tommy” was a common nickname for British, and more specifically, English soldiers. Thus, a Scotsman could identify as British, English, Scottish, a jock, and a tommy, while an Englishman could identify as British, English, and a tommy.⁸⁶

Despite Scottish soldiers identifying as both British and Scottish, their visible Scottish identity and the fierce reputation they promoted accounted for the different way German captors viewed and treated them. Time spent as a prisoner of war in German prison camps could emphasize cultural differences among British prisoners. Wilkinson notes that in German prison camps, “British POWs came to be housed in single nationality barracks, albeit therein the composite British nationalities (English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish) would be mixed.”⁸⁷ Reflection on one’s identity was a common theme among prisoners, having been physically removed from their role as a combat soldier. Within prison camps, Scotsmen generally identified as British, while maintaining a strong sense of Scottish cultural nationalism. Scottish prisoner Joseph Lee provided several examples of the complexities of maintaining both British and Scottish identity as a prisoner of war in his memoir, *A Captive at Carlsruhe*. Lee noted that he worked as the cashier in the British portion of the camp commissary and answered in the affirmative

⁸⁴ Lewis-Stempel, *The War Behind the Wire*, 34, 57, and 59.

⁸⁵ Interview of George Agnew, 10 August 1916, WO/161/98/640, War Office 161: Committee on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War: Interviews and Reports, The National Archives catalogue, Kew England, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C9212609>.

⁸⁶ Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, “Tommy,” <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/tommy>, accessed December 29, 2024, and Dictionaries of the Scots Language, “Jock,” <https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/jock>, accessed December 29, 2024.

⁸⁷ Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War in First World War Germany*, 201.

when asked if he was English, apparently unbothered to identify as English. At the same time, he exhibited his Scottish identity by attempting a “mock Scotch haggis,” attributing a draughts victory to being Scottish, and longing for Scotland after reading the Scottish novel, *The Master of Ballantrae*.⁸⁸

Once nationality lines were broken down, the British bond among prisoners was almost always trumped by the Scottish bond. Certain camp activities contributed to a fragmentation of British identity, particularly in sports, where there were specific English, Irish, and Scottish teams.⁸⁹ Similarly, cultural celebrations highlighted the more unique traditions of specific nationalities within the prison camp. Lieutenant Hamilton of the Gordon Highlanders describes “Hogmanay celebrations with haggis and Scotch buns, but regrettably without whiskey.”⁹⁰ Hamilton goes on to describe the celebration, saying “we danced reels in the passage to the delight of the Russians and the annoyance of the French in the room below, and ended up with a wee Dock & Doris and Auld Lang Syne. Quite a merry evening.”⁹¹ Such a description speaks to the camaraderie and connection felt among Scotsmen, within their larger British identity.

Not all Scots, however, appreciated the breakdown of British nationalities, preferring to view themselves as a collective brotherhood. Scottish poet Donald Robertson expressed this feeling in the poem “Scotch or English,” where he posed the questions: “Scotch or English, does it matter? Aren’t we brothers one and all? Scotch and

⁸⁸ Joseph Lee, *A Captive at Carlsruhe: And Other German Prison Camps* (London: J. Lane, 1920), 123, 216, 94, 25, 26.

⁸⁹ Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War in First World War Germany*, 219.

⁹⁰ “Exhibition shows Scots tales from German POW camps in WW1,” *The Scotsman*, October 20, 2018, <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/exhibition-shows-scots-tales-german-pow-camps-ww1-556324>.

⁹¹ “Exhibition shows Scots tales from German POW camps in WW1,” *The Scotsman*.

English, we are brothers, joining hands to win or die.”⁹² Yet this seems to have been a minority sentiment. Robert Dawson of the 1/4th Gordons summed up the general attitude of Scottish soldiers when he said, “There are no doubt some fine Englishmen, but give me the Scotsman every time.”⁹³

As noted above, Scottish regiments and their battalions were not always comprised of Highlanders or even of Scotsmen. This arrangement magnified differences in identity and allegiance between Scotsmen and non-Scotsmen. D.W. Pailthorpe made clear his identity when he said that he signed up for a Highland regiment, *not* the British Army.⁹⁴ However, Her Majesty’s Government’s objective since the 1880s to have non-Scottish soldiers embody the *esprit de corps* of the Highland regiments served its purpose. Lieutenant Colonel Cyrus Peck of the Canadian Scottish, noting that he did not have Scottish blood in his veins, nevertheless argued for the use of bagpipers in battle, saying “I believe that the purpose of war is to win victories, and if one can do this better by encouraging certain sentiments and traditions, why shouldn’t it be done?”⁹⁵ For Captain Lyall Grant of the London Scottish, he celebrated his Scottish heritage wherever possible. Moynihan writes that Grant “exulted in his Scottish connections” and, “as an act of patriotic defiance he takes every opportunity to play his bagpipes at the head of a ceremonial parade. And it is concealed inside the bag of his pipes and sewn in the

⁹² Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 401

⁹³ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 395.

⁹⁴ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 363.

⁹⁵ M. Zuehlke, *Brave Battalion: The Remarkable Saga of the 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish) in the First World War* (Mississauga: Wiley, 2008), 148.

waistband of his kilt that he eventually smuggles out his secretly written diary notebooks.”⁹⁶

Although most non-Scotsmen joined Scottish diasporic regiments wanting to embrace the Scottish military tradition, there were instances when profound differences came to light between non-Scots and Highland Scots. Englishman H.H. Stainton admitted to lying about having a Scottish grandfather so he could join the Liverpool Scots, having romanticized notions about the Highland Scots as well as a love for bagpipe music. However, upon meeting a Highland soldier and being unable to understand his brogue, he said that he felt like a “rank imposter,” and questioned if he had the moral right to wear the kilt as part of the Liverpool Scots.⁹⁷

For others, the experience of fighting alongside a Highland regiment highlighted differences but shifted perceptions relating to the renowned Highland reputation. A once-skeptical lowland Scot who served as a signaler changed his perception of the Highlanders after an experience in battle together. The unnamed officer was quoted in the *Aberdeen Express* as saying, “I am a Southron myself, and, like so many of my fellows, I went out firmly convinced that the tales of Highland heroism were greatly exaggerated. At [redacted location] I was with a battalion of the Gordons sent against a very strong enemy position and now I know that it is impossible to speak too highly of the bravery with which Highlanders go into action.”⁹⁸ The officer goes on to detail the extraordinary valor of the Highland battalion, observing their increased motivation and courage once the piper started playing. Perhaps the most revealing detail of the account as it pertains to

⁹⁶ Moynihan, *Black Bread and Barbed Wire*, 80.

⁹⁷ Cecil and Liddle, *Facing Armageddon*, 323.

⁹⁸ “On Gordons On,” *Aberdeen Evening Express*, August 17, 1916, British Newspaper Archive.

how Scottish soldiers viewed themselves is that cries of “Scotland Forever!” rang out as the Highlanders ran into battle, suggesting a reverence for, and pride in, their Scottish identity and tradition, rather than their greater British identity.

Firsthand accounts from Scottish soldiers, whether assigned to Highland regiments or non-Highland but Scottish regiments, indicate that Scottish soldiers believed a fighting spirit was their heritage as a Scotsmen, a spirit and capability they believed to be missing from their fellow Britons. Scottish soldiers embraced their unique identity and uniform by referring to themselves as “ladies from hell” and perpetuating their reputation as ferocious warriors who took no prisoners.

How Germans viewed Scots

Though multiple Scottish accounts speak to German hatred and fear of Scottish regiments, it is difficult to determine the veracity of such perceptions without further assessment of accounts by Germans themselves, of which there are few cited in English-language scholarly literature. Yet some German accounts do exist that suggest that the Germans recognized the Scots as more formidable soldiers than their British comrades, while at the same time perceiving the Scottish to be culturally or ethnically inferior to the English.

Scotland-based newspaper *The Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette* offered insight into purported German perceptions of Scottish soldiers in its June 27, 1918, edition. After remarking that there is “an official silence that screens many a moving tale of Scottish bravery on the field of battle,” the newspaper cites the London-based *Pall Mall Gazette* as reporting that “the British War Office came into possession of a

document of extraordinary interest...one recently prepared by the German Headquarters' Staff and placed in the hands of the divisional commanders in the field for their guidance."⁹⁹ The document listed British divisions in order of "furchtbarkeit," translated roughly to mean "terribleness" or "formidableness." The first three divisions on the list were Scottish divisions.¹⁰⁰ Such reporting was a source of pride and morale for Scottish regiments and reinforced their own belief that they were among the greatest and most formidable of German enemies. The *Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette* also cited extracts from *The Evening Standard* in the same edition, stating, "The Germans, as is well known, are a plodding race and make up lengthy statistics on every conceivable subject...according to a German prisoner, statistics have been compiled from all fronts showing what enemy troops kill most Germans. It will be gratifying to our brethren across the Tweed to hear that at the head of all nations and all troops is placed a certain Scottish Division."¹⁰¹ Although it would have been natural for Scottish media to use this sort of information as propaganda, primary sources—both German and otherwise—consistently reflect that German soldiers viewed Scottish regiments as a more impressive enemy than their English counterparts.

Records further suggest that Germans not only distinguished between the different UK nationalities in terms of combat capability, but in terms of cultural status, as well. German war-time propaganda reveals a pejorative view of the cultural status of Scottish

⁹⁹ "Frightful to the Huns," *Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette*, June 27, 1918, British Newspaper Archive.

¹⁰⁰ "Frightful to the Huns," *Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette*.

¹⁰¹ "A German Tribute to Scotland," *Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette*, June 27, 1918, British Newspaper Archive.

soldiers. Recent scholarship has brought to light evidence of German racism similar to the systematic racism and cultural discrimination that came to define World War II.¹⁰²

German First Lieutenant Otto Stiehl, deputy commandant of Weinberg prison camp and self-proclaimed anthropologist, noted that “the Scots form a further sub-group, some of them of Celtic origin, but the majority probably of Scandinavian. The most typical of them wear just as hard an expression as do the English, but there is a reflective look in their eyes which indicates a fundamentally different mentality.”¹⁰³ German propaganda during WWI also used racial bias to promote German superiority over its enemies, particularly the colonial subjects of the United Kingdom. In propaganda illustrations, Scottish soldiers were shown as culturally and ethnically inferior to the English despite Scotland’s status as an integral constituent of the United Kingdom.

In a series of German propaganda postcards issued during the war years (see figures 1-2), Scottish POWs are portrayed alongside other “uncivilized” and “savage” people, including Arabs, Africans, Hong Kong Chinese, and Sikhs—all nationalities of the British Empire. One postcard, written in French and translated to read, “Some Champions of Civilization, Liberty and Progress,” prominently features a Highland soldier in the foreground.¹⁰⁴ This postcard was intended for a French audience, and

¹⁰² Nancy Fitch, “The Face and Race of the Enemy: German POW Photographs as a Weapon of War,” In *Out of Line, Out of Place*, ed. Rotem Kowner and Iris Rachaminov (Cornell University Press, 2022), 128. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501765445-008>.

¹⁰³ Christopher Duffy, *Through German Eyes: the British and the Somme 1916* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006) 87. Of Otto Stiehl, Heike Liebau wrote, “The architect and photographer Otto Stiehl (1860-1940) enlisted as a volunteer in 1915 and was assigned duty as commander of the Weinberg camp. In 1916, Stiehl published *Unsere Feinde*. 96 Charakterköpfe aus deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern, a collection of portrait photos of prisoners classified according to ethnic and racial types. The book became a means of propaganda in Europe.” Heike Liebau, “A voice recording, a portrait photo, and three drawings: tracing the life a colonial soldier,” ZMO Working Papers, No. 20, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ “‘Savage Scots’: wish you weren’t here,” *The Scotsman*, August 20, 2010, <https://www.scotsman.com/news/savage-scots-wish-you-werent-here-2442165>.

sought to undermine the reputation of their British allies by questioning British civility, particularly highlighting the presence of 'barbaric' populations within the British Empire. The Scottish POW features prominently among the group of “colonials” in multiple cards, indicating that Germans viewed the Scots as having more in common with lesser non-Anglo colonials than with the English. Cedric Cotter points out the danger in such portrayals, saying, “propaganda depicting PoWs as barbarous also contributed to worsening treatment. Over time, propaganda escalated, and representations of prisoners became increasingly brutal. The propaganda shaped public opinion and legitimized violence against prisoners.”¹⁰⁵

Sources suggest that Germans viewed the Scottish as distinct from the English—both in terms of Scottish (particularly Highland) military capability and in perceived Scottish cultural inferiority. These distinctions would be magnified by the Scottish prisoner of war experience.

¹⁰⁵ Cedric Cotter, “The 1918 Bern Agreements: repatriating prisoners in a total war,” *Humanitarian Law and Policy Blog, International Red Cross Committee*, March 29, 1918, [https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/03/29/1918-bern-agreements-repatriating-prisoners-of-war/#:~:text=In%201916%2C%20reprisals%20became%20harsher,the%20worst%20aspect%20of%20humanity](https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/03/29/1918-bern-agreements-repatriating-prisoners-of-war/#:~:text=In%201916%2C%20reprisals%20became%20harsher,the%20worst%20aspect%20of%20humanity.). Additionally, several reports found in the WO 161 and Foreign Office 383 files reference harsher treatment of British POWs because of reprisals. Interviews contain statements similar to that of Private J. Newman, who said, “Treatment inhuman. Stated by the Germans to be the beginning of ‘Reprisals’ though not stated what for.” J. Newman interview,” FO 383/394, presented in Parliament 21 August 1918, 111658, TNA, Kew.



Figure 1. "Cultural Brothers in the Prison Camp." German propaganda postcard, April 1915.

Source: Dev Brum Private Collection, Dortmund Postkolonial (blog). February 21, 2017. http://www.dortmund-postkolonial.de/?attachment_id=5479.



Figure 2. “Völkerschau: Ethnographic Exhibition of our Captured Enemies.” German propaganda postcard, September 1915.

Source: Dev Brum Private Collection, Dortmund Postkolonial (blog). December 31, 2015. http://www.dortmund-postkolonial.de/?attachment_id=3816.



Figure 3. German World War I poster, Feld-Uniformen unserer Feinde im Westen (Field Uniforms of Our Enemies).

Source: German World War I poster, Height 344 mm., Width 495 mm. Imperial War Museum, London, United Kingdom.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/29415>.

Chapter III.

Disparate Treatment of Kilted Prisoners of War

Chapter III discusses the lack of research regarding WWI Scottish prisoners of war and provides a general overview of the World War I POW experience. The central focus of chapter III is the Scottish POWs' experience in German prison camps. A variety of primary sources, including interviews of repatriated POWs, newspaper articles, and government reports reveal that the Scottish POW experience was largely comparable to that of other British POWs captured by the Germans. However, patterns of differentiated treatment of Scottish (specifically, kilted Scottish) prisoners of war emerged through this study. This treatment came in the form of both public humiliation and curiosity, harsher treatment, and attempts to recruit to the Irish Brigade.

The POW experience in World War I provides a unique lens through which German perceptions of Scottish troops were magnified. Different nationalities of the Allied forces, including French, Russian, Italian, Serbian, and British (English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh) lived side by side as POWs in camps under German command, providing a laboratory for comparative analysis. The nature and organization of WWI POW camps lends themselves to a study of identity and belonging. One's nationality not only dictated an individual POW's assigned barracks, but often the way they were treated by their captors and cohorts. Yet, historians, including Scottish historians, have rarely discussed the distinct experience of Scottish prisoners of war in World War I.

Post-war reluctance among returned POWs to discuss their captivity, stemming from feelings of shame and embarrassment, hindered conversation about the Scottish

World War I POW experience. This was in addition to a reported British ban on press interviews regarding one's time spent as a POW.¹⁰⁶ There was a stigma attached to being captured and held by the Germans, particularly if it was perceived as a means of avoiding combat. As Van Emden notes, "Quite clearly, there was an air of suspicion attached to capture that was missing from most cases of personal injury or death."¹⁰⁷ POW/Missing in Action (MIA) flags and stories of heroic survival did not yet exist. The expectation to "fight to the death," both spoken and unspoken, was deemed unmet if taken prisoner. "For you the war is over" was reportedly a common utterance of German soldiers to newly captured Allied prisoners. In his 1918 memoir *Outwitting the Hun: My Escape from a German Prison Camp*, American POW Pat O'Brien described being in a German hospital when a German doctor tried to engage him in conversation. O'Brien, suffering from a mouth wound, refused to speak, prompting the doctor to walk away disgustedly and say, "You don't have to worry anymore, for you the war is over!"¹⁰⁸

Yet accounts of prisoners of war belie any assumption that being a POW was easy. Soldiers held by Germans often underwent exceptional hardships, including summary execution, starvation, brutality, rampant disease, and the dangers of forced labor if near the front lines or, in dangerous occupations, such as mining. This, in addition to what was dubbed "barbed wire disease," described by John Yarnall as "a condition characterized by a gradual loss of memory, irritability and continued

¹⁰⁶ The ban is noted in the minutes of the 1918 Parliament notes. Hansard notes: Major Newman "asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the fact that returned prisoners of war are now forbidden to give interviews to the Press or to answer questions as to their treatment, any official interviews the returned prisoners and learns from him the details of the treatment he received while in enemy hands." HC Deb. (3 July 1918) (56). <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1918-07-03/debates/85bcc7d0-df96-4d8b-932e-5e7221695d3b/BritishPrisonersOfWar>

¹⁰⁷ Van Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Pat O'Brien, *Outwitting the Hun: My Escape from a German Prison Camp* (New York and London: Harper & brothers, 1918), 37.

concentration of the mind on certain aspects of camp conditions.”¹⁰⁹ Despite such maltreatment, the limited published accounts of WWI British prisoners of war focused on escape attempts more than any other aspect of the POW experience.¹¹⁰

Speed provides another explanation for the lack of research involving WWI POWs when he notes that “it is as though the Holocaust and the other horrors of that conflict have blinded scholars to the question of captivity between 1914-1918.”¹¹¹ Moreover, the greater availability of both survivors and WWII documents lends itself to more accessible research opportunities regarding WWII POWs. Post-WWI economic dislocations and the rise of Fascism, as well as the ineffective WWI Leipzig War Crime Trials, also help account for the collective disregard for the WWI POW, despite the existence of numerous government reports and soldiers’ memoirs.

The absence of definitive data regarding Scottish military participation and casualties in the Great War—a subject of great debate in recent years—further complicates efforts to study the Scottish POW experience.¹¹² Destroyed military records, along with discrepancies in how Scottish casualties were (and continue to be) counted—including the question of who qualified as a Scot, obscure conclusive statistical data. The

¹⁰⁹ John Yarnall, *Barbed Wire Disease: British and German Prisoners of War, 1914-1918* (Stroud: History Press, 2011), Chapter 11, Kindle.

¹¹⁰ “Prisoners of War,” *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 13 July 1926, British Newspaper Archive.

¹¹¹ Richard B. Speed, review of *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War: Britain, France, and Germany, 1914–1920*, by Heather Jones, *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 5, December 1, 2012.

¹¹² In the 2014 article “Great War worst for Scots troops ‘a myth’” in *The Scotsman*, Stephen McGinty writes about the longstanding myth that a disproportionate number of Scotsmen were killed in WWI when compared to other UK populations. McGinty notes that Hew Strachan, along with other historians, have recently pushed back on the casualty estimates promoted by Sir Tom Devine, Colin Campbell, and Niall Ferguson—as high as 26%, according to Campbell and Ferguson. There are known issues concerning duplicate names of soldiers who switched regiments and questions as to whether non-Scots who fought in Scottish regiments should be counted as a Scot. Stephen McGinty, “Great War worst for Scots troops ‘a myth,’” *The Scotsman*, August 10, 2014, <https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/great-war-worst-scots-troops-myth-1529401>.

categorization of Scottish soldiers as English, British, and Scottish—in addition to members of Canadian, South African, and English kilted regiments being counted as Scottish—hinder the ability to easily parse the Scottish experience. According to the National Records of Scotland, “An accepted total of the Scottish war dead has yet to be calculated. Estimates vary between 100,000 and 135,000.”¹¹³ Without definitive information regarding numbers of Scottish prisoners of war *and* casualties, it is impossible to fully grasp the whole of the POW experience of Scotsmen.

Historical Background:

World War I, also known as the Great War, was fought between the principal Allied powers of the United Kingdom, France, and Russia (and from April 1917 to the war’s end, the United States) against the Central powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire from July 1914 through November 1918. Scotland, having joined with England to form Great Britain in 1707 through the Act of Union, fielded twelve regiments—five kilted and seven non-kilted—as part of the British Army in 1914. Each regiment was comprised of its own Regular, Special Reserve, and Territorial Force (T.F.) battalions.¹¹⁴ Additionally, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and England established Scottish regiments that fought in World War I.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ “Scotland’s People and the First World War,” National Records of Scotland, archived December 2024, <https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20241128124216/https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/learning/first-world-war/scotlands-people-and-the-first-world-war>.

¹¹⁴ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 15.

¹¹⁵ Ugolini and Forsyth, *A Global Force*, 2.

World War I yielded an estimated 8-9 million prisoners of war, of which roughly 2.4 million were held by Germany.¹¹⁶ The treatment of prisoners was subject to international legal obligations acquired under the 1864 and 1906 Geneva Conventions, and the 1907 Hague Convention, which states in Chapter 2, Article IV of the Annex to the Convention that “Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not of the individuals or corps who capture them. They must be humanely treated. All their personal belongings, except arms, horses, and military papers, remain their property.”¹¹⁷ The subjective nature of the term “humanely” contributed to widespread disparity in the standard of treatment throughout POW camps, even within the same country. Lewis-Stempel concludes that “the life of the British prisoner would depend much on the personality of the *Lager* commandant.”¹¹⁸ Thus, the well-being of British POWs in Germany varied from camp to camp, depending on the attitudes and inclinations of camp commanders. Article VI of Chapter 2 of the Convention Annex also was a determining factor in POW treatment. It provided that “The State may utilize the labour of prisoners of war according to their rank and aptitude, *officers excepted*.”¹¹⁹ This clause not only exempted officers from manual labor but also accounted for the establishment of separate camps for officers and enlisted men. The disparate treatment of officers and enlisted ranks arguably was the critical distinguishing characteristic of a WWI POW’s experience and will be discussed further as it pertained to Scottish POWs.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Heather Jones and Uta Hinz, “Prisoners of War (Germany),” 1914-1918 Online International Encyclopedia of the First World War, October 8, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/prisoners_of_war_germany.

¹¹⁷ “Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV); October 18, 1907,” Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04.asp#art4.

¹¹⁸ Lewis-Stempel, *The War behind the Wire*, 70.

¹¹⁹ “Laws of War,” Yale Law School.

¹²⁰ A notable difference in the experience of British officer versus enlisted soldiers is the existence of an exhaustive list of captured British officers. The UK National Archives notes: “There is a published List of

Although significant numbers of British troops were taken by Turkish forces, the majority of British (including Scottish) POWs were captured on the Western Front and held in German camps.¹²¹ The bulk of British prisoners were captured in two phases. In the earliest months of the war, between August and October 1914, German troops captured approximately 18,500 British soldiers. During the German spring offensive of 1918, more than 100,000 British soldiers were taken prisoner. As a result, captured British troops either spent the better part of the war (four years), or roughly the last six months of the war, in a POW camp. According to the National Archives of the United Kingdom, an estimated 192,000 British and Commonwealth servicemen were taken prisoner throughout the war.¹²²

A precise number of Scottish POWs as a sub-set within total British POWs is not available from existing records. According to Jones, “we do not have reliable statistics on how many prisoners Germany captured, let alone how many died in German captivity.”¹²³ Jones writes that “in 1918, the German army, disintegrating under pressure, stopped registering newly captured prisoners.”¹²⁴ Despite the lack of precise numerical

British Officers taken prisoner in the various theatres of war between August 1914 and November 1918. The list covers officers of the British Army, Royal Air Force, the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Naval Division. As well as names and rank, the book provides the date the officer went missing, where and when he was imprisoned and the date of his repatriation or death if the officer died while prisoner.” An exhaustive list of enlisted British POWs does not exist. “British and Commonwealth prisoners of the First World War and previous wars,” TNA, accessed February 21, 2024, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-prisoners-of-war-1790-1919/>.

¹²¹ “Scottish Prisoners of War 1914-1918,” National Records of Scotland, accessed February 23, 2024, <https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20241128123556/https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/learning/first-world-war/scottish-prisoners-of-war-1914-1918>.

¹²² “British and Commonwealth prisoners,” TNA.

¹²³ Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War in the First World War*, 19.

¹²⁴ Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War in the First World War*, 19.

data, existing evidence does offer insight into harsh treatment of Scottish POWs that was neither isolated nor rare.

For this thesis, I examined approximately ten percent of the 3,000 interviews conducted by the Committee on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War, of which the majority studied were interviews with repatriated Scottish prisoners of war (see Appendix Figure 4 for example). However, it is entirely possible, and even likely, that descriptions of differentiated treatment of Scottish POWs also can be found in statements given by interviewees of other UK and Commonwealth regiments. The most significant limitation of this interview collection is that it represents only a fraction of the estimated 192,000 British troops who were prisoners of war, and, and thus, only a fraction of Scottish POWs as well.

The UK National Archives further notes that “these documents primarily concern servicemen who escaped internment, were repatriated before the end of the war, or were incarcerated in a neutral country. Approximately 750 pages of interviews and reports on First World War POWs of ranks below those of commissioned officers are known not to have survived...There is very little information anywhere on POWs who were liberated after the Armistice on 11 November 1918.”¹²⁵ The destruction of documents relating to enlisted POWs is notable, as the POW experience of officers proved far more uniform than that of enlisted ranks. Moreover, there is no breakdown of the different UK

¹²⁵ The National Archives, “The National Archives - Homepage,” text, *The National Archives* (blog) (The National Archives), accessed August 28, 2024, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-prisoners-of-war-1790-1919/> and “Prisoner of War Interview Reports 1914-1918 - The National Archives,” accessed August 28, 2024, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/prisoner-of-war-interview-reports-1914-1918/>.

nationalities within the surviving reports (other than by having to assume that a Scottish regiment is made up largely, though not wholly, of Scots), complicating efforts to find patterns among Scottish POWs.

Interviews were conducted by examiners selected by the Committee on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War and took place before the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. Information obtained in these interviews consists of the soldier's name, rank, regiment, home address, place and date of capture, comments on treatment and conditions in camp, and escape attempts. Additionally, most reports conclude with the "opinion of examiner as to intelligence and reliability of informant."¹²⁶

Although some of these interviews were used in support of British anti-German propaganda, the primary accounts of British prisoners of war provide a level of authenticity that is often absent in the eight government-issued reports of the Government Committee on Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War. The government reports unsurprisingly fail to mention the many cases in which British POWs reported fair and decent treatment by their German captors. Also absent in the government reports is the acknowledgement that experiences among POWs in the roughly 300 German WWI prison camps varied widely, as a tendency to offer broad generalizations are woven throughout the reports. Even within the same camp, interviews suggest diverse experiences under different commandants.¹²⁷ Several interviews indicate

¹²⁶ "Prisoner of War Interview Reports 1914-1918," TNA.

¹²⁷ In Dr. Romer's assessment of various camps, there are references to previous reports of disparate treatment of British prisoners of war. He noted at least three instances where the removal of particular camp staff resulted in improved conditions for the British prisoners. In a July 17, 1918 report, he wrote, "Since the removal of the former Unteroffizier Reimann, relations with the authorities have much improved and seem to be now quite satisfactory." A July 24, 1918 report observes, "Since the removal of the former Commandofuhrer, conditions have very considerably improved, and the relations with the camp authorities are now of a satisfactory nature." Similarly, a July 30, 1918 report noted "Since the two guards,

that German camp staff had, at times, accompanied visiting neutral observers, causing prisoners to hesitate in speaking openly or critically about their experiences for fear of retaliation.¹²⁸

Several other factors contributed to one's perception of the POW experience, including age, military rank, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, date of capture, and length of captivity. Accounting for such variables in evaluating prisoner treatment provides further avenues to be explored in the study of the prisoner of war experience in World War I.

In addition to the interviews conducted by the Committee on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War (WO 161), Foreign Office 383 files furnish an array of primary source documents that give nuance and context to the British prisoner of war experience (see Appendix Figure 5 for example). Diplomatic correspondence and camp inspection reports from neutral observers enhance understanding of varying dimensions of the prisoner of war experience.

Were Scottish POWs treated differently than their English counterparts because of their identity as Scots? If so, how?

The lack of research concerning Scottish WWI POWs has led many scholars to aggregate the Scottish POW experience together with that of other British POWs in

Unteroffiziers Trenke and Neumann have been removed from this Commando, as a result of the official enquiry held by his Excellency Lieutenant-General v.d.Goltz, there is no further dissatisfaction amongst the British, and no cases of rough or ill treatment were reported." These reports are found in "Working Commando Report," FO 383/394, TNA, Kew.

¹²⁸ In George Thomson's interview he said, "An American, Mr. Hart, came on several occasions and asked how the prisoners were getting on, but he was always accompanied by Germans, so no complaints were made." George Thomson interview WO 161/98/427. Similar sentiments are expressed by John Adam (WO 161/99/129) and Alexander Allan (WO 161/99/19).

WWI. However, primary, individuated evidence regarding Scottish WWI POWs reflects patterns of kilted Scottish prisoners of war being singled out for humiliation, harsher treatment, and, paradoxically, curiosity and recruitment. Essentially, if Scots were identifiable by their kilt and/or by verbal identification, they could be subject to disparate, harsher treatment than other British troops or those of other nationalities. German perceptions of Scottish POWs as a barbarous people, as depicted in German propaganda and in primary source accounts, may have been a contributing factor in the disparate treatment of Scottish prisoners of war.

At the same time, Scottish primary sources reveal that Scottish soldiers expected—or at least were not surprised—by harsher treatment from their German captors, given the reputation that Scots themselves promoted as being a savage, martial people who inflicted similar harsh treatment on the Germany enemy.¹²⁹ A 1921 article in the *Dundee Courier* expressed the expectation of a distinct Scottish or, at least, Dundodian experience when reporting on a Scottish prisoner of war, saying, “Surely the wartime experience of a Dundodian must be unique!”¹³⁰ This study examines the documented voices of Scottish POWs in German camps to gain a better and more nuanced understanding of the unique experiences of WWI Scottish POWs in Germany.

Interviews with repatriated British prisoners of war reveal a consensus that treatment varied noticeably by prisoners’ nationality. A belief persisted among British POWs that French prisoners received the best treatment in German prison camps and

¹²⁹ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 408.

¹³⁰ “War Prisoner at 72: Dundee Captain’s Stirring Encounter,” *Dundee Courier*, 27 September 1921, British Newspaper Archive.

Russians the worst.¹³¹ Although no specific study in English-language scholarship has yet focused on the preferential treatment afforded French POWs, there are various factors that may have influenced the prevailing British perspective and sentiment. In response to an early account of the British prisoners receiving harsher treatment than the French prisoners, German military authorities replied,

If the English pretend that they were attended to during the journey only after the French, the reason is to be found in the quite comprehensible bitterness of feeling among the German troops, who respected the French on the whole as honourable and decent opponents, whereas the English mercenaries had, in their eyes, adopted a cunning method of warfare from the beginning, and, when taken prisoners, bore themselves with an insolent and provocative mien. That any such distinction in treatment was ordered by superior officers is an untruth.¹³²

The German response not only reflects an unfavorable view of the English as mercenaries but also acknowledges a deeper animosity between the Germans and the ‘English’ (British) prisoners of war, than that between the Germans and the French, whom the Germans viewed as honorable. The German propaganda portrayal of the British as imperialists who swallowed up uncivilized populations into their empire reflects a fundamental German resentment toward the British that was largely absent in their attitude toward the French. Additionally, evidence indicates that the Germans tried to exploit any existing tensions among the Allies, particularly if the possibility of recruiting them to the German side appeared conceivable.¹³³

¹³¹ Lack of government oversight rooted in Russian political instability contributed to the poor treatment of Russian POWs. Van Emden notes that “German authorities alone acknowledged that over 118,000 Allied prisoners died in their camps, particularly the Russians, who received no outside assistance or help from home.” Van Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, 76.

¹³² Yarnall, *Barbed Wire Disease*, Kindle Chapter 6. Foreign Office file FO 383/43, National Archives, Kew.

¹³³ Jones writes, “During the years 1914 and 1915 there is also evidence that British and Russian prisoners in particular were mistreated using harsh physical punishments in some home front camps -contrary to

Whether or not it was objectively true that the British received harsher treatment than the French across the wide range of POW camps and commanders, it was a consistent perception of British POWs. An official British government report confirmed comparatively harsher treatment of the English (again, a general term for any nationality of the United Kingdom), noting that “Care was taken to make the conditions specially degrading for the English. Where French and English were conveyed by the same train, the French would be better accommodated and allowed privileges in the matter of obtaining food at stations.”¹³⁴ Within months of the first capture of British soldiers in 1914, accounts of harsher treatment of British POWs were relayed to London. U.K. Parliamentary debate from April 27, 1915, records Mr. Primrose, British MP as noting,

It does seem to be the case that in many cases British officers and men have been discriminated against. I have heard statements that the Russian prisoners are treated equally badly with the British, but in most cases the German Government seem to have given more favourable treatment to the French prisoners, in the hope, I suppose, by these rather clumsy efforts, of detaching our Allies.¹³⁵

In some cases, British POWs reported decent treatment while observing harsher treatment of Russian POWs. Canadian Private Earl Drope observed, “I only know of one case of actual cruelty to a British prisoner, Lance Corporal Higgins. In this case he was

disciplinary regulations. In contrast, prisoners from a number of distinct cultural, national, or ethnic identities were given privileged treatment to entice them to change sides and support Germany: among these groups were Irish prisoners, who were concentrated in Limburg camp in 1915 and subjected to a largely unsuccessful propaganda campaign to force them to change sides to fight against Britain; Muslim prisoners captured fighting with the British, French and Russian armies who were subject to propaganda visits by Turkish dignitaries and some of whom were ultimately sent to fight in the Ottoman army; and finally ethnic Germans captured fighting with the Russian army who were encouraged to become naturalised German citizens. Ultimately none of these policies was particularly successful; most prisoners continued to support their state of origin.” Jones and Hinz, “Prisoners of War (Germany).”

¹³⁴ “Report on the Transport of British Prisoners of War to Germany, August 1914-December 1914, 3.”

¹³⁵ HC Deb. (27 April 1915) (71) co. 654. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1915-04-27/debates/6ddad6e4-7818-4e58-bce5-e945c4584abb/PrisonersOfWar>.

hit over the head with a revolver. On the other hand, they treated the Russian prisoners with excessive brutality assaulting them every day with every weapon available.... I believe that our particular commando compared favourably with other commandos as regards British prisoners, as reports reached me of cruelty to men on other commandos.”¹³⁶

Thomas Shannon of the Winnipeg Rifles recounted similar brutal treatment of Russian POWs when he said, “I saw no cruelty to British, but the Russian, Serbians, and Italians were kicked and knocked about. The French were always the best treated.”¹³⁷

Corporal James McDaid of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders saw patterns of mistreatment of both British and Russian POWs but ultimately agreed that the Russians received the worst treatment, stating, “The French soldiers were treated the best by the German soldiers. They were never hit, so far as I could see, and never ill-treated. The Russians were treated the worst. The Germans did not seem to look upon the Russian prisoners as human beings. I have seen the Russians very badly treated; they would stand more than an Englishman.”¹³⁸ Private Turner of the Gordon Highlanders echoed this sentiment, saying, “The Russian prisoners, of whom there were at least 150, were even worse treated than the English.”¹³⁹

Also common were reports of poor treatment of both British and Russian POWs. Private Robert Anderson reported seeing “British and Russians tied up to stake and beaten with thick india-rubber,”¹⁴⁰ while James Bulger, in describing the hospital and

¹³⁶ Earl Drope interview, 2 June 1916, Series WO 161/100/372, TNA, Kew.

¹³⁷ Thomas Shannon interview, 7 August 1918, WO 161/100/374, TNA, Kew, England.

¹³⁸ James McDaid interview, 14 August 1917, WO 161/99/66, TNA, Kew.

¹³⁹ B. Turner interview, 27 May 1916, WO 161/98/613, TNA, Kew.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Anderson interview, 29 November 1915, WO 161/98/368, TNA, Kew.

treatment at Wittenberg camp during a typhus outbreak said, “French were treated better than others. Hospital without beds. No orderlies. Russians and British had to lie together on the floor, which was covered with filth and vermin.”¹⁴¹ Of course, these accounts referring to British prisoners of war may include Scottish POWs, while not identifying them specifically.

Records reflect consistency in the British perception that preferential treatment was given to French POWs and that the harshest treatment was reserved for Russian POWs. Treatment of English and, more specifically, kilted Scottish prisoners of war, on balance, appears to have hewed closer to the treatment of Russian prisoners of war.

Although the discriminatory treatment of Scots was not systematic or as routine as that of Russian POWs, official UK government reports indicate that one of the most common methods by which the Germans mistreated British prisoners of war, including Scots, was through humiliation. Nowhere was this more evident than in the transport of prisoners of war. In a May 1915 discussion regarding British prisoners of war in the House of Commons, MP Primrose described the hardships endured in the transport of British POWs, saying,

As we all know, the treatment of prisoners in camps is not the only cruelty which the German Government have inflicted on our fellow countrymen. Their treatment on the way from the trenches to the camps has been of a cruel—and calculated to be cruel—character. We have the best information, absolutely reliable information, which we cannot publish because of its source, that coats are almost invariably taken from the prisoners, that officers are spat upon without any word of remonstrance from the guards who are accompanying them, and that in the various stations in Germany the German Red Cross people give food and drink to

¹⁴¹ James Bulger interview, 29 November 1915, WO 161/98/368, TNA, Kew.

the Belgian and French prisoners, but deliberately refuse it to English prisoners.¹⁴²

The “Report on Transport of British Prisoners of War to Germany, August-December 1914” corroborates Primrose’s statement by disclosing how humiliation of prisoners often came in the form of publicly parading POWs while en route to the prison camp. The Germans believed that such public humiliation of prisoners would help boost the morale of the German public. Kilted, Scottish prisoners of war were often the targets.

English POW Private Dodd described being jeered at every German station where he and his comrades stopped, but he noted that this was especially true of Scots, who “were dragged out and insulted, called ‘Fraulein’ [translated as young, unmarried woman] and kicked.”¹⁴³ Primary sources do not explain how the term “fraulein” was to be taken as a specific slur on the Scots’ manhood. However, the record of it being directed exclusively toward kilted Scottish soldiers implies a barb at the masculinity of the Scots, as the kilt resembled the skirts worn by young German women in the early twentieth century. Private Arnold likewise observed, “We were treated like wild beasts, and shown at every station. The Scots were pulled out and called ‘Fraulein,’ and their kilts were lifted up.”¹⁴⁴

Andrew Young of the 1st Gordons recounted how “we were marched round the town and paraded before the people as the ferocious Schottlanders (Scotsmen), defeated in battle and now held in captivity...meanwhile a camera was clicking, and no doubt

¹⁴² HC Deb. (27 April 1915) (71) co. 659. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1915-04-27/debates/6ddad6e4-7818-4e58-bce5-e945c4584abb/PrisonersOfWar>.

¹⁴³ “Report on the Transport of British Prisoners of War to Germany, August 1914-December 1914,” 30.

¹⁴⁴ “Report on the Transport of British Prisoners of War to Germany, August 1914-December 1914,” 30.

when the film reached Germany, we would show up about 500 strong.”¹⁴⁵ German troops apparently found particular satisfaction in the capture of Highland Scots and valued photographs of the captured Scotsmen for propaganda purposes. A December 1918 article in *The Scotsman* supports Young’s sentiment, reading, “As they [prisoners of war] journeyed through Germany the train was stopped at many of the stations so that the spectators, and particularly the ladies, might see the kilted Highlanders.”¹⁴⁶

In another instance of Scottish POWs being singled out for humiliation, Lewis-Stempel describes how “men from Scottish regiments were officially paraded on station platforms and, at bayonet point, made to lift their kilts to music-hall laughter.”¹⁴⁷ This orchestration of humiliation, though isolating and demeaning, would have enforced Scottish soldiers’ belief that their capture was more valuable and impressive than those of other nationalities, at the same time reinforcing the Scots’ cultural identity and shared experiences.

The display of Scottish prisoners of war to the German public was noted several times in the POW interviews. William Johnstone of the Gordon Highlanders stated, “Any men of Scotch regiments were always displayed to the people.”¹⁴⁸ English Lieutenant J.B. Morgan said on his journey to the camp that “a Scotchman in a kilt was made to stand at the door of the truck to be jeered at by the German soldiers on the platform.”¹⁴⁹ Scotsman Alexander Reid recalled, “Being the only Highlander, I had to stand up at

¹⁴⁵ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 406.

¹⁴⁶ “Enemy Tales,” *The Scotsman*, December 11, 1918, British Newspaper Archive.

¹⁴⁷ Lewis-Stempel, *The War Behind the Wire*, 62.

¹⁴⁸ William Johnstone interview, 3 October 1918, Series WO 161/100/431, TNA, Kew.

¹⁴⁹ Government Committee on Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War, “Report on the Transport of British Prisoners of War to Germany,” U.K. Parliament, 1918, 14.

every station and show myself. At one station a man came at me with a knife and cut a piece out of my kilt, but he was stopped by the guard from doing any further mischief.”¹⁵⁰ Such occurrences, experienced even before arrival at the German prison camp, speak to one of the crucial ways in which the POW experience differed for Scottish prisoners, strengthening the notion that kilted Scots were viewed and treated differently by their German captors.

Another pronounced form of humiliation revealed in interviews of Scottish POWs were reports of being photographed while attending to personal needs. John Osborne of the Scots Guards wrote “for three weeks we were not able to wash at all and the sanitary arrangements were unspeakable, and German women came from the town and took photographs while they were in use.”¹⁵¹ Charles Brash of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders likewise recorded “the latrines at first were just holes in the ground in the open. The civilian population were constantly taking photographs through the wires of the Highlanders using them.”¹⁵² This testimony mirrors the evidence in the foregoing propaganda postcards that the Germans viewed Scottish soldiers as markedly different than the English, suggesting an otherness or exotic element that intrigued the Germans.

Although the physical distinction of the kilted Scottish regiments could lead to humiliating treatment by German captors, kilted Scottish soldiers were also singled out as a result of curiosity. “The Report of the Transport of British Prisoners of War to Germany” notes that disparate treatment of Scots was not always fueled by a desire to humiliate or exact revenge, but by curiosity. The Report states, “if there happened to be

¹⁵⁰ Alexander Reid interview, 2 September 1918, WO 161/100/386, TNA, Kew.

¹⁵¹ John Osbourne interview, 1 May 1918, WO 161/100/21, TNA, Kew.

¹⁵² Charles Brash interview, 30 August 1916, WO 161/98/668, TNA, Kew.

among the prisoners a Highlander in a kilt, this curiosity would be exhibited in the doorway of the truck.”¹⁵³ A diary entry from a German schoolgirl suggests that the appearance of kilted Scottish soldiers would have likely piqued public interest, as she noted that “the long brown coats and the tattered trousers [of captured Russian soldiers] no longer arouse any curiosity.”¹⁵⁴ The anomaly of the kilted POW likely intensified the public’s interest and reaction when they were paraded before German citizens.

Scottish POW Malcolm Hay experienced the curiosity of a German general when he had been taken prisoner and was recovering from an injury in a German hospital. Hay received a message from a German orderly saying, “The General is coming to inspect the hospital and wishes to know if the Scotch officer would be good enough to wear his uniform.” Hay goes on to explain that the German general asked several questions regarding the advantages of the kilt as “a fighting kit” and questioned whether Scottish regiments wore the kilt in winter.¹⁵⁵ Hay’s revelation that he was the only one in the hospital to be inspected provides another example of a Scottish POW being singled out because of his Scottish nationality. Another Highland soldier experienced curiosity about the kilt in a letter published in 1918 in *The Scotsman*, saying, “we seem to interest the [German] people much, especially the children, who love the kilt it appears.”¹⁵⁶

The exclusivity of the kilt made it an item of high value, with captured soldiers recounting instances when others attempted to buy or steal their kilt. Wilkinson writes of

¹⁵³ “Report on the Transport of British Prisoners of War to Germany, August 1914-December 1914,” 3.

¹⁵⁴ Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War*, 54

¹⁵⁵ Hay, *Wounded and a Prisoner of War*, 1722, 1730.

¹⁵⁶ “A Scottish Prisoner of War in Germany,” *The Scotsman* (1860-1920), Aug 08, 1918, <http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/historical-newspapers/scottish-prisoner-war-germany/docview/485622898/se-2?accountid=11311>.

personal items—particularly uniforms—forming “part of a man’s ‘identity kit,’ used to both reflect and construct their identities.”¹⁵⁷ The following accounts illustrate the kilt’s function as one of the key components of captured Scottish soldiers’ “identity kit.”

Dudley Stewart-Smith of the 1st Black Watch said after being taken prisoner, “I regarded the sale of any kilt to a German as a direct insult to a man’s regiment. To me it would be like parting with my most treasured possession.”¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Private John Kerr of the Gordon Highlanders reported hearing of a Canadian Highlander who would not remove his kilt. “He refused to work except in his kilt, and they would not let him, so they put him in camp cells, 14 days on bread and water. They asked him again and when he refused, they took off his kilt and put him back again in cells.”¹⁵⁹ Other Scottish POWs were not given the option of keeping their kilt and reported that it was stolen after being told that it was needed for “disinfecting.”¹⁶⁰ Hugh Mackie of the Cameron Highlanders recorded, “the night I was first picked up by the Germans my kilt was taken from me and I was left with just my shirt and jacket.”¹⁶¹ Thefts of the most tangible symbol of Scottish nationalism marks another unique element of the Scottish POW experience.

The kilted uniform of Highland regiments also created untoward circumstances for Scottish soldiers that other Allied soldiers did not experience. The anecdotes below are representative, but not exhaustive. Corporal McDaid explained how “the Germans refused to give trousers to any Scotchman with kilts unless the Scots gave up their kilts,

¹⁵⁷ Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War in First World War Germany*, 35.

¹⁵⁸ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 159.

¹⁵⁹ John Kerr interview, May 1916, WO 161/98/588, TNA, Kew.

¹⁶⁰ Lewis-Stempel, *The War Behind the Wire*, 22.

¹⁶¹ Hugh Mackie interview, 1916, WO 161/98/478, TNA, Kew.

which they refused to do.”¹⁶² Private Kerr believed that his kilt led to German cruelty, claiming,

Germans came along before October 1st and saw us wounded. I saw them coming and turned myself over and I think they thought I was dead, but one German put a bayonet in the stomach of another of us. He was not killed. One of the Germans kicked me while I was lying on the field. I think because I had my kilt on.¹⁶³

Kerr continued, noting, “I had very rough treatment in the field dressing place. I had put a bandage on myself—what I carried. It was a mass of blood. After it was pulled off they searched my clothes and a German tried to pull my kilt off.”¹⁶⁴

The kilt was the physical demarcation of a Scottish soldier, and interviews are replete with examples of the German tendency to exact harsher punishment on kilted, Scottish prisoners of war. Some, but not all, accounts explicitly link the treatment of Scottish POWs directly to their Scottishness, while others do not. Lewis-Stempel claims that “more than five hundred [British] prisoners died directly at the hands of their guards, through beatings and shootings.”¹⁶⁵ Scottish POWs can certainly be counted among the five hundred, although the exact number remains unknown.

Some Scottish prisoners were so convinced of the German contempt for Scottish soldiers that they believed they would be killed before being taken prisoner. According to Peter McGregor of the 14th Argylls, “the Huns [Germans] don’t like the Highlanders. In fact, they fly whenever they see the kilts, and finish them off. They never take a Scottie prisoner. They finish him off.”¹⁶⁶ Many Scottish soldiers were, of course, taken prisoner

¹⁶² McDaid interview, 1917.

¹⁶³ Kerr interview, 1916.

¹⁶⁴ Kerr interview, 1916.

¹⁶⁵ Lewis-Stempel, *The War Behind the Wire*, 97.

¹⁶⁶ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 405.

by Germans, with several memoirs and interviews speaking to the general hostility between British prisoners and their German captors, and sometimes greater hostility towards the Scottish POWs. John Bowie of the 1/8th Argylls claimed that the Belgians told him that “the Germans always talked about enemy troops they never liked, the ‘Scottish’ above all. When a Scotchman went about Brussels as a prisoner of war, there was never a dourer or more harshly treated man.”¹⁶⁷

Private J. Murphy of the Scottish Rifles reported, “at the field dressing station they asked me my nationality, and when I told them I was a Scotchman they “scoffed” at me and treated me very badly.”¹⁶⁸ Likewise, Private Anderson of the 1st Gordons remarked in reference to the treatment at the German prison camp at Wittenberg, “Characters brutal; behaved specially badly to kilted Scotchmen.”¹⁶⁹

Indeed, other interviews indicate that Scottish POWs were singled out for dangerous and/or illegal work within the camps. Under the Hague Convention, POWs were not required to participate in defense work, or any work related to the war efforts.¹⁷⁰ Private Turner saw a clear violation of the Hague Convention when he recorded that “two Gordon Highlanders, one called Piper Robertson, were ordered to assist in building Zeppelin sheds, but they refused, and were sentenced to one year’s imprisonment.”¹⁷¹ Cameron Highlander Private A. Wood stated that he and two other Scottish prisoners of war were forced to “work for two hours serving a field gun with ammunitions and

¹⁶⁷ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 406.

¹⁶⁸ J. Murphy interview, May 1916, WO 161/98/619, TNA, Kew.

¹⁶⁹ Anderson interview.

¹⁷⁰ “Laws of War,” Yale Law School. Article 6 states “The State may utilize the labour of prisoners of war according to their rank and aptitude, officers excepted. The tasks shall not be excessive and shall have no connection with the operations of the war.”

¹⁷¹ B. Turner interview, 27 May 1916, WO 161/98/613, TNA, Kew.

digging a position for it under British fire” immediately upon their capture.¹⁷² Private Wray of the King’s Own Scottish Borderers recounted that “Jock Cane of the Cameron Highlanders, refused to go down the pit and was threatened to be shot.”¹⁷³ Interviews document several instances in which the threat of being shot escalated to Scottish POWs actually being shot, or subject to corporal punishment, though not necessarily because they were Scots.

Lance Corporal Richard Law described, “On 1st December I saw Private MacEwan, Scots Guards (7th Division) shot dead on the promenade...on this occasion Private MacEwan, who had a thigh wound and could not walk, and the sentry, who was drunk, turned round and at point blank range fired. MacEwan was shot through the body, and the bullet (a big soft lead bullet) after passing through MacEwan smashed a barrel and lodged in the wall of the canteen. I do not know if the sentry was punished.”¹⁷⁴

Law went on to document his own experience of harsh treatment at the hands of Germans, reporting,

About Christmas 1914 I failed to salute a sentry and my punishment, given by an under-officer, was to be tied to the railings for two hours daily for six days. The first day I was tied up with ‘electric light wire.’ I was made to stand on my toes, and my hands were lightly tied behind my back to the railings, and also my legs. It was snowing, and I had no warm clothing and was in my kilt. After 20 minutes I was unconscious and taken down. During my punishment I twice lost consciousness. Lance-Sergeant Rust 2/Wilts saw my punishment.¹⁷⁵

Mistreatment was not only administered by German military captors, but by German civilians, as well. Private Donald Macdonald reported that “a man named

¹⁷² A. Wood interview, 14 May 1918, WO 161/100/199, TNA, Kew.

¹⁷³ C. Wray interview, May 1916, WO 161/98/606, TNA, Kew.

¹⁷⁴ Richard Law interview, 4 June 1917, WO 161/99/53, TNA, Kew.

¹⁷⁵ Law interview, 4 June 1917.

McFarlane of the Scottish Rifles, was, I am fairly certain, suffering from consumption. The civilians with whom he worked used to stand over him and thrash him, so that when he came up he could hardly walk.”¹⁷⁶

Private Murphy, when asked about instances of German cruelty in the prison camp, offered an account of a Scottish POW being shot, this time because of an escape attempt. Murphy noted that, “the sentry halted them and made them put up their hands and shot one named Sulver, of the Royals Scots Fusiliers.”¹⁷⁷ Of the three men involved in the escape attempt, the Scottish POW was the only one shot, though the motive is unknown.

Another account of a Scottish POW, Private D. Grierson, being shot suggests that his nationality did play a role in his murder. In a report to the Government Committee on Prisoners of War, Lance Corporal G. Hooper of the Wiltshire Regiment described how the German sentry who shot Grierson was “known to be antagonistic to the British,” and upon escorting a Scotsman and Frenchman back to camp after an escape attempt, shot them both in cold blood.¹⁷⁸ Although the sentry reported that he shot them because they attempted to escape again, a civilian witness told Hooper that the men did not attempt to escape. In his official report, Hooper agreed with the civilian’s assessment, noting that the blood at the scene of the crime was on the walking path, indicating that the captured prisoners were not trying to escape when they were shot.

¹⁷⁶ Donald Macdonald interview, April 1918, WO 161/100/530, TNA, Kew.

¹⁷⁷ Murphy interview, May 1916.

¹⁷⁸ G. Hooper statement, FO 383/394, presented to Parliament 5 November 1918, TNA, Kew.

The murder of Scottish prisoner of war John Barry of the 2nd Scots is cited as one of the most ruthless POW shootings, with witnesses claiming that the German sentry who shot Barry unbuttoned his coat and pulled it off his shoulder to carefully aim the gun. News of the murder reached Parliament, where it was discussed in May 1918. Unsurprisingly, MP Macpherson noted conflicting accounts of the shooting between German officials and Private Barry's fellow prisoners at the Sennelager camp.¹⁷⁹ Cameron Highlander Sidney York provided his eyewitness testimony of the event, stating, "we were marching out of the camp when a guard shot my comrade who was limping from a wound in his foot...he was killed right out. We were made to continue forward...the sentry was not more than a yard and a half off when he shot him. The murder was witnessed by over a hundred men."¹⁸⁰

Other instances of cruelty involved the type of medical care or lack thereof toward Scottish prisoners of war. Regarding German medical care, Private Murphy reported, "the doctors nearly always asked your nationality, and if you said English or Scottish, they treated you more roughly, but the French were attended to better and with more kindness. They were harsh and rough in their treatment of the English and Scottish prisoners."¹⁸¹ At least two Scottish prisoners of war stated that they had witnessed cruelty toward fellow Scotsmen. Private Christie of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, when asked about German medical treatment, said,

I have no complaint of any cruelty to myself, except with regard to what I have said about Dr. Monier. I have seen him feeling wounded men and

¹⁷⁹ Lewis-Stempel, *The War Behind the Wire*, 97 and HC Deb. (14 May 1918) (106) co. 193. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1918-05-14/debates/85ae49ea-5633-4074-9f9f-4d76fa5fdf80/ScotsGuardsPrivateShotBySentry>.

¹⁸⁰ Sidney York interview, 14 January 1919, WO 161/100/619, TNA, Kew.

¹⁸¹ Murphy interview, May 1916.

asking them if they feel pain, watching the face all the time, and if they felt pain he would run his scissors into the wound. One man, Private Hugh Mackie, Cameron Highlanders, had had a bullet through the muscle of his back, and I saw him held by orderlies while Dr. Monier with his scissors cut a piece of flesh about 6 inches long from his back. The bullet had tunneled under the muscle and come out the other side, and he cut right across. I saw no other instances of cruelty.¹⁸²

Another British POW similarly reported harsh treatment by Dr. Monier, arguing that he was careless in the treatment of Private French of the 10th Gordons, resulting in the amputation of Private French's leg. Christie reported this as the only instance of true cruelty that he witnessed. Private Macdonald also described abuse by cruel German captors, noting that "Sergeant-Major Gunther was a brute. If, as sometimes happened, a man hurt his hand the place festered, Gunther would cut it with a penknife instead of sending us to a doctor. It was most painful."¹⁸³

In one of the most compelling but depraved examples of Germans singling out kilted Scottish prisoners of war for brutality, Lance Corporal Law described seeing kilted POWs being thrown into a burning haystack after their capture. Law stated,

The evening I was taken prisoner at Langemark, about 8 p.m., I saw to the left front of a farm near the cross roads, where there were some haystacks on fire, the German troops throwing our men into the burning haystacks. I could see the men who were being thrown into the fire wore kilts; I could plainly see the kilt as they were being thrown into the fire. I am not sure whether they were dead or not.¹⁸⁴

This account was confirmed by other witnesses, including fellow prisoner Sidney York, who testified in even more detail, saying,

I was about 50 yards from the scene. The British began to advance again, I know that the Queen's Royal West Surreys came up to reinforce them.

¹⁸² D. Christie interview, May 1916, WO 161/98/575, TNA, Kew.

¹⁸³ Macdonald interview, April 1918.

¹⁸⁴ Law interview, 4 June 1917.

The Germans had carried some of our wounded men back as far as the haystack...On this new attack taking place, I saw the Germans seize at least three of our men who were wounded, who were on foot and standing, but only able to move very slowly, and one man to the head and one to the foot proceed to throw them on to the burning haystack. I saw three men dealt with in this way, all kilted men. I could not say which was the regiment, but either the Black Watch or the Camerons...Our men cried out when they got on to the fire but not before...These men who were burnt had walked back to this point. There were plenty of officers there to stop it...The kilt was recognizable but not the man's features; the men with whom I have discussed the matter did not recognize any faces.¹⁸⁵

The image of kilted soldiers, and *only* kilted soldiers, being thrown into a fire surely affected the soldiers who saw it, particularly other Scots. Moreover, the engagement of English regiments in the same battle suggests that those taken prisoner by the Germans were not exclusively Scottish, but that those who were thrown in the fire were. Incidents like this strengthened the self-perception of the Scottish witnesses as having an identity separate and apart the English while reinforcing the widely held belief among Scottish soldiers that they received harsher treatment than other Britons.

An interesting consequence of Scottish otherness was described in a 1918 article in *The Scotsman*. The article details the visit of Irish nationalist Roger Casement to a German POW camp, where he tried to persuade the imprisoned Scotsmen to join the Irish independence cause by joining the Irish Brigade. According to an unnamed Scottish prisoner at the camp, "He tried to make a speech to us but was received with sticks and stones. He did not get a chance to say much. Hardly any of us even spoke to him." The unnamed prisoner goes on to explain, "The Germans, however, were very determined. A number of men were put apart from us, and the Germans tried to force them into service by punishment, such as reduced rations. The treatment affected the health of some, and a

¹⁸⁵ York interview, 14 January 1919.

few died from the aftereffects. When they found there was nothing doing, the Germans broke up the separate camp.”¹⁸⁶

Irish revolutionaries (in common cause with the Germans against the British) believed Scottish POWs could be enticed away from their loyalty to Great Britain, perhaps because of their vulnerable position as prisoners and their dual national identities. In this instance though, the Scotsmen were unwavering in their loyalty to Great Britain. This devotion could have reflected the Scottish POWs’ unwillingness to shed their British identity, or simply a consequence of their loathing of the German enemy.

Although there are few records of Scotsmen being targeted by Irish revolutionaries and their German allies, it occurred enough to be included in the set of interview questions asked upon British POWs’ repatriation.¹⁸⁷ Captain Hyslop of the 2nd Argylls confirmed that the attempted exploitation of Scottish troops by the Germans was not isolated when he wrote that “the Germans floated over a number of red paper balloons and attached to them were papers printed in English containing accounts of the Irish rebellion; they also said that the English were making the Scotch and Irish do all the fighting while they looked on.”¹⁸⁸ Such German and Irish nationalist propaganda was not mere invention. Primary sources reflect the belief among the Scots and others that British commanders imposed disproportionate combat burdens on Scottish battalions, contributing to a sense of inequality of sacrifice between Scotsmen and other Britons.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ “Released from German Prison Camps: More Arrivals in Holland,” *The Scotsman*.

¹⁸⁷ Private J. Newman reported, “I was never asked to join the Irish Brigade or to assume German Nationality.” J. Newman interview, FO 383/394, presented in Parliament 21 August 1918, 111658, TNA, Kew.

¹⁸⁸ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 400.

¹⁸⁹ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, (London: 1998), 298.

Major Murray wrote in his journal, “All through the war it is the Scottish first and latterly the colonial troops that have done all the fighting.”¹⁹⁰

A 1915 article in the *Campbell Courier* reflected the same belief that Scottish regiments were overused at the front lines for their fighting prowess, saying, “It is safe to say that every Scottish regiment which has been fighting on the continent has suffered losses in prisoners. Being ‘bonnie fechtters’ they have been called upon to play a conspicuous part in the war.”¹⁹¹ The article continues, “it must be remembered that hundreds of Scottish prisoners have had to bear the full brunt of German brutalities...it is pathetic to reflect on what these men have had to endure throughout the winter in the concentration camps.”¹⁹²

Another German propaganda tactic is detailed in the 1914 book *Prisoners of War*, by Tighe Hopkins. Hopkins explained how the German press tried to exploit the differences among the various British nationalities by pitting them against each other. Hopkins described a German correspondent’s report on the Doberitz prison camp, saying “he [the German correspondent] could not bring his pen to write the truth, and from the recesses of his cultured brain, such as it is, he has woven a nice little story of social and domestic discord in the British camp at Doberitz.”¹⁹³ Hopkins quotes the German correspondent as saying a camp inspector

discovered that it was impossible for English, Scottish, and Irish prisoners to tolerate each other... Again, we are told, the peace of the camp was threatened. Peace was restored by dividing the prisoners into their respective nationalities. John Redmond’s [Irish] men were put to work in an isolated part of the camp...they shouted and blasphemed and shook

¹⁹⁰ Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 298.

¹⁹¹ “Scottish Prisoners in Germany,” *Campbell Town Courier*, 08 May 1915, British Newspaper Archive.

¹⁹² “Scottish Prisoners in Germany,” *Campbell Town Courier*.

¹⁹³ Tighe Hopkins, *Prisoners of War*, (Simkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd, London: 1914), 99.

their fists and scowled at their hated foes from England and Scotland while the Prussian military guard, high-minded and restrained, watched this display of British racial hatred and smiled.¹⁹⁴

Although this account is a clear example of German propaganda designed to draw attention to and divide the different British nationalities, it is likely based in some truth. That the Germans so publicly distinguished among the British nationalities suggests that they were acutely aware of the differences among them and, moreover, that they sought to exploit the differences to benefit their cause.

Multiple primary accounts of Scottish POWs speak to the targeted treatment they received from German captors, however research regarding the overall treatment of POWs in Germany indicates that one's status as an officer, rather than nationality, was the most significant factor in determining the quality of one's POW experience.¹⁹⁵ Lt. Archibald Allan Bowman of the Highland Light Infantry was taken prisoner in April 1918 and spent roughly six months in multiple German POW camps. As an officer, he enjoyed luxuries far removed from the maltreatment and manual labor forced upon his fellow Scotsmen in the enlisted POW camps.

Bowman's time in captivity included serving on the Officer Prisoner of War Committee, working to improve prison conditions and to organize the daily routine. Bowman's well-kept notes on the needs of the camp, including hot water for baths and the need for cultural opportunities in the form of a reading room, a piano tuner, and language lessons, demonstrate the sophistication of Bowman's camp compared to that of enlisted POW camps. Bowman also served as "chief lecturer to the camp," providing his

¹⁹⁴ Hopkins, *Prisoners of War*, 99.

¹⁹⁵ Heather Jones, personal correspondence, February 25, 2021.

fellow prisoners with lectures on philosophy.¹⁹⁶ Bowman's experiences, and those of other Scottish officers taken captive, confirm the widespread belief that rank more than nationality was the ultimate arbiter of the conditions of one's POW experience.¹⁹⁷

Yet British government officials, including Prime Minister Asquith, were convinced that even British officers were discriminated against. Asquith said,

I do not hesitate to say—and I say it in the plainest possible terms—that from the very beginning the British prisoners have been treated by the Germans in a discriminating fashion. There can be no shadow of doubt about it. Those who have read the sworn testimony of our officers, their description of their treatment on the way from the places where they were captured, either in France or Belgium, to the different camps in which they were ultimately interned: those who have read the almost incredible tale of deliberate and calculating insult to which British officers and British soldiers have been exposed, and from which to a considerable extent their French and Belgian fellow victims were shielded, must realise that from the first it has been the deliberate policy of the Germans to expose our soldiers and our officers to the worst possible treatment. That is a fact which is worth placing on record.¹⁹⁸

Despite the conviction of British authorities that British prisoners of war were systematically mistreated by the Germans, records reflect that not all Scottish soldiers were mistreated. According to Hal Kerridge, a member of both the Gordon Highlanders and London Scottish, because the Scots had a reputation for not taking prisoners, they expected retaliatory treatment if they fell into the hands of the Germans, and “they [the Scots] were surprised when they were taken prisoner and treated well.”¹⁹⁹ With over 300

¹⁹⁶ University of Glasgow, “The Bowman Letters,” Instagram account, January 2018, (@lettersfromaprisonerofwar1918).

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Greenshields explores more aspects of officer POW camps, specifically examining the luxurious items that officers requested and received, in an attempt to maintain the same lifestyle they did at home. Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 339.

¹⁹⁸ HC Deb. (27 April 1915) (71) co.664. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1915-04-27/debates/6ddad6e4-7818-4e58-bce5-e945c4584abb/PrisonersOfWar>.

¹⁹⁹ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 408.

prison camps in Germany, many Scottish POWs speak of an experience during which they were treated with civility and minimal intentional hardship.²⁰⁰

Similarly, not *all* Scottish regiments endorsed the practice of taking no prisoners. Robert Burns of the 7th Camerons noted after capturing several German prisoners in September 1916, “The men who were taken prisoner, they were just human beings, the same as us. Our regiment didn’t kill any prisoners; we weren’t like that.”²⁰¹ Joseph Lee echoed that same sentiment in his 1917 poem, “German Prisoners.” Lee reflected on his mixed but, ultimately, sympathetic feelings toward the German POWs that he encountered in 1917, ironically before he, too, would be captured and held as a prisoner of war in Germany. Lee wrote,

When first I saw you in the curious street,
Like some platoon of soldier ghosts in grey,
My mad impulse was all to smite and slay,
To spit upon you – tread you ‘neath my feet.
But when I saw how each sad soul did greet
My gaze with no sign of defiant frown,
How from tired eyes looked spirits broken down,
How each face showed the pale flag of defeat,
And doubt, despair, and disillusionment,
And how were grievous wounds on many a head,
And on your garb red-faced was other red;
And how you stooped as men whose strength was spent,
I knew that we had suffered each as other,
And could have grasped your hand and cried, ‘My brother!’²⁰²

Sweeping generalizations regarding the varying kinds of treatment Scots and Germans received at the hands of their captors are impossible. Conditions and treatment

²⁰⁰ David Bilton, *Allied POWs in German Hands 1914-1918* (Great Britain: Pen & Sword Military, 2017), 101. Many of the WO 161 interviews note a lack of food, but attribute it to an overall food shortage, rather than intentional cruelty of their captors.

²⁰¹ Greenshields, *Those Bloody Kilts*, 433.

²⁰² Royle, *In Flanders Fields*, 62.

were not uniform. However, there are too many accounts of Scottish POWs being maltreated for being Scottish to be simply anecdotal or few and far between. Battlefield ferocity and the kilt all too often yielded humiliating or inhumane treatment of Scots when captured.

Chapter IV.

When Jock Comes Marching Home

The concluding chapter considers whether the Scottish experience in World War I enhanced feelings of Scottish separateness or cultural nationalism. I argue that the war experiences—including those of prisoners of war—ultimately reaffirmed a unique Scottish identity. Chapter IV summarizes the weak outcomes of the WWI war crimes trials. It examines the impact of renewed Scottish cultural nationalism that the war engendered. Lastly, Chapter IV discusses how the shared Scottish experience in World War I led to varying political views—including British unionism and Scottish nationalism—issues that Scotland continues to grapple with today.

To answer the question whether the Scots' experiences in World War I enhanced feelings of Scottish separateness or cultural nationalism requires nuance and relativity. Life as a Scottish soldier fighting for the British Army was fundamentally similar to that of other nationalities within the United Kingdom. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, there is enough evidence from primary sources to suggest that the experiences of Scottish troops, and prisoners of war in particular, were not just “varied at the margins,” as Ewen Cameron suggests.

Scottish prisoners of war were not subjected to the extensive, systematic cruelty endured by Russian POWs at the hands of their German captors. There was, though, sufficient singling out and differentiated treatment based on their Scottishness so as to strengthen self-perceptions and emotions of Scottish otherness and cultural nationalism. However, feelings of shame and guilt, coupled with post-war public disillusionment,

caused many repatriated POWs to suppress their experiences and quietly reintegrate into society. Thus, a direct throughline from the Scottish POW experience to a visibility in civil society is not easily detected from available sources. Primary source evidence does reflect that the reaffirmed Scottish identity—realized by the Scottish experience in WWI—became manifest in several ways, including the construction of a Scottish National War Memorial and in political movements that drew from the war experience.

World War I was a watershed historical event, where nothing was the same as it was before, particularly in terms of concepts of empire, the nation-state, nationalism, sovereignty, and self-determination. The Ottoman, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian Empires disintegrated. Ideas of national and ethnic identity and allegiance were challenged at an unprecedented level. For prisoners of war, concepts of one's identity were tested and refined when stuck in a lager (German prison camp)—sometimes for years—with German captors and fellow prisoners of various nationalities.

Scotland itself emerged from the war with an enhanced sense of national uniqueness and identity. The kilt, pipes, and bonnet once associated with the Highland clan warrior now represented Scotland as a whole. Scots entered the war with the conviction that they were an inherently martial people, distinguished by superior military capability and fervor. Their WWI battlefield experience strengthened this self-perception and was further reinforced by German attitudes toward them, whether as warriors or captives.

Interviews of repatriated Scottish POWs revealed the belief that their Scottishness had an impact on the conditions of their confinement. Connections made in the camps to one's Scottish identity through Scottish literature, folk songs, Scottish food, holiday

celebrations, Scottish games, or simple kinship among fellow Scottish prisoners served as reminders of an identity greater than that of an individual prisoner. This proved to be a source of strength throughout imprisonment.²⁰³

From the outset of the war, feelings of Scottish, rather than British, pride were used to buoy public solidarity and support. Scottish identity was especially on display in the care and concern conveyed from the Scottish home front for Scottish prisoners of war. A *Scotsman* article dated May 1915 features a letter to the editor in which the writer asks if it would “be possible to raise a fund in Scotland to send food to prisoners of Scottish regiments in Germany.”²⁰⁴

In response, Mrs. J. Inglis Clark noted that there was already a local, Scottish-specific POW fund in existence and advised the Scottish public to support that committee, rather than the Prisoner of War Help Committee based in London. Clark wrote, “It is surely appropriate that we Scottish people should first of all look after and provide for our Scottish prisoners of war, and in order to do this should rather support the fund of the Scottish Committee.”²⁰⁵ The implication of this exchange is that Scots are a separate people who need to first to look after their own.

Similarly, a 1918 appeal by the Harry Lauder Million Pound Fund, established to support returning Scottish soldiers, was not a call to duty for King and Empire, but instead emphasized that the war was fought for Scotland and her people. The request reads, “through gas and flame and flying steel, the lad in the tartan has fought to the

²⁰³ Lee, *A Captive at Carlsruhe*, 123, 216, 94, 25, 26 and “Exhibition shows Scots tales from German POW camps in WW1,” *The Scotsman*.

²⁰⁴ “Letters to the Editor,” *The Scotsman*: 4 May 1915, British Newspaper Archive.

²⁰⁵ “Letters to the Editor,” *The Scotsman*.

last—for Scotland and for you. His fighting days are over. What are you going to do for him now?”²⁰⁶

Support for Scottish POWs, from both local advocacy groups and from the British government, was unwavering throughout the war. The government’s demands for camp inspections by neutral diplomatic observers and the delivery of food parcels from Scotland-based organizations were critical components in the efforts to keep POWs alive. On the home front, there were steadfast feelings of sympathy and support for those in German captivity. In April 1915, Prime Minister Henry Asquith, incensed by reports of German abuse of British prisoners of war, promised,

I say it with all emphasis and with all deliberation—that when we come to the end of this War, which please God we may, we shall not forget, and ought not to forget, this horrible record of calculated cruelty and crime, and we shall hold it to be our duty to exact such reparation against those who are proved to have been guilty agents or actors in the matter as it may be possible for us to exact. I do not think we should be doing our duty to these brave and unfortunate men, or to the honour of our own country and the plain dictates of humanity, if we were content with anything less than that.²⁰⁷

Despite such fervor, justice for the wrongs and brutal treatment POWs endured was never realized. Within days of the November 11, 1918 Armistice, British POWs began the process of returning home. All British POWs were repatriated by February 1919.²⁰⁸

Once the POWs were out of German hands, the Allies intended to hold Germany accountable for its actions. Under the Versailles Treaty, at the insistence of the reeling

²⁰⁶ “Scots Who Come Home Crippled,” *The Scotsman*, December 19, 1918, British Newspaper Archive.

²⁰⁷ HC Deb. (27 April 1915) (71) co. 664. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1915-04-27/debates/6ddad6e4-7818-4e58-bce5-e945c4584abb/PrisonersOfWar>.

²⁰⁸ Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War*, 263.

Germans, the Allies permitted the German High Court at Leipzig to prosecute accused German war criminals. The Allies' original list of nine hundred names of alleged war criminals was whittled down to a paltry forty-five names, of which only twelve were prosecuted. Of those twelve, three were tried and convicted for the abuse of British prisoners of war.²⁰⁹ Previously discussed instances of German mistreatment of Scottish prisoners is a small sample of the broader abuse and cruelty for which justice was never achieved. The failure of the Leipzig Trials was a lesson learned that would not be repeated.²¹⁰

In the UK, stories and memories of the Great War POWs either faded away or were buried.²¹¹ His Majesty's Government was complicit in the burial. Noted previously in Chapter III were parliamentary records from June 1918 indicating that at least some repatriated British POWs were forbidden from speaking publicly of their experience. In response to Major Newman's inquiry regarding the foregoing, James Hope, Lord of the Treasury, responded that the Government Committee on Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War existed for the purpose of conducting and compiling interviews of repatriated POWs, and that the complete report would be available once all interviews were conducted.²¹² Despite this assurance, records indicate that less than two percent of the estimated 192,000 British prisoners of war captured were actually interviewed.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Hankel, "Leipzig War Crime Trials."

²¹⁰ Hankel, "Leipzig War Crime Trials."

²¹¹ A 1926 article in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* notes, "War books are no longer popular, with the outstanding exception—those which tell of attempts to escape from German prisons." "Prisoners of War," *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 13 July 1926, British Newspaper Archive.

²¹² HC Deb., (3 July 1915).

²¹³ The United Kingdom National Archives, while not issuing an exact number, says that War Office 161 series "are reports on over 3,000 British and Commonwealth prisoners of war captured during the First World War. Although the reports contain valuable information, they represent only a tiny percentage of the estimated 192,000 British and Commonwealth captives." <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/prisoner-of-war-interview-reports-1914-1918/>.

Moreover, the British government's refusal to allow repatriated POWs to speak freely of their experience would have contributed to the rapid national forgetting of the POWs' suffering.

At the same time, it is hard to know how willing many former POWs would have been to discuss publicly or write about their experience, even absent the government directive to stay silent. Records reflect a general reluctance to talk about time spent as a POW. Survivor's guilt, coupled with the shame of being captured, generated a self-imposed form of censorship for most former prisoners of war. Several ex-POWs conveyed the same feeling as Lieutenant Birkenshaw, who said, "I have no wish to be remembered as the man who was a prisoner in Germany, therefore least said the better."²¹⁴ For some returned POWs, however, living with the pain of their experience was unbearable. Numerous stories echo one shared in a 1920 article in *The Scotsman*, which outlines the circumstances surrounding the suicide of a returned Scottish POW. "The deceased was badly treated when a prisoner of war in Germany, and so starved that when released he had the appearance of a skeleton. Lately he had been a changed man; he was out of work and was distressed over a girl to whom he was engaged." The article concludes with the coroner's verdict of "suicide whilst of unsound mind."²¹⁵

For repatriated Scottish prisoners of war, evidence indicates that, despite their common reluctance to speak of their time in German hands, they valued a shared identity as a surviving Scottish prisoner of war. Reunions for former Scottish POWs were a

"Prisoner of War Interview Reports 1914-1918 - The National Archives," accessed August 28, 2024, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/prisoner-of-war-interview-reports-1914-1918/>.

²¹⁴ Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War*, 281.

²¹⁵ "Suicide of Returned Prisoner of War," *The Scotsman*, 4 October 1920, British Newspaper Archive.

common occurrence in the years immediately following the war. The earliest reunions largely served to provide the repatriated prisoners with an opportunity to thank the local committees that supported them through their captivity. *The Edinburgh Evening News* reported that 300 ex-prisoners of war had gathered at a school in March 1920 to thank the Care Committee of the Royal Scots Greys for their unmatched care, noting that the committee was the first to exist in the British Isles, having formed in December 1914.²¹⁶

Scottish newspaper archives show that ex-prisoner of war reunions occurred regularly through 1927, before dropping off in frequency.²¹⁷ The substantial turnout at the reunions reflected both a shared identity and a desire to commemorate their status as Scottish warriors and surviving Scottish POWs. They had a desire to reconnect with those who had endured the same hardships, including the unique experiences of being singled out as Scots by the Germans. Typically, the news articles reporting on the reunions omitted any discussion of the hardships endured or long-term impact of their captivity but, rather, highlighted the conviviality and camaraderie of the now-safely returned POWs.

The persistent effects of the POW experience resulted in a call to action by some ex-Scottish prisoners of war. A January 1926 article in *The Scotsman* refers to the case of a returned Scottish POW who contracted tuberculosis while in German captivity. Upon his release, he returned to his single-room apartment in Glasgow, but to spare his children from the contagious disease, he opted to sleep in the Glasgow Green. This example was

²¹⁶ “War Ex-Prisoners Foregather,” *Edinburgh Evening News*, 31 March 1920, British Newspaper Archive.

²¹⁷ “Ex-Prisoners of War,” *Edinburgh Evening News*, 09 November 1927, British Newspaper Archive.

used in an appeal to Scottish MPs to amend the Pensions Act of 1921 to allow for increased benefits for veterans.

The article notes that J.F. Logan, president of the International Union of Ex-Servicemen, cautioned the seven Scottish MPs attending the meeting. Logan “warned the government that in the future if this was not taken heed of and action taken to rectify their grievances, these ex-servicemen, who had served their country, would become a menace to the government.”²¹⁸ The returned Scottish POWs were not loud, but they were not invisible either. Indeed, in addition to publishing his memoir, WWI prisoner of war survivor Malcolm Hay founded the Returned Prisoners of War Association for WWII Scottish prisoners of war and raised £257,000 in the North East Prisoner of War Appeal.²¹⁹

Perhaps the greatest tangible expression of strengthened feelings of Scottish national identity after the war was in the construction of the National Scottish War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle, completed in 1927. The Scots’ need to distinguish their experience in the war from that of the rest of the United Kingdom is reflected in the effort to memorialize that experience in Scotland itself. The Scots did not want to be a mere sub-set of the Empire remembered by the Cenotaph in London. As early as 1917, there were calls for a war memorial in Scotland. A December 1917 article in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* notes, “Arrangements are already being made in England for the provision of a National or Imperial War Museum, but the feeling remains that in order to

²¹⁸ “Ex-soldiers’ Pensions,” *The Scotsmen*, 26 January 1926, British Newspaper Archive.

²¹⁹ Lewis-Stempel, *The War Behind the Wire*, 291.

give Scotland the true and lasting memorial of the part she has played in the war some historical monument in the country is necessary.”²²⁰

The Scottish Duke of Atholl championed the cause of a National War Memorial in Scotland. When reflecting on an early suggestion that the war memorial to be erected in London, he recalled, “I am afraid that all the rebel spirit that lies dormant in every Scot roused itself within me, and I made a public statement that if the people of Scotland wished to have a National War Memorial to commemorate their own dead it would not be in Hyde Park, London, and put up with Government money, but it would be put up by Scottish hands, with Scottish money, on Scottish soil.”²²¹ Likewise, Captain J.C. Black, of the St. Andrew’s Society of Glasgow, upon hearing that an official history of the war was being planned by the Historical Branch of the Committee of Imperial Defence, asked that “correct national names and terms be used” and to make certain that “justice will be accorded, and due credit given to Scotland for the part which she has, and is, so nobly playing in this great war.”²²² As this thesis has demonstrated, the clear Scottish desire to have their unique Great War experience distinguished from that of other Britons as the sentiments above indicate, was not matched over time by historians, who consistently categorized the Scots alongside the greater British identity.

There was a call for Scotland’s sacrifices in the war to be recognized separately from those of other British soldiers, alongside a push to emphasize that, unlike their fellow Britons, fighting was seen as the birthright of all Scots.

²²⁰ “Scottish War Memorial,” *Aberdeen Press and Journal* 13 December 1917, British Newspaper Archive.

²²¹ Macleod, “By Scottish Hands, with Scottish Money, on Scottish Soil,” 73.

²²² Trevor Royle, *The Flowers of the Forest: Scotland and the First World War* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), preface, Kindle.

Thus, a distinctive Scottish national and military identity was not born of the Great War, but the war reaffirmed and expanded these pre-existing identities. Allan and Carswell argue that the Scottish National War Memorial “reveals something of how Scots viewed the war and Scotland’s part in it. By adapting buildings in Edinburgh Castle to this purpose, Scotland was placing its response to the war, the Great War that surely then seemed a defining national experience, firmly in the embrace of its historic past.”²²³

Renewed Scottish identity and cultural nationalism did not translate into specific post-war political movements. Both Unionists and Scottish nationalists used the war and its outcome in their appeals. Neither did the war birth an overarching literary movement. Alan Riach argues, “There is no single story in which Scottish literature, the growth of Scottish nationalism and the experience of the First World War, can be defined.”²²⁴

To some, post-war Scottish identity was firmly rooted within Scotland’s position in the United Kingdom. In “National Identity in Crisis: Politicians, Intellectuals and the 'End of Scotland', 1920–1939,” Richard Finlay notes that “pre-war [Scottish] national identity had, to a large extent, been founded on the notion that Scotland was an equal partner with England in the founding and the running of the British empire.”²²⁵ Unionists promoted this theme after the war.

However, any suggested post-war changes in military structure and organization—particularly those concerning Scottish regiments—were ill-received in Scotland. An effort in 1919 by Whitehall and the War Office to re-name the historic

²²³ Allan and Carswell, *The Thin Red Line*, 15.

²²⁴ Alan Riach, “Scottish literature, nationalism and the First World War” in *Scottish Literature and World War I*, ed. David A. Rennie (Edinburgh University Press: 2020), 21.

²²⁵ Richard J. Finlay, “National Identity in Crisis: Politicians, Intellectuals and the 'End of Scotland', 1920–1939.” *History* 79, no. 256 (1994): 242–59, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24421097>.

Scots Greys as Royal Scots Greys (Second Dragoons) received strong Scottish pushback. A 1919 *Sunday Post* article conveys deep Scottish pride in their historic regiments and a reluctance to change the name of the Scottish regiment... “they [the Scottish public] are proud of the Scots Greys; proud of their unbroken Scottish tradition, and of their famous chargers.”²²⁶ It continues, “The crux of the whole matter appears to be the delusion in certain quarters that Scotland is merely a province of England. It is not, but a free and equal partner in the United Kingdom of Great Britain.”²²⁷

Despite the Scots’ formidable battlefield performance, the perception that London saw Scotland as a junior partner in the UK fueled Scottish nationalists. Among the post-war nationalists was poet Hugh MacDiarmid, who, according to Royle, “held firmly nationalistic opinions about the economic state and inferior political status of Scotland” after his war experience.²²⁸ Of MacDiarmid, Riach said,

For MacDiarmid, the First World War was the forcing ground of his sense of what the future must ensure. Many poets began in affirmation then increasingly questioned the values and priorities of the war, but characteristically MacDiarmid drove further. The devastations he witnessed would underlie the vigour and ruthlessness with which he would pursue his vision for a Scotland regenerated, politically as much as culturally, seeing both drives as inseparable.²²⁹

Nationalists referred to the 1914 Home Rule Bill that was put on hold when the war broke out and emphasized again the need for Scottish home rule. Sir Henry Cowan, who had introduced the original Home Rule Bill, attempted to reintroduce the bill in May 1919, noting the international post-war emphasis on self-determination. He said, “Our

²²⁶ “Future of Scots Greys,” *The Sunday Post*, 27 July 1919, British Newspaper Archive.

²²⁷ “Future of Scots Greys,” *The Sunday Post*.”

²²⁸ Royle, *The Flowers of the Forest*, chapter 11.

²²⁹ Riach, “Scottish literature, nationalism and the First World War,” 29-30.

representatives in Paris have been paying lip-service to the principle of self-determination, let the Government now show that Scotland, making a constitutional demand, is to have the opportunity and right of determining her own destiny.”²³⁰ Nationalists also emphasized the post-war perception that disproportionate numbers of Scottish soldiers were killed in WWI (a contested concept in recent years).²³¹ Though the National Party of Scotland was not founded until 1928, nationalists drew upon the experiences and effects of the Scottish experience in WWI to emphasize Scottish otherness, rather than British unity.

Although Scotland’s experience in the Great War reaffirmed Scottish national identity it did not produce uniform political attitudes. The war did, however, imprint an irrevocable change on the Scottish psyche—one that continues to this day. Strachan claims that as a result of the Scots’ experience in WWI, “An enhanced Scottish identity was created, and it emerged in a military context.”²³² Now, much of the population, not just the Highlanders, adopted an association with the fabled Highland warrior tradition—if not in battle itself in a Highland regiment, then by proxy. World War I cemented the convergence of Highland military tradition with Scottish national identity.

Scottish martial identity, renewed by the Scottish experience in World War I, persists today, most notably in the continued legacy of Scottish military regiments. The Royal Regiment of Scotland, the senior line infantry regiment of the British Army,

²³⁰ HC Deb (16 May 1919) (vol 115) co. 1991. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1919-05-16/debates/732a68a5-bd42-406e-a552-a73c0156eebf/GovernmentOfScotlandBill>

²³¹ Stephen McGinty, “Great War worst for Scots troops ‘a myth,’” *The Scotsman*, August 10, 2014, <https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/great-war-worst-scots-troops-myth-1529401>, and Colin Cambell, “We cannot forget that 26% of Scots in First World War didn’t come home,” *The Herald Scotland*, February 26, 2013, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/13093885.we-cannot-forget-that-26-of-scots-in-first-world-war-didnt-come-home/>.

²³² Strachan, “The Scottish Soldier,” Abstract.

embodies the tradition and heritage of the original Scottish regiments. The regiment “draws particular strength and extraordinary cohesion from the uniquely glorious history of its antecedent Regiments.”²³³ The Royal Regiment of Scotland considers itself “the custodians of Scottish martial history, and remains fiercely proud of its heritage.”²³⁴

It is not only the Royal Regiment of Scotland, and the historic Scottish battalions that make up the regiment, that honor and embody Scottish military tradition. Scots at large proudly embrace the kilt as the symbol of Scottish identity. Once banned under the 1746 Dress Act after Scotland’s defeat at Culloden, the kilt undoubtedly is the greatest animating symbol of Highland military legacy. Unlike the Scottish experience in WWII, when troops did not wear kilts, the kilt was a principal distinguishing feature of Scottish forces in the Great War.²³⁵

The kilt is now considered a hallmark of Scottish identity and is standard dress at Scottish celebrations, including weddings, christenings, and sporting events. The psychological and physical benefits of the kilt have long been maintained by those who wear them, including the accounts of Scottish soldiers from World War I. The kilt became the subject of increased academic examination in the twentieth century. Research conducted by the *Scottish Medical Journal* suggested increased virility among men who wear regimental kilts.²³⁶

²³³ “The Royal Regiment of Scotland (SCOTS) is the senior line infantry unit of the British Army,” The Royal Regiment of Scotland, <https://www.theroyalregimentofscotland.org/identity/who>

²³⁴ “The Royal Regiment of Scotland (SCOTS),” The Royal Regiment of Scotland.

²³⁵ Thomas Mackay, “Why do Scots wear kilts? The history of Scottish kilts, the custom a cut above the rest,” *The Scotsman*, 20 October 2023, <https://www.scotsman.com/heritage-and-retro/heritage/why-do-scots-wear-kilts-explained-4379909>.

²³⁶ EJO Kompanje, “‘Real Men Wear Kilts’: The Anecdotal Evidence That Wearing a Scottish Kilt Has Influence on Reproductive Potential: How Much Is True?” *Scottish Medical Journal* 58 (1): e1–5, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0036933012474600>.

Scottish military identity serves as a foundational element that continues to shape attitudes toward Scottish independence. In 2013, the Scottish government (led by the Scottish National Party) argued for an independent Scottish approach to international relations in its formal publication ahead of the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum:

We have in existing naval, army and air force bases the underpinning infrastructure we need to meet our defence needs and regional defence responsibilities. We also have sufficient expertise, built up over years of service and Scotland's proud military tradition, with Scots who have served at all levels of Britain's armed forces and at senior levels in the Ministry of Defence and NATO.²³⁷

The document calls for continuity of the Scottish military identity, stating, “The units of the Scottish Army will carry on the names, identities and traditions of Scotland's regiments, including those lost in the defence reorganisation of 2006.”²³⁸ By seeking to honor the names and identities of traditional Scottish regiments within its platform for independence, the Scottish government underscored how the convergence of Scottish military and national identities, shaped by WWI, continue to echo and guide Scotland to this day.

The experience of WWI Scottish prisoners of war added to the legacy of the unique Scottish identity. Their treatment by the German enemy exposed a complex blend of both fascination and revulsion toward kilted Scottish soldiers. The Germans propagandized what they saw as the Scots' cultural inferiority and submission to the English, while recognizing their perceived martial superiority. The result was patterns of

²³⁷ Scottish government, *Scotland's Future - Your Guide to an Independent Scotland* (Dandy Books, 2013).

²³⁸ Scottish government, *Scotland's Future*.

harsher treatment meted out to Scottish POWs, the singling out of Scottish POWs for humiliation, and efforts to recruit them to the Irish Brigade.

Historians and others have blurred the distinct Scottish experience in the Great War, subsuming the Scots by aggregating the WWI experiences of all the nationalities within the United Kingdom. The Scottish National War Memorial is a remonstrance to that blurring—a physical reminder of what Scots know to have been a unique experience—one in which their Highland martial identity and traditions were acknowledged on a global scale. Strachan concludes that, for Scotland, World War I “left a national legacy. Scottish society, learned and industrious, thrifty and devout – at least in the stereotypes – re-acquired a patina of militarism which it has subsequently proved reluctant wholly to shed.”²³⁹ The revival and advancement of Scottish military identity in the late nineteenth century, coupled with the distinct Scottish experience in World War I—particularly the experiences of its POWs—however and to what extent it “varied at the margins,” played a pivotal role in forging a stronger Scottish national identity that persists to this day. The substantial number of votes for independence in the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum reflects how the Scottish national identity continues to have an impact on Scotland’s place within the United Kingdom and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

²³⁹ Strachan, “The Scottish Soldier and Scotland,” 53.

Appendix 1.

Primary Source Document Examples

No. 2346.

Name, Rank, No. and Regiment.	Reid, Alexander, Private, 7593, Gordon Highlanders.
Home Address.	6, Land Street, Buckie.
Place and Date of Capture.	Cambrai, 27th August 1914.
Nature of Wound, if any.	Unwounded.
Occupation and Age.	Carter. 36 years.
Capture. Aug. 27, 1914.	I did not see any breach by the enemy of the usages of war before I was captured.
Journey. Aug. 27—Sept. 1, 1914.	I was taken when captured to a church, and kept there two or three hours, and was then taken with a large number of other prisoners to Sennelager. I travelled in a low truck with sides and ends about 1 foot high. Being the only Highlander I had to stand up at every station and show myself. At one station a man came at me with a knife and cut a piece out of my kilt, but he was stopped by the guard from doing any further mischief. Soldiers, civilians, and railway men threw stones at us from time to time. The journey took four days, and we got no food except bread and water at one station. There was no sanitary convenience of any kind in the truck. There were no wounded in my truck, but there were some in trucks in front of us.
Sennelager. Sept. 1, 1914—March 29, 1915.	The conditions were very rough at Sennelager at first, but are much better now. For the first six months we were employed putting up barracks at Staumühle Lager. We had to carry boards 3 kilometres from the station, for which we got no pay, doing three journeys a day. Hundreds of men were employed at this work, there being no commando there. All the food we got was two buns at 5 or 6 a.m., and nothing more until 4 p.m., when we got soup if we were lucky. There was no proper means of washing, and we slept on the ground under one blanket.
Hövelhof. March 29, 1915—Feb. 14, 1916	About the 29th March 1915 I was sent to Hövelhof Commando, where 30 English, 40 French, and a few Belgians were employed making roads to Sennelager and Paderborn. We worked from 6 a.m. (with two hours off for dinner) till 6 p.m., and got 3d. a day. The land was moorland, which they were treating for cultivation. We lived on a farm in a big barn, and had beds to sleep in and washed under a pump. The sanitary arrangements were all right. The food was rather better than at Sennelager. I was given a blue dungaree with a red stripe down the back. There were 10 sentries to look after us; they did not knock us about much.
Karnap. Feb. 14—March 14, 1916.	I got letters and parcels here, and nothing was taken out of the parcels. We were allowed to write the usual letters. There was a canteen kept by a German sergeant, at which you could buy cigars, cigarettes, and prisoners beer, but no food. It was rather expensive. They asked for volunteers to go back to Sennelager at the beginning of February 1916, and I went back.
	About the 14th February 1916 I was sent on the Karnap commando, 6 kilometres from Essen, where 30 Englishmen were employed making a reservoir. It was a very wet job, but they lent us big boots. We were paid 3d. a day. We lived underground with very good accommodation. We were very strictly

guarded, and there were big electric lights all round. The food was all right, but the work was very hard, and we had to work 12 hours a day. I saw some men knocked about, but was not knocked about myself.

While at Karnap I got my letters and parcels, which were sent on by the English from Sennelager.

I went sick with a rash on my wrist, and the interpreter sent me to see the doctor, who wanted to send me into hospital, and paid my fare to Essen, but the doctor at the hospital would not have me in. I tried five hospitals, but they would not have anything to do with prisoners, and so I was sent back to Sennelager about 14th March 1916.

Sennelager. March 14—26,
1916.

Summervale. March 26—
April 14, 1916.

About 26th March 1916 I was sent on the Summervale commando, where about six Englishmen and 26 Frenchmen were employed making roads. We lived in a store in the village. The beds were very bad, being made out of wood in the rough, two together in tiers, one above the other. We had straw to lie on and three blankets. We washed in a wash-house and had the usual German latrine—a big trench, which was emptied about once a month. The food was very bad. Before leaving to our work at 6 a.m., having to walk 3 miles, which took an hour, we had rye coffee and bread. One loaf was served out for 10 men; it was very heavy, and made of rye, straw, and sawdust sort of stuff. Our dinner was brought out to us in a big dixe on a hand-cart by a boy. We never had any meat, but one day had a stew made of swedish turnips, and the next the stalks of the turnips mashed up into a stew. There were a few potatoes in the stew. In the evening we had maize meal with prunes and dessert apples in it.

We were paid 3*d.* a day. We got our parcels and letters, but had to pay 1*d.* a mile for bringing the parcels from the station. Our hours were supposed to be from 6 till 6, but as we did not stop work until 6 p.m. and had to walk back, we did not get back until 7.30. We kept "grousing" about it, and finally Paget (South Warwicks) and I reported sick. We had to walk 6 miles to the doctor with a sentry, and the doctor excused us from work for three days, writing it in the book which the sentry had with him. When we came back the German lance-corporal knocked us about and put us on to work in our quarters, cleaning up and carrying out manure, potatoes, and coal from the store. We refused to work, and said that we would like to go back to Sennelager, and were sent back after four days, getting there about the 14th April 1916. We were put into the guard room for 11 days, being taken one day to the orderly room, where they took down our statements as to why we refused to work, and we were told that the general in command would deal with us. We were finally sentenced to eight days' solitary confinement in very small cells on bread and water, with soup every fourth day. There were large stoves in the cells, which were filled from outside. The Germans used to light them, fill them up with coal, and make the cell unbearably hot and stuffy, and look through the peep-hole at you perspiring and say "Fine Englishman." There was a window, but you could not see out of it. After serving my sentence I went back into the lager, and stayed there until about the 1st June 1916, when I was sent on the Westerhaupt Commando, 10 kilometres from Sennelager. About 30 English and 20 Frenchmen were working there, cleaning out a canal up to their knees in water. The hours were from 6 a.m. till 7 p.m., and the pay 3*d.* a day. The under-officer, lance-corporal, and sentries were very bad; they made us work very hard, and used to hit us with the butts of their rifles. We had to walk a mile and a half each way to the canal and back.

Sennelager. April 14—
June 1, 1916.

Westerhaupt. June 1—
July 1, 1916.

We lived in a barn and slept in hammocks, which were lashed to a post, there being three in a row one above the other, with a ladder to get up to the upper ones.

One morning I, Paget of the Warwicks, Davis of the East Lancashires, Jenkins of the Kents, and a Frenchman reported sick. Paget refused to get out of his hammock, but the other four of us were marched 6 kilometres to the doctor, who would not look at us. We arrived back at 11 a.m., when the

under-officer looked at the sentry's book and asked us to be ready to go to work in 10 minutes. I had had no breakfast, so went to make some tea inside. There was no hot water, so I went to the yard to break up some wood. The under-officer came to me and said "Work." I replied "that I should wait till I got some tea made." He then kicked my basin against the wire of the camp and left me. I tried to get into the building to get my jacket, but two sentries "chucked" me out. I tried again, and they then pushed me out of the camp. After the under-officer had kicked my basin he went into the building and found Davis cooking something. He told him to get on his jacket and go out to work, and tried to push him out and take his food away from him. Davis caught hold of the post to which the hammock was fixed, and then the under-officer took his cardigan jacket off him and hammered him with the butt end of his rifle, cutting his hands and his face and making them bleed, pushed him against the wires, and finally out of the gate.

Sennelager. July 1, 1916
Jan. 1, 1917.

We were then sent out to work, getting back at 6 p.m., and the next day all of us were sent back to Sennelager. We were put in a guard room and kept here six weeks and two days, not being allowed any parcels. The under-officer used to come round and see if we had smuggled in any English food. One of the Frenchmen attached a wire to one of the electric lamps and put an empty tin at the end of it, giving the under-officer an electric shock when he came to see what it was. For this, all the men in the guard room were ordered to stand to attention beside the Commandant's office for three days from 6 till 6.

When we were released from the guard room we were left alone for about a week, and were then court-martialled before six officers, being given a German officer to defend us. I was charged with refusing to work, the sentence for which under German military law was three weeks' imprisonment, but I was acquitted, and so was the Frenchman. Jenkins got a week's imprisonment and Paget 14 days. Davis was charged with refusing to work and resisting the sentry, and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, which was the punishment under German military law for this offence. He appealed to the Commandant for a new trial by a general court-martial at Munster. Jenkins and I went with him as witnesses for him. They told me at the court to make my statement as short as possible, and to say that I had been tried and let off, and also told me that I would not be believed. Davis had a German officer, a good man, to defend him, but the sentence was confirmed, the court stating that it was the least they could give him on the charge on which he was tried. He could only appeal again by getting the Commandant to write out the charge in English, when if he thought he had been unfairly dealt with he could appeal, but he did not think it worth while doing this. He served part of his sentence at Sennelager and was sent to Cologne about Christmas 1916 to finish it.

After the court-martial I was employed at wood-cutting 5 kilometres away from the camp, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., for which I received 7½d. a day. We had to walk each way and cooked our potatoes, maize, prunes and apples on a wood fire.

Staumühle. Jan. 1--Feb.
1, 1917.

At the beginning of January 1917, Block 2 of Sennelager was closed for a month, as the Germans wanted it for their own troops, and I was sent to Staumühle. This had been a convalescent camp and the barracks were better, being double-lined with wood. After a month the troops were moved again and we returned to the lager. We did not have to work at Staumühle.

Sennelager. Feb. 1-2,
1917.
Rumpeck (? Rimbeck).
Feb. 2—March 30, 1917.

I only stayed one night at Sennelager, and then went about the 2nd February 1917 to the Rumpeck commando, where I worked on a canal until the end of March, getting 3d. a day. The camp was a very good one, having been a restaurant before the war, and it was only 10 minutes from our work. We worked from 7 a.m. till 6 p.m. and got the ordinary food. About that time the parcels were stopped all over Germany for 14 days because the French were supposed to be sending poison in tins for the crops. After this they tasted all the condensed milk and took all your tins away from you, emptying them for you in front of the sentries;

Farm nr. Rumpeck (? Rim-
beck. March 30—June
1, 1917.

Sennelager. June 1-8,
1917.

Horn. June 8, 1917 —
July 29, 1918.

Escape. July 29 1918.

Opinion of Examiner.

they also took away all the paper which the parcels came in.

At the end of March 1917 I was sent to a farm near the camp, where I worked until about 1st June, getting 3d. a day. The farmer gave us meals which were better than the camp stuff.

On 1st June 1917, I went back to Rumpeck camp sick, my head was bad and I had rheumatic pains all over me. The doctor sent me back to Sennelager, and in about a week I got better and was sent on to Horn commando.

This was a big camp and there were about 60 there. The beds were very bad, the sheets were never washed and they were full of fleas, but apart from this it was a good commando. In the summer I worked on a farm from 6 a.m. till 7.45 p.m., the farmer giving me meals and my pay being 3d. a day. In the winter I was employed making glucose from turnips. Being chief cook I got 1s. 3d. a day, besides tips from the farmer if I made a good brew. The kettles in which we boiled the turnips held 16 cwt., which produced 200 lbs. of glucose (a sort of black treacle). This was sold for Mk. 40 (1s. 2d. a lb.), and was not supposed to be sold to civilians in less quantities than 25 lbs. at a time, but sometimes I used to let women who said they were starving have a pound, getting cigarettes in exchange. A large quantity of glucose was sent to the front.

I remained at Horn until the 29th July 1918, when I escaped with a fellow Gordon Highlander.

Three men were going to try and escape from a Paderborn commando in July or August 1916, and had secreted their disguises under a waggon; the Germans got to hear of this, and when they went to the waggon, one of them, I forget his name, but I think he was a bandsman in the Royal Irish Fusiliers, was shot dead at 5 yards' range and the other two were captured. This was in the German papers, and photos were sold of the grave of the man who was shot.

The witness was a very intelligent man who has had various experiences in Germany, and his statements are in my opinion absolutely reliable. His talking was a little difficult to understand, broad Scotch, but I did the best I could with him.

J. WALTERS.

Figure 4. Private Alexander Reid interview, September 1918.

Private Alexander Reid, 7593 Gordon Highlanders, interview September 1918, copy of original typed manuscript, United Kingdom National Archives, War Office 161, Kew, England.

HOSPITAL ENQUIRY SHEET.

- (1) Name, Rank, No., and Regiment.
- (2) Home Address.
- (3) Place and date of capture.
- (4) Nature of wound, if any.
- (5) Any attention at field dressing station? Kindly treated?
- (6) Name of Hospital to which ultimately sent.
- (7) Length of journey to hospital.
Nature of conveyance.
- (8) Treatment on journey by—
(a) Guard.
(b) Others.
- (9) Any food on journey? If so, what and how often?
- (10) Behaviour of German Red Cross.
- (11) Length of time in this Hospital.
Give dates if possible.
- (12) Treatment in Hospital.
(a) Medical.
(b) Nursing.
(c) Lodging.
(d) Food.
(e) Sanitary conditions; if bad, state way in which defective.
Any difference of treatment made between different nationalities.
- (13) Names of doctors who attended informant; humane or reverse?
Any operation? If so, under anæsthetic? If not, why not?
- (14) Clothing.
Any supplied by Germans?
What? Underlinen? Bed linen?
How often changed?
- ✓(15) Postal arrangements. Received letters and parcels sent? Regularly or not? Opened in informant's presence? Any articles removed?
- (16) Date of discharge from hospital.
To what camp? Length of journey.
Treatment on journey.
- (17) General remarks on points not included above.
- (18) Opinion of Examiner as to intelligence and reliability of informant.

Figure 5. British POW Hospital Inquiry Sheet.

United Kingdom National Archives, War Office 161, copy of original document, Kew, England. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/prisoner-of-war-interview-reports-1914-1918/>

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