

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Janet Lee

This thesis focuses on performances of masculinity by British Royal Flying Corps (RFC) airmen in the charged landscape of the First World War prisoner of war (POW) camp. I examine how captive airmen coped with imprisonment by reasserting the familiar homosocial communities of pre-capture squadron life, particularly through practices associated with domesticity, entertainment, and escape. Throughout, I employ a queer theoretical approach that recognizes practices of gender as reiterative performances in order to illustrate the elasticity and adaptability of hegemonic masculinity in the context of war and imprisonment. I suggest participation in the social relations of family and home, musical and theatrical endeavors, and attempted escapes served to reinscribe martial masculinities through assertions of group identity and national dominance via institutionally sanctioned male homosocial bonding, even as they troubled and made more elastic hegemonic understandings of gender.

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“Missed the Best Months of the War”:
Masculinity, Homosociality, and Empire among British
Royal Flying Corps Interned in First World War German Prisoner of War Camps

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Devon Graham

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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies

Director of the School of Language, Culture & Society

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Devon Graham, Author

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Introduction

The First World War ushered in profound changes in governments, social orders, and cultures in Europe and around the globe. Hundred-year-old empires crumbled under the strain of total war and colonized peoples rose up to demand rights and sovereignty. In Great Britain, an entire generation of people were forced to reckon with their own mortality and the future of their nation and its empire. This empire was led by elite white men, a generation educated in public schools and trained in the mindset of muscular Christian masculinity for the defense of the empire and the maintenance of its power (Dawson; Hall; Krishnaswamy; Vance). During the massive upheaval of war, many young men from Great Britain's elite families joined the fledgling and highly romanticized Royal Flying Corps (RFC). Flight technology was in its infancy in 1914, creating an exceptionally dangerous and glamorous new form of combat (Clark; Paris; Philpott). Airmen, flying airplanes made of wood, linen and wire, were sensationalized in the national press as brave "knights of the air" and hailed as ideals of British masculinity even as they experienced devastating casualty rates (Lee "Knights"; see also Mangan *Manufactured*). Hundreds more were taken prisoner and lived for months or years in German Prisoner of War (POW) camps (Beaumont; Ketchum; Speed). Airmen were raised within late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British understandings and expectations of gender, when hegemonic masculinity became tied to militarism, empire, and homosocial institutions in ways that shaped the experiences of RFC airmen (Bourke; Doan; Tosh).

This project examines RFC airmen's relationships to, and performances of, masculinity within the particular spatial location of the POW camp. I inquire into the lived experiences of these men as prisoners, seeking answers to how they coped with capture and the subsequent loss of agency, and how homosociality, the nonsexual attractions by men or women towards members of their own sex, operated in this physical and emotional space. I seek to understand and answer the following questions:

- How did the particular physical location and the subjects' restricted spatial experiences in the prisoner of war camps affect their performances of, and own understandings of, masculinity?
- In what way did airmen create communities within the homosocial space of the POW camp and how did these communities, and the interpersonal relationships that came from them, offer opportunities for the performance of masculinities?
- In what ways did prisoners' construction and maintenance of homosocial friendships and communities work in the service of, or in defiance to, empire and maintenance of hegemonic power?

These questions direct my work as I examine the performances of masculinity of these elite, white, young British airmen as they navigated the emotional and social experiences of capture and imprisonment.

This work is part of a larger study conducted by Dr. Janet Lee that focuses on the emotional lives of RFC airmen in the First World War ("Eye in the Sky"; "Knights of the Air"). The sources which form the foundation of my inquiries are the letters and diaries written by sixteen RFC officers when they lived as POWs in Germany between 1915 and 1919. The letters and diaries are part of archives in the Imperial War Museum and the Royal Air Force (RAF) Museum in London collected by Dr. Lee. In both the letters written to family members and the personal diaries of these prisoners, I look for the ways in which the airmen describe their fellow prisoners, their emotional states, and their daily activities, paying particular attention to any differences or similarities between these descriptions in accounts written for other people (such as letters and postcards) and diaries (which were typically not intended for others to read). Among the questions I ask during interpretation of these sources are the following: how do prisoners describe their bunkmates, co-pilots, fellow prisoners, and captors? Do they ascribe any particular traits or emotions to others, to their relationships, or to themselves? How do prisoners talk about their social time and interpersonal and group relationships in

camps? These questions guide my analysis of the hundreds of pages prisoners wrote during their time as POWs and serve as a scaffolding for my analysis of these documents.

To undertake this project, I engage with two major theoretical lenses: gender history and queer theory. In doing gender history I follow feminist historians such as Joanna Bourke and Laura Doan who deploy gender as an analytic category in order to examine gender as a historical construct. In her book *Disturbing Practices*, Laura Doan, for example, acknowledges that categories of gender are “always in flux and subject to any number of contradictory alternate, denied, or suppressed definitions” and maintains this understanding throughout her historical analysis (108). Reflecting the move in academia in the 1990s from “women’s history” to “gender history,” this thesis is based on an understanding that categories of ‘man’ or ‘woman’ do not “exist pre-discursively” but are “constructed in and through human culture and language” (Gabaccia and Maynes 2). As a gender historian I must continually negotiate contemporary understandings of gender categories and refuse an understanding of a stable gender system for my subjects, for it is in the “nature of the category to fix, naturalize, and stabilize” that which is “contingent” (Doan 108). In addition, I integrate the insights of feminist historians who focus on performances of masculinity during this period. I incorporate J. A. Mangan’s work on the Victorian ideal of “manly love,” a concept that was encouraged by British institutional authorities and presented male friendships as “spiritually exalted, sublime, and benevolent” (Mangan *Manufactured* 119). I also consider the gender formulation of the “soldier hero,” which Graham Dawson calls one of the most “powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions” (Dawson 1), and address the class and race-based formulations of this masculinity (Barringer; Krishnaswamy; Tosh). I further engage with Jessica Meyer’s work on the gendered role war played in the British imagination, including expectations that conflict would turn boys into men through the “masculinizing

experiences” of warfare even while soldiers themselves coped by engaging in various domestic practices (Meyer 3). Santanu Das’ argument that a very real, tender, and intensely physical intimacy evolved among men on the front lines of the First World War is also central to this work, as is Joanna Bourke’s scholarship on the emotional connections and loving relationships between men on the front lines.

In doing feminist gender history I must necessarily consider the positionality of the subjects of this study. Since its emergence in the 1960s, modern western feminist theory, and gender history, makes the epistemological claim that the “perspective of the knower shapes what he or she looks at, sees and ultimately can know” (Gabaccia and Maynes 1). My work contributes to ongoing scholarship in gender history in which gender is approached as a “pervasive signifier of power relations” (Gabaccia and Maynes 2). The subjects of this study were among the most elite class of white, British men and thus must be approached as part of hierarchical institutions of power and hegemony. They were children of the British Empire and were both raised in, and went on to define, the systems of power and oppression that exist today; systems that rely on exclusive, gender-based homosocial groups and relationships. As a result, the subjects’ knowledge and performance of gender must be approached within the context of their own position within power hierarchies.

The subjects of this study are not the only ones to operate within systems of power, however. As a gender historian I undertake this work following Doan’s call for “critical history” that “acknowledges the historian as the producer of a ‘representation of the past’” (xii). My approach to this gender history centers the way in which historical materials are produced under particular conditions that are “embedded within social and ideological systems” and recognize the ongoing effect of hierarchical gender and racial systems on myself (Doan xii; see also Hodder). I do not claim to search for a past that existed but rather am deeply aware that by interpreting and writing

this history I am actively re-narrating it. I am a feminist scholar who lives and works in the United States, thus I bring a particular cultural context and U.S. centric education to my analysis. I do not share my subjects' nationality, gender, nor their elite class status, particularly given the way gender and class were conceptualized in early-twentieth century Britain. I am white, and while I was not raised in an Edwardian context of race, I write from the privileged position of whiteness in the academy. My identity shapes my analysis because of the particular standpoint I bring to this work.

This project also analyzes POWs' performances of gender using a queer theoretical framework. I employ this framework to understand gender and non-normativity broadly defined. As Doan suggests, history "framed by 'identity knowledge' constrains even as it illuminates," emphasizing that queer theory, when applied to history, is not necessarily the search for the queer subject, but rather about queering history (ix). Queer theory is thus not restricted to sexuality, but involves, Muñoz writes, a broad critique of "race, gender, class, nationality, and religion" as well as sexuality (4). Queering involves the opening of "possibilities" of meaning when gender and sexuality, as well as other identities and systems of oppression, are not made to "signify monolithically" (Sedgwick *Between Men*). As a result, I approach gender not as a polarized and fixed category, but rather as a system that was and is "in flux and subject to... contradictory definitions" and as one identity system within an intersectional framework (Doan 108). Attending to Judith Butler's understanding of gender as a reiterative performance, I conceptualize the masculinities I study not as internal fixed realities, but rather as phenomena constantly produced and reproduced by institutional and discursive practices (Butler). In this way, gender history and queer theory are useful tools for my analysis.

I especially engage with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's queer theoretical work on homosociality. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Sedgwick aims to show that homosocial bonding between

men “if successfully achieved, is not detrimental to ‘masculinity’ but definitive of it” (50). Sedgwick’s concept of homosocial bonding as a core component to masculinity, and particularly hegemonic, elite, white masculinity, is central to this work. I employ Sedgwick’s framework to inquire into the larger implications of British airmen’s emotional performances within these homosocial spaces, exploring how understandings of male friendship are produced and illuminate airmen’s emotional worlds (Rosenwein).

This work thus studies a pivotal turning point in history, the First World War, through interdisciplinary feminist and queer theoretical lenses that center the historical construction of gender and its consequences in ways that either critical history or queer studies might not accomplish on their own. In doing so, this project attempts to answer what Doan calls a need for “dialogic exchange” between queer studies and critical history (2013). There is an abundance of literature focused generally on the history of Britain in the First World War (Hynes; Frantzen; Fussell; Winter *The Great War*) as well as on the RFC in particular (Broad; Collins; Lee “Knights”; Pugh) and the experiences of combatants held in POW camps (Feltman; Ketchum; Rachamimov *POWs*). There are also many gender history approaches to the First World War and excellent interventions on the topic have been made, many of which are central to this work (Bourke; Cole; Das; Doan; Kühne; Meyer). Fewer, though, are studies that examine the lived experiences of imprisoned soldiers themselves, particularly studies that trouble these men’s relationship to their own conceptions of masculinity. Iris Rachamimov’s work on gender performance in Russian and German officer POW camps is a notable exception, and while it does not center on British airmen, this contribution to the scholarship surrounding gender and imprisonment in the First World War is important for my work (“Disruptive Comforts”; *POWs*).

The first three chapters of this work address the context, theory, and methods on which my analysis is grounded. The second section of the thesis is

my analysis, which spans chapters four through six. Each of these three chapters provides a thematic analysis: chapter four considers domesticity in POW camps; chapter five entertainment; and chapter six focuses on escape. Each of these three themes is a frame through which I analyze how, within the homosocial communities of POW camps, prisoners understood and performed masculinity.

Chapter one, “The Royal Flying Corps,” outlines the cultural context of the subjects of this study. Here I illuminate the history of the RFC in the context of the First World War, modernity, and the advent of flight. Alongside British cultural context, this chapter situates the German Prisoner of War camp in relationship to the RFC and to the subjects of this study.

Chapter two, “Theories of Gender,” introduces the theoretical framework for the project. I first discuss theories of masculinity and homosociality, addressing the ways in which scholars have theorized masculinity in Great Britain in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and how hegemonic masculinity became tied to militarism, empire, and homosocial institutions in ways that shaped the experiences of RFC airmen. This chapter also offers an overview of queer theory and lays out how these frameworks apply to the Royal Flying Corps as a whole and to the experience of prisoners of war in particular.

The third chapter, “Methods,” addresses my methods and sources. Included in this chapter are the demographics of the sixteen RFC officers that make up my study, including where and for what length of time each of them lived in captivity. I also discuss the methodological differences in analyzing letters and diaries and the significance of these differences in what they can illuminate about the men’s emotional lives and relationships. Finally, this chapter addresses in depth the theoretical understandings that are crucial to undertaking gender history: critical history and feminist historical approaches.

Chapter four, “‘We’ll Make a Home of It’: Domesticity and Gender in POW Camps,” is the first of my analysis chapters. Using the theoretical

framework established in chapters one through three, this chapter analyzes the letters and diaries of the POWs through the theme of domesticity. Here I focus on the normative practices of domesticity, in particular home-making, dining, and hosting, practiced by RFC airmen in POW camps. I examine the gendered, familial performances of these homosocial communities as examples of institutionally-sanctioned male bonding and explore the potential for these practices to trouble traditional familial arrangements rooted in heteronormative regimes.

The fifth chapter, titled “Permission to Put Up a Stage: Music, Theater, and Gender,” analyzes the source material through the theme of entertainment. I investigate the way in which RFC airmen turned to familiar homosocial communities of squadron life, especially those produced through music and theater, when faced with the emasculation of imprisonment. I consider how practices of making music and producing plays together offered opportunities for prisoners to perform gender in ways that both re-inscribed martial masculinities and potentially resisted hegemonic ideologies of gender and empire.

The final chapter, “‘Give Their Captors the Slip’: Escape and Hegemonic Masculinity in the POW Camp,” turns attention to a recurring event in prisoners’ writing: escape attempts. Chapter six discusses the way in which planning, executing, and witnessing escapes from POW camps offered opportunities for prisoners to perform gender both for those at home and for fellow prisoners. In particular, I explore how these performances reinscribed hegemonic martial masculinity even as they allowed for prisoners to expand what it meant to be a “soldier hero” in the context of a POW camp.

Throughout this work, I am confronted with the fact that I am focusing on the lives of privileged, white men, who gained much from British imperialism and colonial atrocities. I identify this as potentially an ethical problem as a feminist researcher and scholar. I am aware that studying these subjects inherently means that I am not spending my time studying

systematically oppressed social and political groups throughout history, of whom the larger academic canon knows less. However, I maintain that studying structures and maintenance of power is vitally important to doing social justice feminist work. The building of unequal power relations must also be studied with a critical eye from the top down in addition to the bottom up. I keep this potential ethical struggle with me throughout this work in order to remind me why I study these men and to center the goal of working towards a more just world.

Additionally, as with all historical research, there is an ethical question inherent in this work as the subjects of my analysis are not granted the opportunity to ‘talk back’ or correct my analysis. Also, I am reading letters meant for familiar, intimate eyes, or diaries that were potentially meant for no one’s eyes at all. What does it mean, as a historian and archivist, to read these men’s deepest thoughts and fears at a trying time in their lives? What does it mean to be looking at them and their lives through my own life and through my own assumptions about what their actions mean? While there may not be a satisfactory answer, these questions remain at the forefront of my mind throughout my research and serve as a reminder of the humanity of the subjects of this study.

Chapter 1

The Royal Flying Corps

This chapter provides necessary historical context of the RFC and prisoner of war camps in Germany. In section one, “Formation and Recruitment,” I lay out the political and logistical formation of the corps within the context of the new technology of flight, detailing the military’s expectations and public opinion in Great Britain. I also delineate the process of recruitment and the class-based consequences of this practice. In section two, “Daily Life,” I trace the experiences of RFC airmen, outlining the life-threatening process of learning to fly, the various positions within the flying corps, including the much mythologized flying ace, and the structure of the RFC social life. While this project does not engage directly with the realities of airmen on active duty, articulating the politics, innovations, and experiences of the RFC on the Western Front is vital for understanding the cultural and social context of RFC airmen taken prisoner. Subsequently, I close this chapter with section three, “Prisoners of War,” by mapping the contours of POW life, outlining the process of capture, the codified treatment of prisoners, and the logistical realities of captivity, all necessary contextual foundations for the analysis of life in captivity. This chapter introduces the culture and community of the Royal Flying Corps and lays the foundation for the nuances of gender at play in the organization.

Formation and Recruitment

The RFC was established in 1912 after much deliberation on the part of the British government. Flight technology was in its youth and had seen limited use in warfare, confined to tethered observation balloons which were used in the American Civil War and Franco-Prussian War (Morrow). In fact, similar observation balloons continued to be used by both sides during the First World War but the inability to control the flight pattern of balloons meant that they were of limited use (Hall). Despite such limitations, the

successful use of balloons in observation paved the way for powered flight and the introduction of airplanes in war.

The RFC was finally created by the British government as a defense branch of the military out of fear of aerial attack (Paris). In 1908, the German Zeppelin (LZ4) successfully completed a 12-hour round trip flight, making waves in England as introducing a potential new method for military strike: destruction from the air. Many British leaders agreed with Sir Charles Rolls when he warned the Committee of Imperial Defense, just months after the successful LZ4 flight, that “England will cease to be an island” (Morrow 4). The creation of the RFC also came from a fear of the sovereignty of national airspace; as flight technology began to emerge throughout Europe, German delegates argued that the “air is free to all” while the British Committee on Imperial Defense proclaimed the British government’s view was that “sovereignty over the soil extends to the air above it” (Philpott 4). The international disagreements surrounding legal air control forced Britain’s hand in creating their own military air service.

Due to the government’s relatively late decision to create the RFC,¹ the corps was small at the outbreak of war in 1914. At this point the RFC was made up of only four squadrons, equaling a total of 109 officers and 66 airplanes (Philpott). While numbers grew (those actively serving in what would become the Royal Air Force (RAF)² dramatically increased from 200 to over 20,000 officers by the end of the war), the statistical insignificance of the RFC remained constant and was never higher than 3% of the British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) (Winter 1983). These low numbers were in part the result of the lack of trained pilots. Two weeks after the declaration of war, only 55 men in the entirety of Great Britain held the Royal Aero Club’s certificate that deemed them trained in piloting and would allow them to begin

¹ The French Flying Corps “Armée de l’Air” was founded in 1909 and the Imperial German Flying Corps “Die Fliegertruppen” was founded in 1910, giving both a multiple-year advantage on recruitment and training before the outbreak of war.

² The RAF was formed in 1918 when the RFC amalgamated with the RFC’s naval wing, the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) that had detached from the RFC before the war.

active service. Even a year later, in the summer of 1915, this dearth of pilots had barely been addressed, as only 200 pilots were in training, and leaders of the RFC assumed that “gentleman weekend fliers” could serve as the additional supply of pilots as necessary (Winter 1983 18; see also Tredrey). Compared to the 4,000 combat aircrafts dispersed among 150 squadrons in 1919, and roughly 9,000 dead and missing members of the air service by the end of the war, this initial number is notably small (Winter 1983).

The airmen who made up this small initial force were recruited from the most elite families in Great Britain and from public school alumni, a social class that could afford the leisure of recreational flight. The RFC was stretched for the necessary resources to build the “flying machines,” and many of the early RFC airplanes belonged to the pilots themselves. The British War Office’s policy asked RFC members who owned planes to “bring these to the Central Flying School when they undergo their training” (Philpott 5). This privileged recruiting pool was maintained, in part, by the £700 cost of an airplane engine and the £75 cost of a Royal Aero Club Certificate, which was a precondition for entry into the RFC (Philpott). Recruitment from an elite social class was not only a result of prohibitive costs: the act of flying itself was seen as a gentlemanly practice in which the airplane was compared to horses and the pilot class to the cavalry class (Clark). Men who had experience with the gentlemanly practices such as riding a horse, sailing a boat, or riding a motorcycle were assumed to have the necessary skills to become a pilot and sent on solo flights quickly (Kennett).³ As discussed in the following section, the RFC became seen as “an imperial elite” who evoked class-based notions of glamour, chivalry, and nobility (Mangan *Manufactured* 126; see also Lee “Knights”)

³ The prestige of the RFC was maintained in many ways, including in their pay. For a Second Lieutenant, the lowest ranking officer in the RFC, regular Corps pay was 14 shillings, 6 pence per day in addition to the 10 shilling daily “flight pay,” for a total of 447 pounds, 2s per year (Philpott). For comparison, a Second Lieutenant in the British infantry during the First World War would have been paid 8 shillings, 6 pence per day, meaning that a transfer to the RFC with the same officer rank would increase daily pay by up to 16 shillings.

However, recruitment from less “elite” men became increasingly necessary after the horrendous loss of life in late 1916 and early 1917. During the Somme offensive in late 1916, the RFC lost 800 airplanes and 252 pilots (Winter 1983). Months later, during the Arras offensive in the Spring of 1917, the RFC lost fully 20% of its flying personnel in just six weeks (Kennett). While fighting over Passchendaele for two months in the late summer of 1917, Squadron 9, as an example, lost its entire pilot membership twice over (Winter 1983). As a result, the life expectancy of the average RFC pilot in 1916 was three weeks over the line, and this was reduced to two weeks in 1917 (Clark; Kennett). Such drastic losses had the effect of reducing training time to less than half the number of hours required at the start of the war, and dramatic increases in recruitment.

As recruitment expansion occurred and men from less elite class backgrounds were being trained as flying officers, there was a strong reaction from some in the elite classes of Britain. As early as June 1915, C. G. Grey, editor of the weekly *Aeroplane*, wrote that while young and fit, a lower class man “will never make an officer and will never fly after a bad smash in the way the better class of man will do” and one gentleman-pilot decried “what a mixed crowd” the RFC had become (Winter 1983 25; 19). Class distinctions were part of the hierarchies of the RFC and leadership attempted to maintain an elite corps even to extremes, resorting to sending out “inexperienced lads from home as officers” rather than let in less elite, more experienced men (Winter 22; see also Clark). Regardless of the complaints of the elite class, though, the necessity for numbers led the RFC to recruit from increasingly larger pools as the war went on, and by 1916 the RFC not only expanded the recruitment pool to a wider variety of British men, they also brought in colonial pilots into their Squadrons. Self-governing white Dominion states (Australia, Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand) and Ireland were pressured to participate in universal conscription that Great Britain passed in March of 1916 following the Battle of the Somme, and collectively

contributed approximately 1.3 million men to the British war effort, including the RFC (Gerwarth and Manela; Philpott). Over time, white Dominion airmen became increasingly common, with Canadians alone accounting for one-third of the RAF by the end of the war (Philpott; Winter). RFC pilot Frederick Ortweiler corroborated the role of these forces, announcing that the “Colonials” he had met in training seemed “a particularly gentlemanly set” (8 March 1917, Diary [hereafter designated as “D”]).

Despite the increased heterogeneity of class and nation backgrounds, the initial founding of the RFC based on gentlemanly-practices and class hierarchies affected its organization throughout the war (Lee “Knights”). The Royal Flying Corps, to the British public and potential new recruits alike, continued to evoke images of chivalrous, heroic pilots flying above the clouds, promising “romance and adventure” and eclipsing both the stalemate of passive trench warfare and the horrific mortality rates for airmen (Bowen 3). As a result, many officers transferred from other branches of the army, enticed by the RFC’s promise of adventure, its exclusivity and opportunity for higher pay and living conditions, and its reputation for *esprit de corps*.

Combat Flying

The role of RFC airmen differed over time as the organization developed, and each new responsibility had its own public image and personal emotional consequences. Before RFC recruits could take on any particular role in the corps, however, they faced the daunting task of learning to fly, which was statistically the most dangerous task potential pilots encountered. Official figures indicate that of 14,166 pilots who died during the war, fully 8,000 of them died while training, meaning more pilots died learning to fly than were killed by belligerent powers or during combat (Clark; Tredrey). Such disastrous numbers were the result, in part, of the newness of flight technology: airplanes were constructed of linen, wire, and wood, did not include parachutes, and were likely to stall mid-flight (Lee “Knights”). The

designs of airplanes were inexact and irregular,⁴ resulting in planes that would fly differently case by case, even for experienced pilots. Before planes were deemed usable by pilots, ever new plane design entered into service required, on average, 400 modifications, such as the position of the gun in the SE5a, which in the original design shot off the propeller of the men's own plane (Clark; Jordan). Similarly, the petrol tank in many planes was positioned next to the pilot's seat so that even if a pilot survived a crash landing, he was often the victim of severe burns upon impact, a grisly end pilots wrote about with horror (Kennett; Morrow). Mismanagement on the part of the British War Office also meant that the corps was plagued with labor shortages; when the War Office declared conscription in 1917 the skilled workers needed for airplane manufacture were almost entirely drafted into the armed forces.

In the early part of the war, visual and photographic reconnaissance was the primary responsibility of the RFC, with airplanes acting as the crucial means of obtaining information about the enemy's movement (Clark; Jordan; Lee "Eye"). Two types of reconnaissance airplanes were built to undertake this work: a faster single-seater machine and a slower, more stable two-seater with one pilot and one observer (Hall). Observers had various tasks within the partnership that could include radio communication, aerial reconnaissance and photography, and, as the war progressed, shooting (Bascomb). Often newer recruits acted as observers until they earned the right to be a pilot in their own right, a dream several airmen wrote of longingly, particularly as more prestige was afforded the pilots, who earned full wings as compared to navigators and observers who wore the "half-wing" (Hallion). While the airmen duo's tasks were relatively simply (keep the airplane in the air, observe, and report back to headquarters), even simple reconnaissance flights across the German lines were often bogged down by obstacles such as cloudy weather, the difficulties

⁴ This was in part a result of class stratification in Britain, as designers and engineers were traditionally the lowest-paid skilled men during the early twentieth-century (Winter 1983).

of reading paper maps while flying, and confusion about the unfamiliar terrain. Making it back safely after a flight was never a guarantee.

Though the airmen were initially tasked with reconnaissance, the responsibilities of the RFC quickly expanded. Observers were required to shoot enemy planes, and hung over the side of the machines with a revolver to do so, a method that made aiming nearly impossible (Kennett). It was not until May 1915 that the French developed the ability to shoot timed through the propeller, allowing pilots to achieve success with a mounted machine gun and introducing an era of the war in which reconnaissance planes and fighter planes, and the much glamourized “flying ace,” shared the sky (Kennett). Just as mounted guns quickly developed as a staple of RFC tactics, so did bombing. Early efforts at bombing were haphazard as pilots and observers used whatever means available, such as dropping grenades or “any projectile they could find” over the sides of their aircrafts in an attempt to damage enemy planes and to cause destruction to people and objects on the ground below (Kennett 41; see also Clark). While bombing became more regulated as the war went on, problems continued to persist regarding the inability of many airplanes to carry the extra weight of explosives. Emotionally, too, bombers experienced a unique position distinct from aerial combat pilots. The chivalry and glamour associated with the RFC was predicated on honorable duels between pilots, and on the image of the combat pilot specifically as a “masculine ideal and role model” due to his bravery, not on what one bomber described as his “unromantic task” of “blowing up” helpless people far below (Schüler-Springorum 205; Coles 4 September 1918/D). Despite technological and emotional difficulties, by June 1918, fifteen percent of all airplanes in the RFC were bombers.

The Fighter Pilot

Despite the danger involved in being part of the RFC, the image of the fighter pilot enraptured the public, and the airmen themselves, during the First World War. As already mentioned, the figure of the fighter pilots was deeply

connected to RFC elitism: the officers of the RFC were considered a different “breed” than the enlisted men fighting in the trenches (Broad; Dye). The airmen “recall the legendary days of chivalry,” declared Prime Minister Lloyd George, “not merely by the daring of their exploits but by the nobility of their spirit” (Bowen 18). Pilots were compared to knights, an association that evoked “romance and adventure” (Lee “Knights” 93) as well as a “masculine ideal and role model” (Hageman et. al. 205). Journalists and authors helped to create a mythos surrounding fighter pilots when the RFC emerged, hailing them as “a return of the Paladin, the champion, who relied on personal skill and courage and who followed a chivalric code of behaviour both on and off the battlefield” (Paris 136). RFC airmen became an image of idealized masculinity for much of Great Britain during the First World War.⁵

Propaganda promoting the romance and chivalry of these “knights of the air” was popular during the First World War, made easier by this glamour and prestige surrounding the new technology of flight (Lee “Knights”; see also Bowen). In particular, those Edwardians who belonged to the elite classes responded positively to popular writers of the era who began to recreate the idealized “warrior-defender” as an appealing alternative to the increasing anonymity of mass death in war (Paris 136). Infantrymen such as soon-to-be RFC officer Stephen Sanford also bought into this image. “I hear there is a chance of my being attached as an observer to the flying Corps,” he wrote to his sister in 1915. “I rather hope it comes off as it must be awfully interesting and our present mode of existence is too boring for anything” (November 1915/Letter, [hereafter designated as “L”]).⁶ Even the horrific casualty rate did not seem to affect this image, as the popular ethic of sacrifice helped create the RFC as an imperial elite who were “committed to the glorious fight and ready to die for the cause” (Mangan *Manufactured* 126; see also Lee “Knights”). This image of the heroic knights of the air became increasingly

⁵ For more on hegemonic masculinity in the Edwardian era, see chapter two of this thesis.

⁶ Sanford indeed transferred to the RFC and was taken prisoner while serving as observer.

popular with propagandists and newspapers as the war dragged on, creating a largely false narrative of the realities of the RFC.

The “flying ace” that so dominated the public’s imagination did exist on the front lines, but not in the way the press lauded. As discussed above, the difficulties that came with shooting down enemy pilots were nearly overwhelming. Most RFC pilots went months without successfully hitting a German plane, if they ever did at all (Pugh; Winter 1983). Hugh Trenchard, who served as commander of the RFC, considered “aces” a waste of time and resources, due to the fact that a single bomber could take out more planes by hitting an enemy “aerodrome” than every “ace” could in a week of flying (Clark). Despite the glamour and prestige that clung to the image of the flying ace, the best way to be considered one was simply to survive. Every week a pilot lived, particularly during 1917, his worth in flying and shooting grew compared to the rest of the pilots, most of whom were invariably brand new recruits (Jordan; Winter). The skill that produced most aces was, ultimately, survival.

Further, the image of one brave pilot, the knight of the air, soaring into battle against an enemy rarely occurred in reality. Pilots were trained to fly in formation and holding this formation was the skill that was emphasized above all else; a pilot that fell out of formation was an easy target for German guns. “Maneuvers executed in isolation were nothing,” writes Denis Winter, explaining that “[w]ar flying meant a capacity to cling” rather than a chivalrous duel (Winter 1983 135). As the war progressed, flying in isolation became even more dangerous because the skies became more crowded. Between 1917 and 1918 aerial battles tended to be “dogfights” or generalized engagements that involved at the minimum thirty planes (Kennett)⁷. Successfully hitting a German airplane was a team effort, even if the “score”

⁷ The skies also became increasingly crowded. By 1917, the skies over the trenches included ground strafers flying at 1,500 ft, photographic reconnaissance planes at 7,000 ft, corps observation planes at 10,000ft, bombers at 12,000 ft, and the highest scouts flying up to 20,000 ft (Clark; Kennett). Nowhere was safe for a plane without its formation.

was attributed to one man (Winter 1983).⁸ Formations, and the team aspect to flying, became the first priority.

Just as flight itself was a community-oriented environment, so too was squadron life. Between intense periods of combat, airmen lived in close contact and spent stretches of inactive and unsupervised time with their squadron groups, each a fighting unit of eighteen to twenty men, which were physically isolated from the rest of the RFC and relatively independent from external military authority (Lee “Eye”). As a result, squadron life often approximated a “fraternity or gentleman’s club,” an environment that created a reputation for “a spirit of rowdy camaraderie” and gave the organization its *esprit de corps*, part of the allure of the RFC (Lee “Eye” 1129). In one training squadron, men “danced to the jigging of rag-time on the piano” and put on “a welcome concert to the new cadets” while others busied themselves “writing or drinking and smoking” which made it “a real cozy place” (Ortweiler 8 March, 1917/D). Airmen who had been recruited from elite public schools and universities created a similar “hierarchical, socially-exclusive” social life among themselves, with squadron identity and the RFC *esprit de corps* at its heart (Lee “Eye” 1129).

Prisoners of War

Thus far I have introduced the origins and context of the RFC in wartime, but this work focuses not on the experiences of airmen engaged in training nor aerial combat, but those who lived as prisoners of war in Germany. The precise number of airmen captured and incarcerated during the First World War is unknown, but certainly RFC Commander General Hugh Trenchard’s strategy of offensive engagement, which necessitated pilots frequently fly well behind the German lines, increased risk of capture

⁸ When a German plane was hit, airmen would add it to that pilot’s running ‘score.’ These scoreboards served as competitive motivation among the pilots, who were well aware of their place *vis-a-vis* their fellow pilots (Winter 1983).

(Jordan). Any airplane that went down in German territory, due to artillery fire or technical failure, landed the pilot and observer in German hands (Jordan).

Landing in German territory was a life-threatening and doubtless anxiety-inducing experience. Oftentimes capture was the result of belligerent artillery. Second Lieutenant George Coles, an observer, recalled that after being attacked, they were suddenly “rushing earthwards” at an astonishing pace with the pilot “fainted across his joystick” (4 September 1918/D). The plane was “spinning and rolling, out of control” and Coles was convinced they would “either burst into flames or part company with [their] wings” (4 September 1918/D). The danger was evaded, however, when the pilot “regained his senses” and “by a supreme effort of will and courage” landed the plane in a German field (Coles 4 September 1918/D). Other landings were less dramatic: after Second Lieutenant John Chapman was shot by German guns, he “fortunately...selected a splendid little field” in which to land before “losing [his] engine” (Chapman 27 July 1817/D). Engines were often the target of enemy fire. Second Lieutenant George Armstrong writes that a German pilot “made a very lucky shot and hit his engine” which subsequently “gave out and stopped” forcing Armstrong to land (November 1917/D). Sometimes, however, engine trouble unrelated to gunfire provoked capture. Bomber pilot William “Hugh” Chance, for example, explained that “[t]here was nothing more to be done than glide down and look for a suitable landing place” (17 September 1916/D).

While the experience of crash landing was life-threatening, the process of capture for British airmen was a less violent affair compared to the seizure of many of their compatriots. While enlisted men were often subjected to rough treatment upon capture, RFC officers and German pilots tended to interact within frameworks of chivalry, with both parties demonstrating respectful treatment (Jones 317). RFC observer Ernst Coleman wrote that shortly after he and his pilot, Lieutenant Castle, were shot down in Germany, a German officer “got some water and a towel for Lieut. Castle to bathe his

face with, and also bandaged his leg,” concluding that the Germans “were very good to us and offered us drinks” (24 August 1918, Report [hereafter designated as “R”]). Some British airmen report additional kindnesses beyond medical care: Second Lieutenant Ernest Wingfield wrote to his parents shortly after capture, commenting that “[t]he whole German Flying Corps treated me very well and offered to drop a letter to you over the lines the next day” (30 September 1916/L). After his near-death experience in landing, Coles does not express anger towards the pilot responsible. Instead, after meeting him, Coles thought him “a fine type of youth” and gave him his “flying helmet as a souvenir” (4 September 1918/D). Illustrating that such behaviors were not uncommon gestures between rival airmen, Captain Herbert Ward similarly writes that “two German Flying Officers... were very kind” and “dropped a note for me over the lines” (Ward 30 November 1915/D). British officers extended this chivalrous courtesy to the German officers, too. Public school connections extended, extraordinarily, even across nationalities. Ingram, for instance, wrote to his parents that a German officer he had met was a “Magdalen College, Oxford, man,” and another a “Dulwich Schoolboy,” exemplifying how, in many ways, class was privileged over nation in the First World War (Ingram 24 August 1918/L). These interactions represent a code of honor between German and British airmen; their rank as officers and positions as part of their respective flying services allowed for chivalrous respect even as their daily duty was to kill each other (Lee “Knights”).

While large numbers of RFC airmen were taken prisoner by the Germans, they were only a small group compared to the massive volume of prisoners held by Germany during the war. Germany increased the number of prisoners it held from 625,000 in February 1915 to 2.5 million by the end of 1918, well above the total number held by all the Allied powers combined (Bascomb; Speed). Germany, along with every major combatant, did not expect the war to last as long as it did and thus was ill-equipped to deal with these large numbers of prisoners that required housing and care. As such,

overcrowding, malnutrition, and disease outbreak caused the deaths of nearly 120,000 prisoners in Germany over the course of the war, almost all of whom were enlisted men (Speed). Hierarchies of class and military rank dictated much for prisoners: enlisted prisoners were more likely to be targets of reprisals, retaliatory punishments for prisoners in response to another nation's poor treatment of POWs, and roughly 80% of enlisted men taken prisoner by Germany worked in working parties (*Arbeitskommandos*), which included work in salt and coal mines, quarries, plowing and laying railroad tracks (Bascomb; Jones; Ketchum). A small number of prisoners were able to work in less dangerous jobs, including as orderlies in officer prison camps where they would clean rooms and cook meals for officers, just one example of the stark difference in treatment between enlisted men and officers (Bascomb).

POW camps in Germany were segregated by rank, and of the 165 primary POW camps in Germany, 75 of them were reserved exclusively for officers such as RFC airmen (Ketchum; Speed). The presence of orderlies and protection from reprisals were not the only difference in conditions between camps for enlisted soldiers and those for officers (*Offizierslager*). One bilateral treaty, the Anglo-German Agreement of 1918⁹, included multiple codified provisions for these differences. Included in this agreement was the provision that older, and presumably senior, officers would be given separate rooms. Younger and more junior officers were promised small rooms with only a few other occupants and a minimum of fifteen cubic meters of "breathing space" (Speed 71). Subsequently, officer camps held fewer men on average, usually between 400-900 prisoners, while camps for enlisted men held 10,000-15,000 and one, Soltau, held approximately 35,000 prisoners.

⁹ An international agreement that codified the treatment of prisoners of war did not officially govern POW camps during the First World War. The vast majority of belligerent powers signed the Hague Conventions and Regulations respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land of 1899 and 1907, which laid out regulations for diplomacy, naval warfare, and restrictions on the use of gasses as well as the proper treatment for prisoners. However, because two powers at war in the First World War, Serbia and Montenegro, had not ratified the Hague Conventions, they were not binding (Bascomb; Beaumont). Nevertheless, the Regulations served as the basis for many bilateral treaties among powers establishing the treatment of prisoners (Beaumont).

Officers also were granted more furniture, including “closets, dressers, washbasins, and drinking cups”: items that enlisted men did not receive. In addition, as already mentioned, every five to ten officers were provided with an orderly, whose duty it was “to attend to the cleaning of the clothes, living rooms, courtyards and halls, to the heating and table service” (Speed 71; see also Beaumont). While enlisted men were housed in barracks, officers could be held anywhere that was deemed “suitable for occupation by officers” (Jones). Subsequently, the officer camps were housed in a variety of places, including former factories, former sanatoriums, monasteries, and hotels (for example, Clausthal POW camp was formerly *Kurhaus Pfauenteichen* or Peacock Lake Hotel) (Bascomb). The privileges granted to officers were also predicated on honor: in many camps, if an officer swore not to escape, he might be allowed to take parole for walks in the surrounding countryside or into nearby towns unguarded (Bascomb). Such differences in treatment between officers and enlisted men where the former were given a higher level of respect and trust demonstrates the prevalence of an entrenched class system throughout Europe in the early-twentieth century.

While there were higher standards of treatment for imprisoned officers as compared to enlisted men, the subjects of this study record a variety of different experiences among various camps. Experiences with conditions such as cleanliness, freedom for recreation, and friendliness of German Commandants who ran the camps, ranged greatly from camp to camp. This variance was not necessarily a consequence of prisoners’ personal experiences, but more likely a result of Germany’s decentralized operation system for military command. Germany’s twenty-one military districts each maintained a significant level of autonomy and the administration and supervision of the camps in each separate district was left to the decentralized corps commanders (Jones; Speed). These commanders were responsible for appointing the camp commandants, and often selecting other high-ranking officers with whom they were friendly, and generally gave them broad

authority to run the camps as they chose (Speed). The decentralization of authority and the relationships between corps commanders and commandants meant that there was little structure to ensure that the conditions and atmosphere from camp to camp were comparable (Jones).

Some commandants, in particular the Niemeyer brothers, became notorious for their poor treatment of prisoners. Captain Karl Niemeyer served as second in command at Ströhen and later Holzminden POW camps and his twin brother, Hienrich, served as Commandant of the Clausthal camp (Bascomb; Winchester). Karl Niemeyer, the more infamous of the two, was described as a “bully,” “rash,” “cad,” and “a low-bred ruffian,” as well as a “bloated, pompous, crawling individual” by various British POWs (Bascomb 66). Captain H. G. Durnford wrote of the Niemeyer twins: “[t]he brethren were practically doubles, and rivalled each other in the calculated arrogance, animosity, and deceit which, for the best part of a year, busied a thousand souls in devising suitable post-bellum punishments for the inestimable pair” (Winchester 192). Some of the punishments assigned by Niemeyer were one to three days in “the jug,” a solitary confinement cell, refusing common rooms for prisoner social time, church services, or lectures, and lengthy wait times for roll call and receiving parcels (Bascomb). Worst of all, according to many prisoners, was Niemeyer’s refusal to grant parole, thus restricting the prisoners to the ground of the camp. One of the consequences of such a commandant, argues historian S. P. MacKenzie, was the increased motivation for escape (MacKenzie). Indeed, despite his cruelty and inclination for punishment, the largest escape from a German POW camp occurred at Holzminden in 1918 under Niemeyer’s watch (Bascomb; MacKenzie).

Just as punishments were contingent on the inclinations of individual commandants, so were privileges, and it was the senior officer among prisoners held the responsibility of persuading the commandant of the camp to provide better conditions (Bascomb). For example, Commandant Blankenstein of Osnabrück POW camp was amenable to making provisions

for the prisoners. In response to demands he agreed to increase the amount of coal for the latrine stove and allowed the prisoners to expand the exercise grounds (Bascomb). Ward noted upon arriving at Vöhrenbach camp, the Commandant, Beckendorf, was “humane and very agreeable, and treated us as gentlemen” (Ward March 1916). Crefeld POW camp was also considered comfortable compared to others due to its real beds, beautiful views, and tennis courts (Bascomb). The Commandant of Crefeld, Commandant Courth, was also more lenient compared to others and allowed prisoners extended freedom for long walks in the woods around the camp, despite the camp being located only eighteen miles from the Dutch border and thus a likely spot from which to escape (Bascomb). These instances of good experiences at comfortable camps were thus directly tied to the attitude and approach of the individual Commandants in charge.

While each camp was different in layout, one typical example of an officer camp can be found in Holzminden. Holzminden held between 500-600 officers and approximately 100-150 orderlies who were housed in cavalry barracks erected in 1913 (Bascomb). The main buildings were two four story blocks, which included cellars and attics, called *Kaserne A* and *Kaserne B* by the Germans and Block A and Block B by the British. Each main building was fifty yards long and had two entrances, one for officers and one for orderlies. Besides the main buildings, Holzminden had two detached cookhouses, a bathhouse, and various storage sheds. In addition, all officer camps were required to have an infirmary. As part of the Anglo-German agreement, officer camps were also required to provide “exercise ground or field on which athletic contests could take place,” and so in the center of camp there was also a potato patch, a football field, and a cricket pitch, and many camps boasted libraries and stages for theatrical productions (Speed 40; see also Bascomb). Holzminden was enclosed by an eight-foot stone wall topped with angled barbed wire palisades, within which was a second fence, twelve feet tall, also topped with barbed wire, and sentry boxes placed every six feet.

Within this fence was yet another barrier: a simple wire fence, and prisoners were restricted to this innermost enclosure (Bascomb).

In this way, the individual experiences of each RFC pilot, observer, and bomber varied widely, as did the individual ordeals of capture and imprisonment. Each *Offizierslager* had a unique location, Commandant, and community that created countless different experiences of captivity in Germany. Despite this variation, this chapter has sketched the outlines of RFC and POW life in order to contextualize the subsequent analysis of performances of hegemonic martial masculinity in these social and geographic locations. Expanding from this foundation and based on this historical context, the following chapter outlines the critical approaches to gender and the theoretical approach employed in my analysis of RFC prisoners of war.

Chapter 2

Theories of Gender

This chapter focuses on the theories of masculinity and homosociality that form the pillars of my study. In particular, it addresses the ways in which scholars have theorized masculinity in Great Britain in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and how hegemonic masculinity became tied to militarism, empire, and homosocial institutions in ways that shaped the experiences of RFC airmen. By homosocial I imply the nonsexual attractions by men or women towards members of their own sex (Bird; Hammarén and Johansson; Lipman-Bluman). I begin with a discussion of the soldier hero, an idealized icon of masculinity during this era, and discuss the ways in which scholars engage with gender as co-constitutive with class, race, and empire. I move to an overview of queer theory and homosociality, sketching out how these frameworks apply to the Royal Flying Corps as a whole and to the experience of prisoners of war in particular. This chapter lays out the theoretical foundations upon which I build my analysis of performances of masculinity and homosocial friendships within the cultural context of an elite group of officers fighting for Great Britain during the First World War.

The Soldier Hero

In contemporary masculinity studies, it is understood that there is no one fixed singular “masculinity,” but rather plural masculinities that are dependent on the cultural understandings in which they arise and are practiced (Dawson; Tosh *Manliness*). Masculinities are changeable through time and culture, Graham Dawson argues, meaning any one society’s image of the ideal form of “manliness” must be approached as a historical phenomenon (Dawson 1). Cultural constraints ensure that among multiple masculinities, Dawson contends, certain performances of gender are “more appropriate and recognizable than others” and as a result the culture, out of a need for social unity, collectively understands that certain masculinities (and femininities) are

dominant over others, or are hegemonic (Dawson 24; see also Connell and Messerschmidt; Tosh “Industrializing”). Shaped by economic, political, and social forces, hegemonic masculinity “embodie[s] the currently most honored way of being a man” in a given cultural moment (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). It is defined, Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt add, as the “normative” and dominant formation, not in a statistical sense as “only a minority of men might enact it,” but rather hegemonic masculinity has the power to require “all other men to position themselves in relation to it” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832; see also Tosh “Industrializing”). The “soldier hero” is a form of hegemonic masculinity that took hold during the second half of the nineteenth century in Great Britain and remained central in the years leading up to the First World War.

The soldier hero, which Dawson calls one of the most “powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions,” encapsulates the military virtues such as “aggression, strength, courage and endurance” that have repeatedly, over centuries, been defined as “natural and inherent qualities of manhood” and best attained in battle (Dawson 1). The image of a soldier celebrated as a hero, idealized in adventure stories about his daring exploits, has become, according to Dawson, “a quintessential figure of masculinity” (Dawson 1). The version of the soldier hero of the First World War appeared in the late-nineteenth century as the “muscular Christian” soldier hero. Reaching significance in the 1850s “muscular Christianity,” Norman Vance argues, represents a moment in which “physical courage and strength” were combined with “moral rigor” to define “manliness,” emphasizing a justified form of violence against the Indian and colonial “threat” (Vance 8; see also Pollock). The intertwined relationship between masculinity and empire as evoked in muscular Christianity is crucial; gender is, as Siobhan B. Somerville argues, co-constitutive with other social categories, and, she contends, scholars must “recognize the instability of multiple categories of difference simultaneously” (Somerville 5). Similarly, Eve Sedgwick argues

that hegemonic masculinity, and indeed all sex-based power structures, must include “historical categories [such] as class and race” (Sedgwick *Between Men* 10-11). The soldier hero developed over the course of the mid- to late-nineteenth century was constituted by intertwining ideas of race, class, and empire.

Class and the Soldier Hero

Donald Hall argues that while muscular Christianity and the image of the soldier hero professed “classless ideals” they “often concealed a deeper belief in the class system and in bourgeois hegemony” (Hall 120). Vance agrees, contending that violence and morality were not the only traits combined in muscular Christian masculinity, but that “distinguished lineage and high social rank” were implied in the ideal, even when it was “ostensibly open to all” (Vance). Numerous institutions informed and perpetuated this class-based hegemonic masculinity, J. A. Mangan argues, in particular British elite public schools. A mark of the ruling class, British Empire elites had routinely sent their sons to these boarding schools, including Eton, Shrewsbury, Uppingham, Malver, Winchester, Dulwich, Cheltenham, Charterhouse, Marlborough, and Harrow (Persell and Cookson). The schools explicitly romanticized the Christian soldier hero-gentleman and educated young pupils in “gentlemanly traditions” that emphasized “loyalty, honour, chivalry, Christianity, patriotism, sportsmanship and leadership” above most academic concerns (Parker 17). Mangan argues the public school system was intentionally intended to serve the empire by providing leaders, politically, economically, and militarily, who would continue to shape ideals of imperial masculinity (Mangan *The Games Ethic* 84). Importantly, Tosh emphasizes the elitism intrinsic to this imperial masculinity, as demonstrated by how “little serious effort” was put into creating a working class ready to be of service in the imperial project during this same time (Tosh “Industrializing” 196). Both Mangan and Tosh suggest this focus on the elite and middle-classes speaks to the particular way that elitism and masculinity were connected in the minds of

leaders during this era: personal authority, according to Tosh, was associated with the gentry class where “paternalistic, face-to-face authority was a defining masculine attribute” (Tosh “Industrializing” 201).

In addition to valorizing the masculinity of English elites, Shearer West argues that late-nineteenth and early-twentieth English culture set idealized masculinity in opposition to other domestic groups, including “non-Protestant religions, the Irish, the Scots, and even the working class” (West 9). Indeed, Tosh adds, the soldier hero was primarily “bourgeois masculinity” and the working class was “largely untouched” by its influence (Tosh “Industrializing” 336). Tim Barringer agrees, emphasizing that elite masculinity was further separated from the masculinity of the urban working class through racialization. As the working class became more vocal in Britain, racialized “stereotypes about ‘savages’ were employed to demonize” them (Barringer 4). During this era race was conflated with class to such an extent that “bourgeois representations of the working classes...adopted a discourse of race” (Das 11) in order to emphasize the masculinity of the elite class, which were founded, Revanthi Krishnaswamy argues, on a “systemic ‘unmanning’ of minorities within and foreigners” in order to define the “manliness” of elite white British imperial men (Krishnaswamy 292; see also Pick). Conceptions of class and race were intertwined with one another and both crucial to the definition of the soldier hero masculinity.

Race and the Soldier Hero

Conceptions of race and whiteness were central to the formation and hegemony of the soldier hero image. Radhika Mohanram suggests that whiteness is historically and culturally specific, in this case in the context of Britain’s colonization project. She writes, and Santanu Das agrees, that “white embodiment could have only come into inscription” in a culture that “classified people into racial hierarchies” (Mohanram, xvi). For example, when the aforementioned 1858 rebellion brought to the fore anxieties in Britain about sustaining the empire generally and Indian colonization in

particular, muscular Christian manliness, Krishnaswamy argues, “rationalized imperial rule” by equating an “aggressive, muscular, chivalric model of manliness” with “racial, national, cultural, and moral superiority” (Krishnaswamy 292). As Tosh points out, a common opinion at the turn of the century held that sustaining the empire required “an Imperial Race- a race vigorous and industrious and intrepid” that required “more men and better men,” intrinsically connecting British whiteness and colonialism to hegemonic masculinity (Tosh *Manliness* 195). In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, British imperial culture conceptualized races as opposites and objectified “others,” creating a racial identity for white British in which “white can become whites only by not being blacks” (Mohanram xvi; xvii). This culture, argues Mohanram, not only shaped colonies, but the “imperial rule of the colonies shifted- and gave new meaning to- British embodiment,” deeply affecting the way in which white, British men saw themselves (xiv).

Significantly, though, Das emphasizes that while “empire” and “race” are terms that “frequently overlap... they are by no means coterminous” (Das 8). The popular conception of race which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century was complex, contradictory, and ill-defined (Barringer; Hondius; Kestner). The English themselves, argues Douglas Lorimer, were not in agreement about the meaning of the word “race,” and as Das contends, throughout the nineteenth century, “race remained a fluid term, used interchangeably with ethnicity and even nationality” (Das 11; see also Lorimer). Some race scientists¹⁰ insisted repeatedly to the British public that race was constrained to biological factors and such biologically-based racial pseudo-science was increasing in popularity in the late-nineteenth century (Lorimer 15). However, much of the British populace continued to conflate “biological race” and culture, religion, and class (Lorimer). As a result, “racial

¹⁰ One such scientist was Edinburgh anatomist Dr. Robert Knox, described as the “British founding father of modern racism” (Lorimer 15).

differences among European peoples” were often understood as differences of civilization. RFC airmen, for example, repeatedly referred to the Germans as “Huns,” and often condemned their lack of culture, thus articulating a British attitude that Germans were a “race of barbarians who had just emerged into statehood” (Coles 6 December 1918/L; Braudy 374). To the Victorian and Edwardian middle- and upper-class imagination, Lorimer argues, civilization was confined to the English and their few fellow nations (Lorimer). Through the developing conceptions of race in Great Britain in the decades leading to the First World War, hegemonic masculinity was defined in opposition to “other” races and cultures.

As a result, when the Boer War (1899-1902), fought between the British Empire and the Boer States in South Africa, exacerbated fears of racial degeneration and anxieties about the possible military weakness of the British Empire, the virility of British men was directly connected to hierarchies of race (Springhall; *Report of the Physical Deterioration Committee*, Cd. 2210, 1904). Young white British men were enculturated into this racialized, imperial masculinity and the “soldier hero” in many ways, one of which was the development of the Boy Scouts.¹¹ Concerned about racial degeneration, Robert Baden-Powell founded the Scouts in 1910 in an attempt to mold the next generation of British boys into “proper men” (Baden-Powell *Scouting for Boys*). In his famous handbook, *Scouting for Boys* (1908), Baden-Powell devoted an entire section to how the Empire must be maintained, and expressed that the organization’s primary patriotic concern was with imperial defense and racial “survival” (Springhall). This reliance on social Darwinism, argues J. Springhall, was tied intrinsically with the concern of masculinity of the modern boy; Baden-Powell intended to “restore the much needed character” and “prevent the sapping of the nation’s moral fibre” through

¹¹ The influence of the Boys Brigade was substantial; the organizations proliferated across middle class communities in Great Britain, combining Christian doctrine with militarism, and passing several million young boys through the ranks and setting the tone for militarized boys groups (Springhall).

proper training of the boys and men of the nation (Baden-Powell *Scouting for Boys*). The virility of the empire depended on it. The Boy Scouts thus became an institutionally-monitored homosocial militaristic entity that championed, explicitly, a particular type of white, British, imperial masculinity for the purpose of furthering the empire (Mangan *Athleticism*; Springhall).

Racialized patriotism, a large part of both the Boys Scouts and public school ethos, also appeared in boys' adventure stories that were prevalent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. English children growing up in this era lived in a world "increasingly understood by perceived hierarchies of race and class," which were taught to them, Kathryn Castle argues, though these magazines and stories (Castle 145). *Boy's Own* magazine (1855-1874) was a popular children's publication that stated its goal was to encourage young readers to "hold the Empire" and hoped that it was "handing [the empire] down greater, more prosperous to future generations" (*Boy's Own* vol. 1/1855, 12;). Depictions of colonial "races" were explicit: the magazine attempted, through its images and adventure stories, to make its readers "recognize the great gulf that existed between their own society, with its conventions and notions of respectability, and the African Tribes," who were of a different, and inferior, race (Castle 153). Later, *Boys of England* (1866-1899) became immensely popular, reaching 250,000 in circulation. Its creator Edwin Brett provided middle-class and upper-class boys with "wild and wonderful, but healthy" fiction in which people of color were adversaries for white British colonial heroes and it was taken for granted in such narratives that contact with white British men would necessarily translate to an improvement in the "African's condition" (Castle 153; see also Drottnet). In extensive studies of these portrayals,¹² a central argument both Castle and

¹² Jan Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africans and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Kristen Drottnet, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 65-97.; *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana* ed by Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2003; *Racism, Modernity, and Identity: On the Western Front*, Edited by Rattansi and Westwood, 1994, Polity Press; Cambridge UK

Penny Summerfield highlight is the distinctions between superior and inferior “civilizations” and “races” in these adventure stories that explicitly encouraged the association between British patriotism and whiteness. In this way, Das argues, an understanding of the “other” and “inferior” forms of racialized masculinities served to highlight the “superior” form of racialized masculinity of the white, elite British soldier hero. Again, as Krishnaswamy argues, race, empire and manliness were constitutive of one another. This was the context for the founding of the RFC.

The Soldier Hero and War

While the connection between masculinity and imperialism was carefully cultivated in elite public schools and boy’s cultural resources, it was not enough to instill an ideal masculinity in the next generation: the masculine moral fiber of the soldier hero needed to be tested. Mangan suggests that many influential members of British society, particularly elite families and military leaders, “viewed war as essential to both the demonstration of masculinity and the fulfillment of the nation’s destiny” (Mangan *Manufactured* 15). Dawson agrees, arguing that during the era of popular imperialism in the late-nineteenth century, war was seen as the “ultimate test and opportunity” for the “virtues of manhood” (Dawson 1). The imperial and martial purpose of public school education in particular, Peter Parker emphasizes, was unambiguous at the outbreak of the First World War: the public-schools boys would be suitable officer material upon their graduation. Parker argues that those who referred to men as “the *product* of a public school were more accurate than they perhaps realized” as evidenced by the fact that these homosocial elite institutions were producing an officer class who would lead the nation’s military (Parker 17). It was in these institutions, after all, that the public schoolboy learned how to perform the hegemonic masculinity of the soldier hero, acquiring “tools of imperial command: courage, endurance, assertion, control and self-control” (Mangan *Manufactured* 11). Jessica Meyer also points out the gendered role that war

played in the British imagination: this would turn boys into men through the “masculinizing experiences” of warfare (Meyer 3). Even before the war began, cultural discourse about a coming conflict centered around the role it would play in “making men” and the ways such a conflict might cure British society of the degeneracy that was plaguing it (Meyer 3). Thus, during the First World War, both the civilians at home and the young men of the British Expeditionary Forces and Royal Flying Corps had been taught that their very masculinity and identity was intrinsically connected to their performance of soldiering in warfare.

Queer Theory and Homosociality

Thus far, I have laid out the theories of masculinity in Great Britain during the decades leading up to the First World War. The subjects of this study were raised in this gendered environment of the idealized soldier hero and at the outbreak of conflict as each joined the Royal Flying Corps, they became part of the institutionalization of this hegemonic gender framework. Integrating theories of masculinity as discussed above, this project also analyzes the performances of gender by airmen in POW camps using a queer theory framework. In this context, queer theory does not refer to the queer subject, but instead is an “anti-normative” approach to historical analysis (Ahmed 2006). Queer theory is not restricted to sexuality, but involves a broad critique of “race, gender, class, nationality, and religion” as well as sexuality (Muñoz 4). Queering, Sara Ahmed contends, is a method of resistance to violent, normalizing power structures and institutions that insist on particular race, class, and gender presentations. It is a term that challenges the “normalizing mechanisms of state power” and interrogates social processes that produce and normalize particular identity categories (Eng, Halberstam, Muñoz 2). In this thesis, I approach performances of masculinity through a queer lens, looking to open what Eve Sedgwick calls the “possibilities” of meaning when gender is not made to “signify

monolithically” (Sedgwick “Queer and Now” 8). Rather than approaching gender as a polarized and fixed category, I adhere to Laura Doan’s understanding of gender as a system that was and is “in flux and subject to... contradictory definitions” (108). Thus, I employ a queer theoretical framework to understand gender and non-normativity broadly defined.

Engaging with this queer lens, this thesis seeks to understand the formation and implications of male homosocial friendships and communities. The study of the homosocial environment of British RFC officers in German POW camps is vital because of the importance of the homosocial group to the formation of masculinities. As already mentioned, I use the term “homosocial” in the same way sociological scholars have used it before me, to refer specifically to nonsexual attractions by men or women towards members of their own sex (Bird; Hammarén and Johansson; Lipman-Bluman). More simply put, it describes and defines social bonds among people of the same sex (in a binary formation). This concept has been used by many scholars to analyze how men, via their relationships, social bonds, and friendships, maintain patriarchy and defend hegemonic masculinity (Bird; Connell; Dawson; Lipman-Bluman).

To undertake an analysis of homosocial communities, I engage with Eve Sedgwick’s argument that men’s relationships, including their heterosexual relationships, imply “an ultimate bonding between men” and that this bonding, “if successfully achieved, is not detrimental to ‘masculinity’ but definitive of it” (Sedgwick *Between Men* 50). Essentially, bonding between apparently heterosexual men, such as friendships, comradeships, and other forms of homosocial relationships, are a vital part of the formation of masculinity. As already suggested, “manliness” is essentially a “set of values by which men judge other men,” emphasizing the inherent connection between masculinity and the social world in its formation (Tosh *Manliness* 71). As Graham Dawson suggests, the formation of masculinity and the “sense of one’s self as a man” is contingent on being “imagined and

recognized by others” (Dawson 23). In addition, I approach the study of homosocial friendships following Sedgwick’s theory that homosocial desire is part of a continuum between itself and homosexual desire rather than distinguished from the homosexual, which opens up the potential for undertaking a queer analysis of these friendships that draws the “homosocial back into the orbit of desire” (Sedgwick *Between Men* 1). Following Sedgwick’s lead, I approach homosocial male friendships as part of this larger continuum, recognizing that the boundary between these structures is fragile, in flux, and constantly being fought by the power of hegemonic masculinity (Sedgwick *Between Men*; Hammarén and Johansson). Thus, as I analyze the performances of and understandings of masculinity by prisoners of war, I center the homosocial space as critical to this gender formation.

Institutional Homosociality in the RFC

One such homosocial community was the British military itself, and in particular the Royal Flying Corps. As discussed in the previous chapter, the RFC was separated from the greater British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) both organizationally and physically, and the unique experience of flight and corps elitism helped to create a sense of pride and loyalty among its officers. The enthusiasm and devotion to the RFC from its airmen, the *esprit de corps*, was a vital part of maintaining morale and group cohesion throughout the devastating casualty rate among them (Lee “Knights”; Winter 1983). *Esprit de corps* is not simply organic communal love for a group or organization, however, but also an institutionally-crafted emotion in service of a goal (Cole). For example, Sir Frances Vane, London’s first Boy Scouts commissioner, explained that “through *esprit de corps* [of the scouts] patriotism will grow” along with “a just appreciation of... the part which the Anglo-Saxon race is called upon to play in the cause of progress” (Quoted in Springhall 72). Vane’s attitude towards the Boys Scouts’ communal spirit as a tool to maintain group loyalty around the goal of preserving racialized and gendered empire demonstrates the similar role *esprit de corps* held within

military organizations such as the RFC. Institutions such as the military sanctioned particular models of male intimacy. Hierarchies of military authority required individuals to define themselves as integral part of all-male groups with particular traditions, and thus emotional bonds and intense intimacies thrived (Sedgwick *Between Men*). British military leadership encouraged these homosocial spaces in order to provide an outlet for “fears, wishes, longing, and desires” not otherwise allowed within hegemonic frameworks (Kühne 325). The homosocial bonding implicit in RFC life thus encouraged operational efficiency in a military sense, while simultaneously facilitating solidarity and emotional survival as an integral part of squadron life.

Theories of Friendship

Homosocial male friendships and their communities among British officers and enlisted men during the First World War have been discussed at length by numerous scholars. Sarah Cole approaches these friendships between men as a structure rather than as a personal relationship, arguing friendships should not only be conceptualized as a “private, voluntary relation” but also as formations organized by societal forces and regulated by “institutional affinities” (Cole 4). The Victorian ideal of “manly love,” for instance, was encouraged by British institutional authorities such as public schools as “propaganda for elite solidarity” (Mangan *Manufactured* 117; see also Das). Indeed, such “manly ideology” treated male friendships as “spiritually exalted, sublime, and benevolent” (Mangan *Manufactured* 119). Such a culture of close male friendships made the “institutionalization of manly love... an integral part of nineteenth century life,” demonstrating the power of class, gender, race, imperial order, and political and economic powers to dictate the contours of friendships (Mangan *Manufactured* 119; see also Lee “Eye”; Sedgwick *Between Men*). As such, according to Cole, male intimacy was undone by this war and friendships failed because the cultures of

modernity that informed the institutions that nurtured such friendships would collapse in the new century.

However, Santanu Das argues that during the First World War a very real, tender, and intensely physical intimacy evolved among men on the front lines of the war, an intimacy that, while experience within martial frameworks, nevertheless represents “a new level of intensity and intimacy in male-male relationships” (115). These intimate emotional and physical relationships, he argues, “require” a reconceptualization of masculinity and gender performances during this period, indicating a divergence in these relationships from the institutional structures of the British military. Similarly, Joanna Bourke notes that while “[d]eliberate simulation of male bonding” was common in the armed forces and in boys organizations, the emotional connections between men were strong and loving (137). In wartime, Bourke maintains, men “took over the roles of mother, sister, friend and lover” for one another, revealing the “wide range of roles played by males” and the loving relationships they developed among themselves (Bourke 133; 136). Like Jessica Meyer in *Men at War*, Bourke emphasizes that these domestic practices provided a source of stability and helped soldiers cope with the anxieties of war (Bourke; Meyer). Michael Roper also shows how First World War combat brought men together in ways that provided opportunities for genuine tenderness and encouraged performances of intimacy, care, and nurturance, demonstrating the intensity of masculine homosocial spaces in the midst of the anxiety of war (Roper 18). The POW camp was one such homosocial space where many such friendships and communities were fostered.

It is these formations of hegemonic martial masculinity and the way in which they operate within the landscape of the POW camp that make up the forums of this project. This thesis seeks to explore how concepts of *esprit de corps* and male homosocial relationships and communities affected POWs held captive in Germany. Did the *esprit de corps* of the RFC hold sway in

prison? Did the “new level of intensity and intimacy in male-male relationships” that Das contends were developing on the front lines dissolve in captivity? (Das 115). What can we learn about the performances of the soldier hero masculinity, particularly through a queer lens, when soldiers are imprisoned for months and years at a time? In the coming chapters I apply theories of homosociality and queer theory, within the context of scholarship on the hegemonic masculinity of the soldier hero, to the experiences of RFC airmen held captive during the First World War.

Chapter 3

Methods

In this chapter I establish the methods by which I undertook this thesis project. First, I establish the demographics of the sixteen RFC POWs I study, including their ages, rank, class-background, and race. I also provide an overview of which POW camps they lived in and for how long, which provides vital information to understand the lived experiences of these airmen. Once these demographics have been outlined, I explain my methodological historical approach, and illustrate the process and theoretical underpinnings associated with the analysis of my source material. Finally, I expound upon the limitations of this project and how these constraints point to future research.

My sources are diaries, letters, a military report, and one memoir, with two exceptions written at time of capture by sixteen airmen of the RFC. These officers were taken prisoner and lived for various durations during the First World War in POW camps scattered across Germany. All airmen in this study survived the war. These documents are housed in archival collections in the Imperial War Museum and the Royal Air Force Museum in London, United Kingdom. My data are a subset of broader research that focuses on the emotional lives of RFC airmen. I engage these primary source data to answer questions about the ways in which airmen of the RFC conceptualized and performed masculinity in the particular homosocial space of POW camps.

The Airmen and the Camps

All sixteen RFC officers lived as POWs in Germany during the First World War for at least some period of time (see Table 1 below). The dates of their captures follow the general pattern of RFC casualty rates throughout the war: two were captured in 1915, four in 1916, six in 1917, and three in 1918 (as discussed in chapter one, 1916 and 1917 were the years with the highest number of deaths and captures among the RFC). The dates of imprisonment

for one officer, Frederick Ortweiler, are unknown. As a result of these various capture dates, the length of time each prisoner spent in German camps differs significantly from one another: Lieutenant Stephen Sanford spent 43 months as a POW while Arthur Lloyd and George Coles both only spent three months in Germany before the Armistice was signed. Importantly, however, the repatriation process could take up to several months and thus most officer's time spent in Germany continued beyond November of 1918.

Table 1.

Name	Rank	Role	Shot Down	POW Camps	Age in 1914
Guy William Armstrong	2nd Lieutenant	Pilot; Bomber	October 13, 1917	Courtrai; Guant; Karlsruhe; Trier; Holzminden	
Robert Bevington	2nd Lieutenant	Pilot	April 19, 1917	Karlsruhe; Holzminden; Schweidnitz; Salzerbad; Braunau	23 y.o.
William Cecil Blain	Lieutenant	Pilot	August 28, 1916	Cambrai; Gütersloh; Osnabrück; Clausthal; Ströhen; Holzminden	17 y.o.
John Chapman	2nd Lieutenant	Pilot	July 16, 1917	Karlsruhe; Holzminden	
William "Hugh" Chance		Bomber	September 17, 1916	Osnabrück; Clausthal	18 y.o.
Ernst Coleman	Lieutenant	Observer	March 23, 1916	Douai; Giessen	
George Coles	2nd Lieutenant	Observer	September 1918	Rastatt Baden; Karlsruhe	17 y.o.
Charles Mackenzie Furlonger	2nd Lieutenant	Pilot	May 18, 1917	Ströhen; Colberg	
Oscar Greig	Captain	Pilot	January 23, 1917	Holzminden; Schwarmstedt; Schweidnitz	25 y.o.

Robert Ingram	Captain	Pilot	August 3, 1918	Rastatt Baden	19 y.o.
Arthur Ceredig Lloyd	Lieutenant	Pilot	September 9, 1918	Strassburg; Karlsruhe; Rastatt	
Leslie Gordon Nixon	Lieutenant	Pilot	December 5, 1917	Karlsruhe; Holzminden	
Fredrick John Ortweiler	2nd Lieutenant	Pilot	Unknown	Holzminden; Stralsund; Kruslin; Danhsloe; Magdeburg	16 y.o.
Stephen Sanford	Lieutenant	Observer	May 1915	Halle; Augustabad; Neubrandenburg; Fürstenberg	
Herbert Edward Ward	2nd Lieutenant	Observer	November 26, 1915	Lomme; Festungs Lazarette, Lille; Cologne (Köln); Mainz; Vohrenbach	17 y.o.
Ernest Harry Wingfield	2nd Lieutenant	Pilot	September 27, 1916	Cambrai; Gutersloh; Osnabrück; Clausthal; Aachen; Stralsund	21 y.o.

Sanford, who was captured in May 1915 and incarcerated in at least four different camps over the next four years (Halle, Augustabad, Neubrandenburg, and Fürstenberg, all located in central and northern Germany), illustrates the varying length of time spent in any one POW camp. This is typical of the POW experience during the First World War. As Captain Oscar Greig noted, “[o]ne does not necessarily stop always in one camp” (Greig 3 June 1917/L). Even Coles, who was captured as late as September 1918, was shuffled to two different camps, Rastatt Baden and Karlsruhe, before being sent to Villingen to begin the process of repatriation after the armistice. Second Lieutenant Ernest Wingfield, captured September 1916, recorded time spent at six different POW camps (Cambrai, Gutersloh, Osnabrück, Clausthal, Aachen, and Stralsund) before being sent to Scheveningen, Holland, in October 1918. The time spent in each camp ranged drastically for these men as well. For example, Wingfield documented the shortest amount of time in one camp as two days at Gutersloh (27th-28th Sept

1916), while his longest internment was over 15 months at Clausthal (9th March 1917-25th June 1918).

Besides hospital camps, each airman in this study was held at an *offizierslager* which, as already discussed, housed officers exclusively. Because of this rank stratification, and the practice of housing prisoners of like-nationalities together, there were many instances of these sixteen airmen overlapping at certain POW camps. Of the 34 camps in this study, there were several officer camps to which RFC airmen were repeatedly sent, most notably Holzminden, Karlsruhe, Osnabrück, and Clausthal. Wingfield, Hugh Chance, and William Blain, for example, overlapped at Osnabrück, where Wingfield and Chance were bunkmates. Similarly, John Chapman and Robert Bevington were imprisoned at Karlsruhe at the same time. Fully seven of the airmen in this study spent time at Holzminden, and as such, it will serve as a central object of reference in the course of my research. Holzminden, located in Lower Saxony, opened in September 1917 as an officers' camp (Durnford). Holzminden held Frederick Ortweiler (unknown dates), Guy Armstrong (March 1918 until end of war), Bevington (October-December 1917), Chapman (October 1917- early 1918), Greig (September 1917-early spring 1918), and Blain (March-July 1918). While not all seven were incarcerated at Holzminden simultaneously, the existing overlap serves as an example of how RFC prisoners more often than not lived together in Germany.

As reflected the age of the corps in general, the imprisoned airmen were, as a whole, quite young. There are confirmed ages for only nine of the sixteen, however, as age tended not to be revealed in letters and diaries. Of these nine officers, Wingfield was 21 years old when the war began in 1914, Bevington was 23 in the same year, Ingram 19, Herbert Ward, Coles, and Blain all 17, and Ortweiler 16 years of age. As a result of their youth, Ortweiler, Blain, and Coles joined the RFC later in the war: Ortweiler in 1917 when he was 18 years old and Blain in 1916 when he was 19 years old. Coles was shot down in 1918 when he was 21. Greig is the only airman to record

nearing the age of 30 while in the POW camps (he records his 29th birthday in 1918 while at Schweidnitz). This range of ages was not atypical of the RFC. During 1915 and 1916, the science of aviation medicine was being developed by the British military, and the new medical examinations began weeding out men with poor eyesight and emphasized the belief that flying required quick, and young, reflexes (Jordan). In part due to the greater focus on physical fitness that came from this aviation science and in part due to the increasing number of casualties and need for replacement, the average age of RFC trainees decreased. By 1918, the average age in one squadron was 22 years old and in another squadron it was only 20 (Winter 1983). Some RFC men recorded the belief that 25 was too old to make a good fighter pilot (Winter 1983).

Of the sixteen subjects, eleven served as pilots. Another four, Ernst Coleman, Coles, Sanford, and Ward were observers, and two, Armstrong and Chance, were bombers. All RFC airmen were officers. In this study, eight were Second Lieutenants, five Lieutenants, and two Captains. Most of the airmen that make up this study had class status and many were educated or were in the midst of their education at public schools (see chapter two). Bevington, for example, attended Rugby, Ward and Chance both attended Eton, Ingram attended King's College School, Wimbledon, and Blain, who was the eldest son of a wealthy cotton merchant, attended Loretto in Scotland. These public school connections were noted in POW camps. For example, Bevington wrote in a letter home that he met a "Captain de Selincourt, RFC" at Karlsruhe, from "St Hills house, Rugby" (Bevington 30 June 1917/L). Furlonger wrote in his diary that Hadrill, a bunkmate at Ströhen camp, was gifted coffee by another prisoner, "an old college chum," demonstrating that school-era connections remained intact even when one, or both, men were taken prisoner (Furlonger 23 June 1917/D).

In addition to class and rank distinctions between the RFC and the greater BEF, there were multiple hierarchies within the corps that are

important to examine. All the airmen in this study were British, rather than from a dominion state, and thus navigated the hierarchical imperial system within the corps from positions of privilege and power. The distinctions between a dominion pilot and British pilot were stark; frequently mentioned in letters and diaries as “colonials,” the presence of dominion airmen in the RFC was a continuing source of categorization and intra-organization hierarchies. Further, all the airmen in this study, and all airmen in the RFC, were white. This whiteness, as discussed in chapter two, was central to identity formation for elite British men and officers of the RFC. Following Mohanram and Das, I approach these racialized subjects as being a part of an evolving understanding of whiteness that “classified people into racial hierarchies” (Mohanram xvi). While I study the homosocial spaces created among these elite white British officers and their performances of masculinity, I recognize that their own conceptions of their racialized British bodies were actively being shaped by their imperial nation’s colonial project.

Historical Approach

I undertake this work following Laura Doan’s call for critical history that recognizes historians as producers of a “representation of the past” rather than the “truth” of the past (xii). Indeed, particularly when undertaking queer history, it is vital to do critical historical practice that acknowledges that the past “does not exist until conjured into existence in the making of history” (Doan xii). In this work, I do not seek a past that existed but rather maintain awareness that by interpreting and writing this history I am actively re-narrating it. In this vein, I reject the possibility of achieving a truly objective reconstruction of the past (Taavitsainen). As a result, in my approach to historical analysis I maintain that all histories are interpretations and recognize that I bring a particular perspective and subjectivity to the analysis of the sources.

Such an approach to the analysis of historical materials is of particular importance when analyzing gender. Once again, following Doan, I

acknowledge that categories of gender are “always in flux” and subject to any number of “contradictory, alternate, denied, or suppressed definitions” (Doan 108). As a historian I must continually negotiate contemporary understandings of gender categories and refuse an understanding of a stable gender system for my subjects, because it is the “nature of the category to fix, naturalize, and stabilize what is in fact...contingent” (Doan 108). Doan’s approach to doing queer critical history is central to my work and requires an understanding of gender categories as temporally and culturally contingent and changeable.

While I study gender systems in historical settings in this work, Jason Crouthamel’s approach to studying the history of sexuality informs my undertaking. Crouthamel contends that in any primary source there exists “much more evidence of [the subject’s] *perceptions* of sexuality, rather than their experiences” (10; emphasis added). Similarly, in my study, the prisoner’s perceptions of gender and homosocial relationships are the focus of the historical analysis rather than any concrete homosexual or homosocial “experience” they may or may not have had. Thus, Barbara Rosenwein’s theory of “emotional communities” is also central to my analysis. Understood as social communities whose members have similar understandings of both emotions and how emotions are expressed (Rosenwein 843), I aim to explore the emotional communities formed by RFC airmen in German POW camps in order to understand the “modes of emotional expression” members “expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore” (Rosenwein 843). I seek to illuminate how these airmen made sense of their experiences, and how they understood and performed masculinity, and to do so I must understand the emotions these airmen, through their emotional communities, would have recognized and put into words.

The written sources I analyze are letters and diaries, which each offers unique insights into airmen’s emotions, friendships, and understandings of gender. As Crouthamel argues, combatants constantly “reevaluated, reinforced, or reshaped masculine ideals” through the “prism of ... complex,

emotional experiences” during wartime (Crouthamel 4). It is these expressions that I explore here. Such exploration is complicated, however. When studying letters, for example, credibility of the author as a narrator of events is not assured; authors of letters might conceal emotions, craft false narrative impressions for readers, and reveal “how men wished to represent themselves,” particularly when the audience is concerned family and friends (Crouthamel 6; see also Payne and Payne). Additionally, letters during the First World War were often written with the knowledge that they would be shared with multiple family members and passed among family friends. These wartime correspondents were thus not “private” letters but rather sources of news for the POWs’ social circle (Bourke 21). Rather than being a hindrance to my study, this aspect of studying the epistolary form is a focus. The possibility that the airmen produced narratives of events that were deliberately self-serving or constructed events in a particular way is of central interest in my analysis. How prisoners portrayed their lives to those closest to them illuminates how they wanted to be seen. In contrast, diaries kept by POWs were not intended to be shared and thus often record less context, listing more mundane events of camp life, and often contain emotions men intended to keep private. Each group of documents requires a different set of questions and necessitates a comparative approach among the writing of any individual subject as well as between different men altogether.

In approaching these letters and diaries, the specific time frame in which materials were written takes on great import. Janet Watson draws a distinction between narratives written during the war itself and those published and produced later, contending that many widely accepted understandings of the First World War were produced in the years following the conflict and these interpretations must not necessarily be conflated with the impressions and experiences of men and women during the war years (Watson). Primarily, Watson cites what Eric Leed calls “the ideological battles of the 1920s and 1930s” in which the “character of the war experience and the

nature of the social knowledge it imprinted upon the identity of the front soldier became a central issue” (Leed 680). J. B. Priestly, writing in 1924, categorized war books as belonging to the categories of “patriotic rant,” “glorious adventure” and, eventually reaching dominance “disillusion” where “sensitive young men [were] plunged into mud and blood” (Priestly). “Disillusionment,” argues Watson, dominated war narratives and shaped the war to be “culturally important...not for what it had achieved, but for what it had cost.” (194). Regardless of the “truth” of these narratives, the post-war writing “makes it difficult to determine the actual content of the social experience men underwent from 1914-1918” (Leed 680) and creates what Samuel Hynes calls “the myth of war” (Hynes 1). Watson critiques the way in which “accounts that date from the war years” and “those that are retrospective” have been “regularly conflated in scholarly as well as popular literature” (4).

The collection of writing with which I engage was overwhelmingly produced during the First World War, and, more specifically, during the airmen’s time in POW camps. Significantly, however, included in this study are two accounts that were written after the subject’s time as POWs: one a narrative written by Captain Ward in late April 1916 describing his escape from Vöhrenbach POW camp, and the other a short memoir written by Coles about his time as a POW. I use these non-contemporaneous documents to inform my analysis because the information in these specific instances are important in building a larger picture of the men’s experiences. Due to the nature of escape, Ward did not keep a diary during his journey through the German countryside, and his official and unofficial narratives of escape from the years following provide crucial detail. Coles, whose narrative of capture was published in 1934, used his diary from several weeks of imprisonment to guide him, insisting he could “describe events in sequence and in greater detail” (Coles archive). Thus, Coles’ document is a combination of diary entries from the year 1918 and his reminiscence from over a decade later, and

is supplemented by letters he sent to his family and sweetheart during imprisonment. While these sources are helpful to my analysis, I maintain, following Watson, a distinction between narratives produced about the cultural impact of the First World War and those that were being produced during the war itself throughout my analysis. Other than these two exceptions, my analysis focuses on what the men recorded about their lives from within the confines of the POW camps during their period of internment. In restricting my sources to the years of the First World War I can answer questions about how the subjects of this study experienced their daily lives and constructed friendships without the benefit of knowing when, or how, the war would end.

My research process follows a critical history methodology which recognizes history as produced and “understand[s] discursive productions as always and already power-laden enterprises” (Park 393). In other words, both the discipline of history and the sources available to me, primary and secondary, are products of hierarchical societies in which some voices, and their artifacts, have been privileged and others lost. I understand that the materials I analyze have been produced under particular conditions that are “embedded within social and ideological systems” and that they do not represent an inherent truth about the past (Hodder 112). At the core of this project is an intention to critique and better understand the ways in which, through various institutional techniques and interpersonal relationships, power is created and to take part in critical social analysis. Critical historical analysis offers these vital tools with which the inequalities of power inherent in the past and present are considered during the research process.

Limitations

I am aware that there are limitations to this project. Focusing on the writings of sixteen airmen does ensure that I am able to achieve some diversity in experience and opinions among the subjects, including a variety of backgrounds in class, regional origin, and personality. Additionally, it

achieves insight into the differing experiences among numerous POW camps. However, I acknowledge that a collection of sixteen individuals' writings might not be representative of the wider population of RFC airmen in POW camps during the First World War. Further, the nature of archival work means that I am only able to study what has been preserved; I cannot know if some of these sixteen prisoners' letters or additional diaries have been lost or destroyed in the 100 years since they were written. The gatekeeping nature of archival preservation means that this work is limited to the accumulated restrictions of decades of historians and archivists' decisions that led this particular group of journals and letters to be accessible for this project and eclipses the numerous voices whose writing does not exist in archives. I have no writings of people who experienced the RFC from outside its ranks, such as family members, mechanics, or orderlies, who could provide alternative perspectives or insight into how the men of the RFC affected and were interpreted by a larger population. Such limitations of representativeness are inherent parts of undertaking historical documentary analysis, yet they inform my analysis of source material and point to opportunities for further study.

One ongoing hindrance to my analysis is the nature of the primary sources. Authors of letters would have shared high "mutual understanding" with their intended readers, including references to people and events about which I have little to no knowledge (Payne and Payne). In such instances I rely on contextual clues in the larger documentation to make sense of the particular document. Additionally, the vast majority of documents with which I am working are handwritten and offer differing levels of legibility. The most likely room for error is in place names and personal names, which can be of particular importance. Once again, a firm understanding of the region of study, historical context, and contextual clues aids transcription and analysis.

Included among my sources are a number of photographs, originally housed in the Imperial War Museum and the Royal Air Force Museum, which are not central to my work, but nonetheless inform my analysis. These

photographs were not usually taken by airmen themselves but instead featured them, including individual portraits, photographs of groups of RFC officers, and images of airplanes. Some of the photographs appear to be candid shots of pilots and airplanes and others are staged and might have been used for publicity purposes. However, even the more posed photographs are likely to contain elements that record instances of “real things” be it revealing the material conditions of uniforms and machines or insight into how photographers were compelled to represent the airmen and the RFC (Margolis and Rowe). Many of the photographs do not include the name or affiliation of the photographer, which poses challenges, as identification of the photographer can provide valuable information about any related work the photographer did and to what ends the photographer worked (Margolis and Rowe). Additionally, when analyzing historical photographs, it is likely that the photos have been cropped or otherwise altered over time by any number of people (Margolis and Rowe). I have little way of knowing if the photographs as I see them today are comparable to the photographs as the subjects saw them, or did not see them. Further, the array of photographs included in this project were not selected by me but rather by Dr. Janet Lee as part of the broader study, thus including another layer of selection that affects interpretation of the historical record. Nonetheless, I analyze the photos to better inform myself on the context in which these men lived, fought, were taken prisoner, and made and sustained relationships.

Finally, I am aware, when analyzing the racism in early-twentieth century Great Britain that I might replicate and repeat racist stereotypes, tropes, and systems in my own work. I attempt to strike a balance between confronting the realities of racism that pervaded the culture in which my subjects lived without perpetuating racist rhetoric. As part of this effort, I recognize that the racism of the Victorian and Edwardian era is not separated from the systemic racism today. The people of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, both the colonizers and the colonized, are not a

disconnected group of people whose views and biases are to be judged, but rather are the people who created systems of oppression that are still in place today. Thus, the critical analysis of the culture that produced these systems remains vital to dismantling these systems today.

These sixteen airmen, a subsection of the numerous individual experiences of RFC prisoners held in Germany, each recorded their actions, emotions, and experiences of capture, internment, and, sometimes, escape. It is these young, white, British men, raised in a hierarchical, class-based, imperial culture, who are the subjects of my analysis and whose words are central to the entire project. I have laid out the historical methods by which I approach these young airmen's written records, and it is within these parameters that I approach my analysis of the performance of hegemonic martial masculinities in POW camps. While this project has limitations, they point to areas for further study into the ways in which gender was performed and understood by individuals in the early-twentieth century.

Chapter 4

“We’ll Make a Home of It”: Domesticity and Gender in POW camps

October 1916 found RFC pilot Lieutenant Ernest Wingfield newly captured and incarcerated in Osnabrück prisoner of war camp where he wrote a cheery note to his mother to reassure her about his safety and comfort. “We have moved into more comfortable and roomy quarters,” he announced, adding, “Oh! We’ll make a home of it!” (19 October 1916/L). Repeatedly, imprisoned airmen engaged in domestic behavior and formed relationships patterned on nuclear family structures. I explore the ways in which, while captive, RFC POWs reasserted familiar homosocial communities of squadron life through normative practices of domesticity such as home-making, dining, and hosting. I examine how these domestic practices offered opportunities for prisoners to perform gender and I approach the practices as mechanisms for both maintaining and resisting ideologies of gender and empire. Throughout, I employ a queer theoretical approach that recognizes practices of gender as reiterative performances that illustrate the elasticity of masculinity in the context of war. I study these gendered familial and domestic practices of the captive airmen as examples of institutionalized male bonding that organizations such as the boy scouts, public schools, and the RFC itself encouraged, and suggest these practices served as gender performances that affirmed martial masculinities even as they stretched the barriers of hegemonic gender.

The significance of traditionally feminized domesticity for combatants was often enhanced by the conditions of this war. By domesticity, I refer to practices, both actions and interpersonal relationships, related to the running of a home and maintenance of nuclear family life. For enlisted men in the trenches, Joanna Bourke and Jessica Meyer argue, domestic practices provided a source of stability and helped soldiers cope with the anxieties of war. Airmen, too, found relief in domestic behaviors, and decorating shared

spaces, acquiring pets, and making gardens were a common part of RFC fellowship (Lee “Eye”). These domestic practices were not unique to the RFC; they were essentially part of all military life and male groups generally.¹³ Nevertheless, RFC officers’ abundance of financial resources, lengthy periods of free time, and their relative independence from military scrutiny allowed them to establish “homes” in squadrons¹⁴ in ways that soldiers confined to the trenches could not. In this chapter, I discuss the ways captivity, despite its constraints and threat to “manliness,” also galvanized performances of traditionally feminized domesticity.

I analyze practices of domesticity in POW camps focusing primarily on a subset of the diaries and letters of three RFC officers: Second Lieutenant Ernest Wingfield, Second Lieutenant John Chapman, and Lieutenant William “Hugh” Chance. I analyze letters Wingfield, imprisoned at Osnabrück camp from September 1916 to March of 1917, sent to his mother and father during his six months in captivity. Chapman was imprisoned at Karlsruhe camp directly after being captured, from July 1917 until September 1917, when he was transferred to Holzminden, where he remained through at least the rest of that year. Chapman’s writing from this period comes from a daily diary with entries ranging from a phrase or single sentence to several paragraphs, the longest entry being just over half a page. All entries analyzed in this chapter are from this six month period of his imprisonment. Chance was a bomber pilot shot down in September 1916. Like Wingfield, he was held at Osnabrück camp from September 1916 until March 1917 when he was transferred to Clausthal camp. His writing comes from his diary kept during his six months at Osnabrück.

¹³ For example, boys in English public schools frequently received food parcels from their families and shared them with groups of loyal friends much the way RFC airmen did in training and in POW camps (Chandos, *Boys Together*; Mangan, J. A. *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*).

¹⁴ RFC *esprit de corps* was particularly focused around individual squadrons, military groups of roughly 20 men which served as the central organizing structure for the RFC, and became airmen’s primary emotional and social unit during war.

While these three men and their writing make up the majority of my analysis in this chapter, I also draw from the writing of four other RFC officers: Second Lieutenant H. Ward, Captain Robert Ingram, Captain Oscar Greig, and Second Lieutenant Charles Mackenzie Furlonger. This chapter draws from Ward's diary kept during December 1915 while in captivity and his reminiscences in a 1917 Report he made to Colonel B. L. Anstruther. Ingram's writing comes from letters to his sister, Mabel, and his parents during his time at Rastatt POW camp from August 1918 to November 1918. I draw from Greig's letter to his parents from Ingolstadt POW camp written in June 1917, and Furlonger's personal diary that he kept while imprisoned at Ströhen POW camp between May 1917 and January of 1918. Finally, I include brief excerpts from Second Lieutenant G.W. Armstrong's December 1917 diary written at Trier POW camp and a November 1918 letter Second Lieutenant George Coles wrote while imprisoned at Karlsruhe POW camp. As a result, my analysis focuses on the details of the lives of three men in particular while simultaneously re-creating the diversity of living situations in POW camps by drawing from additional prisoners' experiences.

To undertake this analysis, I first illustrate the particular domestic practices airmen performed while incarcerated, including decorative practices, dining habits, and interpersonal relationships, noting the ways in which these domestic performances imitated pre-capture practices. I then examine the ways in which these practices were performances of gender, specifically delving into examples of 'hosting' fellow prisoners for tea and the use of gendered family titles. I consider both the ways in which such practices reaffirmed the martial masculinity of the 'soldier hero,' exploring how domesticities were institutionally encouraged and expanded it, given the particular physical and emotional setting of the POW camp. Finally, I discuss the ways in which the feminized domesticity performed by airmen was intrinsically connected to nationalism, empire, and British superiority.

Domestic Practices

Capture and imprisonment meant airmen were separated from squadron communities that had previously served as social structures and were frequently shuffled from camp to camp with little to no notice. Eager to connect with ‘hominess’ in this foreign and fluid setting, prisoners performed domesticity in numerous ways in camps, turning the life of the prisoner into “real living” and finding comfort and familiarity in a space that offered very little of either (Chapman 14 October 1917/D). Much like the pattern of the squadron, airmen in POW camps self-organized into “messes,” groups of four to eight men who took part in “cooking, eating, hearing and discussing news, and sleeping” in the same space (Ingram 25 October 1918/D; see also Ketchum). Upon entering a camp, RFC officers almost immediately tended to see colleagues from their own and other squadrons. For example, when first interned Ward noted he and his fellow new inmate “found a lot of people we knew, and for a day or two were continually meeting old acquaintances” and Wingfield wrote “I am continually running against fellows I know so am not so lonely” (Ward December 1915/D; Wingfield 29 September 1916/L). Messes were then created among prisoners with these shared connections via the RFC: “We are 4 in our small mess, all from the same Squadron,” Ingram wrote (25 October 1918/L). These mess groups helped create an environment in which the bunkmates were “a very happy crowd... all things considered” (Ingram 25 October 1918/L). Acquaintances soon became intimates, who would be sorely missed when transfers moved a prisoner out of the shared space. “One of my room companions . . . went off to Furstenberg last week,” wrote Sanford, “I am very sorry to lose him” (8 July 1917/L). Similarly, Nixon confessed in his diary that he was saddened to see his mess group disbanded by sudden transfers: “[t]hus ends our little party which so far as we know will not be united again ‘til after the war” (January 1918/D). For most airmen the emotional and community structure of the POW “messes” served much the same role as squadrons did before capture, and the family-like

relationships men formed in POW camps were in part structured by the institution of the RFC and in part a result of seeking familial emotional connection.

Prisoners wrote at length in letters home about creating homes by decorating their rooms, making them livable, and by enjoying their few comforts with fellow prisoners. Wingfield, for instance, who declared they were “mak[ing] a home of it,” described their plans, which like all our prisoner narratives used “we” as the pronoun of intent:

We are now considering [a] scheme for furnishing the room as it is bare except for the beds and a table and chairs. We are trying to get some red bunting to cover the walls... also some curtains for the windows, a tablecloth and one or two mats. Then we shall hang one or two pictures around and there we are (19 October 1916/L)

Some of the alterations were decorative, such as the “red bunting,” while others are physical reminders of a softer domestic environment, such as the “curtains” and “tablecloths” (Wingfield 19 October 1916/L). It was not only letters home in which prisoners expressed their decorative activities; instances of home-making appeared in personal diaries as well. “Bought some wallpaper in the canteen,” wrote Furlonger, “and we spent the day making the room look shipshape” (28 January 1918/D). Similarly, Chance describes the anteroom he and his bunkmates arranged as ““look[ing] nice and comfortable” with its “walls papered a dark red with white painted dado and doors, blue curtains and furnished with card tables and deck chairs” (26 October 1916/D). Chance, too, wrote in his diary about the housekeeping process among his bunkmates: “A great discussion this afternoon as to how we should arrange our room. [Fellow RFC prisoner] Money has ideas of his own but will have to fall into line with the wishes of the majority. Finally decided to have all beds in two tiers, one side of the room and to hang curtains round them and round the walls . . . Quite comfortable” (17 October 1916/D). Several days later Chance updates his diary on the matter and provides insight into the collaborative aspect of decoration, noting he and his bunkmates “[r]e-arranged

the room in the evening” and settled on “[t]hree double beds on one side of the room and two tables in the middle . . . Our room begins to be quite comfortable” (20 and 21 October 1916/D). The goal of making a homey environment out of their rooms was a group endeavor and additions such as tablecloths, mats, curtains and pictures on the walls all served not only to personalize the generic space of a POW bunkroom, but also acted as physical indications that the shared space served as a home. Indeed, the men repeatedly referred to their bunkrooms as “home” until the word became so common that that need for quotation marks became unnecessary.

Airmen’s domestic practices went beyond physically changing their living spaces; they also turned to each other to recreate the social and emotional dynamics of the traditional domestic sphere and the RFC through the preparation and consumption of meals. Dining, however, was a complicated endeavor as food came from a variety of sources. Officer POW camps provided meals for the prisoners, but often these meals were not to the prisoner’s liking. Armstrong noted in his diary that these rations were “vile” (Undated/D), Chance wrote they were “unpleasant” (October 26 1916/D), Nixon claimed the food was “useless” (16 June 1918/L) and breakfast was usually rejected as prisoners disdained the German black bread and “extraordinarily bad” coffee made from roasted acorns (Ward c. 1916/R). The German provided mid-day meal “was generally untouched by [prisoners]...[t]he German supper, which was at seven o’clock, was treated in the same wa[y] as the lunch” (Ward December 1915/D). Instead, airmen went to elaborate lengths to create their own “home cooked” meals in their messes, what Ward referred to as a “special supper round about nine or nine-thirty” (December 1915/D).

Imprisoned airmen were able to refuse camp rations because, due to their status as officers, they had two other main sources of supplies. One of these was food purchased at very high prices (what Chance described as “a real swindle” [20 October 1916/D]) at canteens within the camps. Prisoners

could shop for “chocolate, cheese, beer, honey at [the] canteen,” among other things, using an exchange of their officer salaries or other sources of income for “camp money” (Wingfield 20 September 1916/L; Furlonger 30 September 1917/D; Rachamimov “POWs”). Wingfield wrote to his mother from Osnabrück, relieved that “arrangements are being made for us to draw money,” admitting he had “drawn about £10 already” (19 October 1916/L). Supplies at camp stores were so costly that buying food through these means required substantial resources that wealthy families could often provide. As Wingfield confessed to his mother, he had “spent [the £10] too, things are rather expensive” (19 October 1916/L).

The second, and more common, way prisoners accessed foodstuffs was through packages from home sent via the British Red Cross¹⁵ and some prisoners felt that “an officer must live completely on his parcels” (Nixon 16 June 1918/L). These packages were coveted, enough to make Coles proclaim “Day of days!” in his diary and to feel “like a millionaire” when one arrived (25 September 1918/D). This was partly due to the fact that, Ward explains, “[c]ooking was allowed in our living rooms and so we formed a kind of mess and lived almost entirely on the contents of our parcels” (c. 1916/R). These packages from home allowed British prisoners to have “terrific meal[s] of porridge, bacon, tongue, toast and marmalade and every sort of thing in their own rooms” (Ward December 1915/D). Importantly, as Ingram pointed out, “[i]t is usual to club one’s parcels together” (25 October 1918/L). It was commonly understood among groups of bunkmates that the food received by any one man was not to be consumed by him alone, but by his ‘family’ members as well. This was crucial for prisoners like Nixon who, “because

¹⁵ Run entirely by unpaid volunteers, the British Red Cross became a “clearinghouse for gifts, correspondence, and information about not only the wounded but also prisoners of war” (Hutchinson 282). Red Cross organizations of each nation worked closely with the government and military of their home nation and became an integral part of the war effort. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Red Cross moved away from its original goal of becoming a neutral international humanitarian organization and towards a more nationalist formulation. Thus, all packages that the men in this study received came through the British Red Cross, a nominally humanitarian organization that in reality was a coordinating “branch” of the British war effort.

many parcels are lost,” wrote “[f]ortunately I mess with 4 other officers who get all their parcels through and they make up the lack in my parcels” (16 June 1918/L). “Another red letter day today. The first parcel arrived,” exclaimed Furlonger, even though the parcel was for his bunkmate, not himself (27 June 1917/D). Similarly, Chapman mentions that his bunkmate “Walters had a lifesaving parcel...his first from home. Oh, we did have a good tea” (20 October 1917/D). Pooling together foodstuffs with one’s bunkmates and “mess” mates not only served to bond the men during the act of sharing, but also connected them emotionally as a family unit. As a result, receiving packages, whether their own or someone else’s, was often an event of “great joy!” and made “all life seem rosy” (Furlonger 23 June 1917/D).

Once food was obtained, domestic duties were adopted through meal preparation in a system of shared labor that Ward described as “quite a well-organized affair” (26 December 1915/D). The six prisoners in Grieg’s bunkroom took “turns at cooking, a week at a time each,” and Grieg bragged “I have just finished my week without any serious effect on any of us” (6 March 1917/L). Similarly, Chapman wrote home that it was his “turn of being cook today,” Nixon announced he was “getting quite adept in the cooking line – my turn comes every 4 days,” and Chance boasted that his and his fellow prisoners were becoming “quite good cooks and had hot roast beef and cocoa for supper” (Chapman 13 August 1917/L; Nixon 23 December 1917/L; Chance 8 November 1916/D).

Cooking and food preparation featured prominently in prisoners’ lives, as did the socialization these meals catalyzed: messes sought the opportunity for sociability outside their bunkrooms, and engaged in domestic practices through patterns of “hosting” and visiting each other’s “homes” for tea. For example, Chapman hosted “neighbors” over to tea as guests: “Tea with Capt. Whitehall at 3.30. Had a lovely talk, met Captain Jackson -- an artist” (30 September 1917/D). Chapman also hosted a prisoner named Thompson who “had cocoa with us, and we talked with great interest for an hour and a half

about Art/music and Spiritualism” (14 October 1917/D). The social premise of tea and hosting gave prisoners the framework in which to develop interpersonal connections. As a result of these opportunities for developing social relationships, Chapman felt “a new atmosphere in prison life [that is] much more attractive than before” (14 October 1917/D).

Gender, Domesticity, and Hegemony

The feminized acts of decorating, keeping house, cooking, and hosting that had been practiced to some extent in pre-capture squadrons soon became part of airmen’s daily lives in POW camps. As established above, prisoners did not shy away from crossing gendered boundaries for household labor and took great pride in their domestic work: Chance declared that the result of his bunkmates’ decoration was “[a]lmost as good as being at home!” (22 October 1916/D). The domesticity displayed in POW camps as described above were performances of gender and thus decorating bunkrooms to specific tastes, cooking for one another, and hosting guests expand notions of hegemonic martial masculinities, even as institutional homosociality allowed for reiteration of masculinity through the same performances. In this section, I explore the way in which performances of gendered domesticity both reinforced these hegemonic boundaries and made elastic notions of masculinity.

Tea, Hosting, and Civilization

One of these feminized domestic acts was the practice of “hosting” fellow prisoners for tea. Serving and taking tea was a common social ritual in Great Britain during this era that had become “a crucial part of daily patterns of consumption and domesticity” (Fromer 1). While serving tea offered a bridge between the private and public spheres in the act of hosting friends and neighbors in one’s private home, it also held importance as a gendered ritual for the domestic family itself. In Great Britain, the ritual offered the male head of household an opportunity for leisure and refreshment in the comfort of the

domestic space and acted as a time where male and female spheres intersected. A tea service required “invisible— female— hands to perform the necessary domestic labor,” allowing female family members to act as “nourisher” and male family members as “consumer,” thus creating familial roles within the social practices of the tea table (Fromer 3). The facilitation of conversation around the tea table and its role in the development of intimacy and relationship was also a specifically feminized performance: according to Sarah Ellis writing in 1839, women of England constructed the “domestic ideal in their own individual homes, offering a peaceful refuge for their husbands and fathers,” indicating the importance of the gendered domestic sphere in the mid-nineteenth century onward (Ellis 260).

The spheres of private and public, and feminine and masculine, intersected through hosting in POW camps. For officer POWs, Iris Rachamimov argues, “the [bunk room] functioned as a ‘private space’ in which private matters could be dealt with” (“Camp” 298). For example, one evening Chapman “[m]et captain Whitehall late And had tea with him and a long talk of our old days” (30 September 1917/D). Chance similarly hosted an old family friend to tea who shared “plenty of interesting things about his early experiences” as a prisoner, as he “had been a prisoner since...1914” (20 October 1916/D). During these teas, talk of the “old days,” potentially referring to military service and early imprisonment, perhaps schooling, or their homes in Britain, tea with fellow prisoners provided an opportunity for more intimate conversations than might be had in the “public space” of recreation rooms, libraries, athletic fields, or communal messes. These more intimate conversation topics were granted expression in the “private space” of the bunkroom, which acted as the domestic “private home” of the host. These private spaces were being maintained by prisoners, a feminine practice, and simultaneously included the opportunity for “refuge” for the “masculine” guest; hosting meant POWs acted both as feminine “nourisher” and masculine “guest,” indicating a flexible understanding of gender among these prisoners

(Ellis 260). Jason Crouthamel points out that during the First World War, men consistently “fused ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ characteristics, especially under the rubric of ‘comradeship’” during military service (Crouthamel 8). In these instances of hosting, it is evident that the common gender performances that permeated British tea culture during this period were taken up by POWs as well, modifying traditional performances and incorporating “feminine” traits into their performance of masculinity.

Simultaneously, hosting ‘neighbors’ and friends to tea was an act of reaffirming nationalism and patriotism, and thus performing British masculinity, within the confines of camps. Tea, Julie Fromer argues, occupied a liminal space in the late-Victorian era culture, between the “inside” and the “outside;” the domestic (Great Britain) and the exotic (Empire) (Fromer 2). Originating in Asia, tea inherently evoked the reach of the British Empire, and consuming tea in a social setting symbolized that even in the strenuous situation of total war, and even while imprisoned, British imperial power was such that English gentlemen could have access to this important commodity. Furthermore, tea reflected civility and “civilization,” reflecting notions of British superiority over the less “civilized” German “Hun” who did not have such cultured practices. Chance confirmed this, writing “[w]e have bought a teapot and becoming quite civilised” (21 October 1916/D). Indeed, camp home-making writ large reinforced hierarchies of class and nation by creating a semblance of ‘civilization’ and bourgeois normalcy, and tea and domestic pleasure could be employed as rituals of leisure symbolizing class, culture, and “civilization,” especially when paired with rejection of the “Hun’s’ black bread and atrocious coffee” (Ward c. 1916/R). As Chapman declared after decorating his bunkroom, “[t]able cloths and all home comforts was the aim – [it’s] quite civilized now” (13 October 1917/D). The habit of hosting other prisoners for tea was a social reminder of the British prisoners’ collective power and authority both as British gentlemen and as citizens of a powerful Empire, reaffirming loyalty and patriotism, and shoring up nationalism. As

Blain claimed, “as more and more Englishmen arrived we managed to make the best of everything” (7 August 1916/L). This collective identity, reaffirmed through socializing and taking tea, allowed the prisoners a chance to reassert their power to one another and themselves even while living in a relatively powerless physical space. In this way, while “camp domesticity” (Rachamimov “Camp”) stretched the bounds of gender and promoted intimacy and close friendships among prisoners, it simultaneously sustained group solidarities and collective authority in ways that reaffirmed national and military allegiances and hegemonic martial masculinity.

Familial Relationships

Gendered inclinations towards domesticity mirrored traditional family structure and performances: airmen turned to each other to re-create the social and emotional dynamics of the traditional domestic sphere and, as J. Davidson Ketchum argues, the nuclear family. One way prisoners emphasized familial bonds was by using names that indicated gendered and generational identities. Ketchum points out that the term “family” might seem “questionable if the men had not constantly used it themselves” (Ketchum 130), and indeed Chapman wrote, upon a transfer, “Krauts conducted the party/family to Schewidintz” (6 December 1917/D). Particular names were given to members of these “families.” As noted, Chapman was particularly close to “Dad,” whom he described as seated at the “head of the table” during bunkroom meals, a position befitting the patriarch of the family (30 November 1917/D). Alongside “Dad,” was a prisoner known as “Fanny” (also identified with quotation marks), who sat “at his left” (30 November 1917/L). The exact relationship between Chapman and Thompson (“Dad”) is difficult to discern; from diary entries it appears that the two spent time together reading, exercising, dining, and playing card games, all typical forms of entertainment in the camp. Yet it is likely that these designations indicated certain social performances. For example, Chapman described one evening during which the members of a dinner party “imbibed too freely” (*offizierslager* provided an alcohol ration, which some POWs traded, with the result that others enjoyed a

substantial amount) (30 November 1917/D). During this evening, according to Chapman, “‘Dad’ sat in his chair and dictated . . . and ‘Fanny’ distributed Raisins [sic] and almonds” to the rest of the dinner guests (30 November 1917/D). In this instance the prisoners are following traditional gender practices as “Dad” occupies “his” chair, implying authority, and “Fanny” is feminized as “she” serves others. Later in the same entry, when describing the feast, Chapman notes they ate “potato pies, Fanny’s delicacy, and beans” (30 November 1917/D). Notably, no other food item is connected to its cook except Fanny’s potato pies, further connecting “Fanny” to domestic femininity. In her work on domesticity in First World War POW camps, Iris Rachamimov argues that this practice of using familiar designations for fellow prisoners was fairly common. Such titles were almost always indicated using quotation marks, as Chapman does, in ways that remind the reader (and reassure the writer) that this familial designation was role play, temporary, and “normality” might be immediately restored (Rachamimov “Camp” 302). However, as Rachaminov insists, the “subjective force” of such notation “was never questioned” and heteronormative familial boundaries were stretched (Rachamimov “Camp” 302).

Another heteronormative boundary was frequently expanded in the prisoners’ cooking habits. In October 1917 Chapman recorded the relationship between himself and one of his bunkmates, Walters: “[We] started [making] meal[s] together- table clothes and all home comforts was the aim- quite civilized now” (13 October 1917/D). Interestingly, Chapman and Walters are cooking *together* rather than taking turns as many other officers recorded. Chance notes the same: “Sanders and I got up before Appel and cooked breakfast” he writes, which “consist[ed] of porridge and tongue” (5 November 1916/D). Cooking together indicates a partnership, a more intimate connection than the practice of dividing labor because it implies time spent in each other’s company rather than the efficiency that taking “turn[s] of being cook” might demonstrate (Chapman 13 August 1917/L). Indeed, the importance of

Chapman and Walter's connection is emphasized when Chapman continues in his diary entry for the next day, writing:

Married life with Walters thoroughly successful- meals now are not parades but tete a tetes. Had a splendid dinner of meat pudding... and our end of the table is so much more attractive than the old way...

There is now a new atmosphere in prison life- much more attractive than before- ...- now it is forming into real living. (14 October 1917/D)

This entry demonstrates how Chapman imitates domestic life with Walters: he refers to Walters as his spouse within the home they have created in the camp and the two men work together to produce "civilized" meals as a married couple. Sarah Cole suggests that this was not uncommon, and that in wartime "comradeship was offered as a replacement for nearly all other forms of human and social organization" (18). However, Chapman and Walters' relationship is not merely a "replacement" for a "real" marriage; it very much serves as a form of emotional marriage in the physical reality of the POW camp. Chapman does not use quotation marks around the word married, as he does with other family titles. Additionally, the relationship greatly improves Chapman's emotional life, by making life "much more attractive than before," in a way that a loving marriage might (14 October 1917/D). Such an understanding of marriage invites a rethinking of how the airman conceptualized marriage, expanding the emotional consequences of the relationship to apply to bonds outside the institution (Roper). As Rachamimov argues, the creation of domestic spaces and the use of the word "home" allowed prisoners of war "to access some of the emotional rewards that the word generated" ("Camp" 295). Similarly, the long conversations around the comfortable dinner table, a table put together by himself and his spouse, give Chapman a "family" he did not have before, and turn the discomforts of prison life into "real living" (Chapman 14 October 1917/D).

While "camp domesticities" cross gender barriers, these behaviors were not unique to POW camps nor to airmen (Rachamimov "Camp"). Michael Roper argues that trench soldiers' emotional survival depended on developing familial relationships, such as the ones apparent in prisoners' diary

entries (Roper). Similarly, Crouthamel, who studies the emotional lives of German trench soldiers, argues that in order to emotionally survive the trauma of war, men “actively negotiated, bolstered, and challenged” prevailing hegemonic masculine ideals in a variety of ways (*Intimate History* 2). Jessica Meyer points out that enlisted soldiers commonly expressed pride at their acquisition of domestic skills during war, for example, such as washing clothes, cooking and making tea, and generally “tak[ing] care of themselves” (33). Indeed, as discussed in chapter two of this thesis, domestic practices and homosocial group intimacies were sanctioned by the British military institution in part, Thomas Kühne notes, because British military leadership thought these homosocial spaces would balance the brutality of militarism by providing respite for “fears, wishes, longing, and desires” not otherwise given expression (Kühne 325; see also Frantzen).

Wingfield’s and Chapman’s inclinations towards domestic practices in the POW camp were also in many ways replications of pre-capture RFC squadron life. As introduced in chapter one, the RFC encouraged domestic performances through the routines of squadron life and messes, anterooms, and bunkrooms were the “focal point of off-duty relaxation” for RFC airmen (Winter 1983 179). Features such as a cast iron stove, easy chairs and sofas, pianos, billiard tables, and small libraries were staples of shared quarters during squadron life (Winter 1983 179). Decorating, too, was routine, as demonstrated by RFC pilot Charles Dixon, who was not a POW: “Been working on the mess. It’s going to be jolly comfortable . . . mess room we shall do in blue and the anteroom painted white -- with comfy benches all around” (17 November 1917/D). This type of homosocial bonding, which was implicit in RFC life and expressed via domesticities, also encouraged operational efficiency in a military sense. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains, hierarchies of military authority and discipline required individuals to define themselves as integral part of all-male groups in order to survive the pressures of combat (Sedgwick *Between Men*). As a result, military leadership

encouraged rowdy play, camaraderie, and even intimate, familial performances (Lee “Knights”; Sedgwick *Between Men*). Such practices facilitated solidarity and emotional survival as an integral part of squadron life: behaviors replicated in the POW war camps where coping – and ultimately survival -- was a priority. Thus, domestic families in the POW camp were, in this way, reaffirming institutionally sanctioned forms of martial masculinity.

Captivity and Gender Elasticity

Even while domestic performances were sanctioned and thus reaffirmed hegemonic martial masculinity, domesticities in POW camps leave room for elasticity of the very same masculinity. Homosocial domesticity among prisoners challenges understandings of the heterosexual nuclear family structure in a different way than intimate domestic practices performed by active duty officers. RFC POWs were in an inherently different position from their counterparts still actively fighting the war; capture, argues Brian Feltman, was an “event that challenged [men’s] status as brave soldiers and thus their merit as men at war” and many prisoners could not grapple with “the shame of their situation and their inability to contribute at the front” (Feltman 73). POWs lacked the ability to “justif[y]” these domestic “soft havens” through performances of martial masculinities in the way their active service counterparts could, both through fighting on the front lines and through heteronormative activities (or perceptions of such activities) while on leave (Rachamimov “Camp” 299). As a result, camp domesticities “trod a much finer line” between what appeared to be “accepted norms of masculine closeness” and behavior which “seemed to challenge gender and sexual boundaries” (Rachamimov “Camp” 299). By opening the space of a POW camp to be a possible site of “home” rather than simply imprisonment, airmen’s relationships with one another reveal a more complex understanding of family and the domestic sphere. Within this framework, Wingfield’s desire to make his bunkroom “homey” with the help of other men, and Chapman’s

relationship with “Dad”, “Fanny” and Walters, reveals not only a close comradeship among prisoners but an active expansion of notions of family that differ from what heteronormative structures dictate. As Sedgwick argues, there is a spectrum between homosexuality and homosociality, and the desire present in both is more blurred than hegemonic masculinity allows it to be. RFC prisoners, emasculated in captivity, turned to one another in homosocial domestic intimacy to find comfort and happiness, and to create “a new atmosphere in prison life” that allowed for “real living” (Chapman 14 October 1917/D).

Airmen POWs nurtured each other as domestic partners by cooking for and with one another, sharing the coveted contents of their packages from home, and taking on emotional significance as each other’s family members. In doing so, prisoners were adopting, as Joanna Bourke argues, a “manly gentleness” towards each other, following patterns of other male homosocial organizations in British culture in which the transition to adulthood “necessitated an adoption of manly gentleness and nurturing” (Bourke 24; see also Meyer; Mangan *Manufactured*). Thus, according to Bourke, the compassion and care POWs expressed for each other in their constructed domestic spaces and their performances of feminine practices did not contradict their masculinity but was definitive of it. As Sedgwick suggests, homosociality, and in particular the bonding among heterosexual men, is a vital component in the formation of masculinities, and the incorporation of homosocial nurturing and “feminine” domestic patterns of behavior did not contradict the men’s masculine identity in their minds, but reinforced it (Sedgwick *Between Men*). Even as homosocial domestic practices were indicative of the hegemonic masculine ideals, Rachamimov suggests the particular difficulty imprisoned airmen experienced in comparison to active duty officers: lacking outlets for martial virility. Thus, as Sedgwick suggests, distinctions between male desire, and the lines between homosexuality and

homosociality which hegemonic masculinity dictate, are far more elastic than the image of the “soldier hero” allows them to be.

Chapter 5

“Permission to put up a stage”: Music, Theater, and Gender

In August 1918, shortly after capture by the German Air Force, Captain Robert Ingram, a pilot in the British Royal Flying Corps (RFC), wrote a letter to his parents in which he expressed a common existential threat to life among prisoners of war (POWs): “[o]f course it’s hateful beyond words to feel one is out of the war and can do nothing more to help” (Ingram 24 August 1918/L). Ingram was not alone in his experience of vulnerability and helplessness when he “must just look on as a spectator” in captivity; across nation and station prisoners expressed in letters and diaries the emasculation of imprisonment (Feltman). This chapter explores the way in which RFC POWs responded to capture and imprisonment, especially the loss of agency and control, by reasserting the familiar homosocial communities of squadron life, especially those produced through music and theater. In this chapter I employ a queer theoretical approach that recognizes practices of gender as reiterative performances to illustrate the elasticity of masculinity in the context of war. The practices of making music and producing theatrical shows together offered opportunities for prisoners to perform gender in ways that both re-inscribed martial masculinities and potentially resisted hegemonic forms.

Capture, argues Brian Feltman, was an “event that challenged [men’s] status as brave soldiers and thus their merit as men at war” and many prisoners struggled to grapple with “the shame of their situation and their inability to contribute at the front” (Feltman 73). The guilt of not being able to fight was explicitly and implicitly connected to the image of the “soldier hero” masculinity and anxiety surrounding the emasculation of imprisonment. For example, Ingram writes from a POW camp, “[o]ur main regret is that we’ve missed the 3 best months of the War” and Ward records humiliation at being made to “walk by threes, like a schoolgirl’s crocodile” by German guards

(Ingram November 1918/L; Ward c.1916/Memoir, hereafter “M”). When RFC airmen had, in their minds, “failed” at the “ultimate test” of war and found themselves prisoners, their masculinity and “imperialist patriotism” was in question and had to be re-asserted (Dawson 1). A combination of desire to reassert that masculine agency and the institutional class privileges awarded British officers in captivity (as discussed in chapter one) allowed airmen to build homosocial communities replicating previous RFC life. New prisoners would soon join the “cheery crowd” of the camp, and partake in the various “[s]ocial institutions,” as Bevington called them, that imitated RFC diversions (Bevington 22 Oct 1917/L). Such activities included stocking and taking advantage of communal libraries (which at Holzminden numbered nearly 5,000 volumes) (Bascomb), playing chess and cards, and participating in sports including football, cricket, hockey, and baseball, a new competition from the Canadians, which Bevington declared “an excellent game” (Bevington 22 Oct 1917/L; Wingfield Sept 29th 1916/L; Ward 1916/M). Among these various sources of entertainment, music and theater especially provided opportunities for reasserting agency and control and for building homosocial communities.

In order to examine understandings of gender within the POW camp, this chapter focuses in particular on the writings of four RFC POWs: Second Lieutenant Charles Furlonger, Lieutenant William “Hugh” Chance, Second Lieutenant Robert Bevington, and Second Lieutenant Ernest Harry Wingfield. Furlonger was captured in May 1917 and imprisoned at Ströhen through the end of the year when he was transferred to Colberg. Here, I analyze diary entries he made between June 1917 and August 1918, covering life at both camps. I also include diary entries Chance made during his first three months at Osnabrück POW camp after being captured in September 1916. Bevington, captured April 1917, sent letters to his family while at Holzminden in the autumn of 1917 and from Schweidnitz POW camp where he remained from December 1917 until May 1918, which are a central part of this chapter.

Finally, I examine letters Wingfield wrote to his family, and one his family wrote to him, during his first two months of imprisonment at Osnabrück between September and November 1916.

I have divided the chapter into two major sections to discuss how first music, and then theater, provided opportunities for prisoners to perform gender. I lay out the common practices of musical performance in POW camps and compare them to the institutionally sanctioned entertainment in pre-capture RFC squadrons. I then analyze the ways in which music was used by prisoners to demonstrate their continued identity as the “soldier hero” even as the musical practices reveal the elasticity of the same identity. Next, I establish the ways in which theater operated in POW camps and how performances were connected to British life and culture, discussing the reaffirmation of imperial and orientalist British supremacy through such performances. Finally, I explore the role crossdressing played in POW theater, demonstrating its power to both reaffirm and complicate hegemonic soldier hero masculinity.

Music

In the world of officer POW camps, music rang out throughout barracks, mess halls, and often makeshift concert venues and there were numerous musical opportunities available to imprisoned officers. Purchased or mailed to one man in particular, gramophones, for example, were shared with bunkmates and became an item of mutual ownership and enjoyment. While imprisoned at Ströhen, Furlonger’s bunkmate Fenwick “produce[d] horrible sounds from a very ‘cheap and nasty’ gramophone he ha[d] purchased,” which prisoners could do either at the camp canteens or, sometimes, in local German towns. Airmen also wrote home “ordering Gramophone records,” requesting that their family and friends send along favorites in addition to the usual packages of food and clothing (Furlonger 23 June 1917/D; 20 April 1918/D). Even without gramophones, prisoners sang songs together in their bunkrooms,

as Chance's colleagues did one night: "[a]fter Appeal we had an impromptu sing-song in the anteroom" (Chance 18 November 1916/D). In addition to singing, bunkmates frequently formed small concert groups, even as large as "an orchestra," often for the purpose of performing in shows that ranged in size from camp-wide to room-specific (Bevington 29 March 1918/L). Chance, for instance, wrote about one small "concert given by Russians. Their orchestra with balalaikas combined with guitars played very well" (Chance 22 October 1916/D). Wingfield's "hut" at one point was in a "horrible spot" due to noise as he and his bunkmates were "starting a brass band and some of the instruments ha[d] just arrived" (Wingfield 30 September 1916/L).

Listening to and creating music in POW camps was a form of entertainment through which prisoners could socialize with one another and provide some structure to cope with daily life. Fenwick and Furlonger used the gramophone for "celebrations" (Furlonger 23 June 1917/D), and Second Lieutenant John Chapman notes in his diary that when he "[h]ad a lovely quiet dinner [with] an old Dower R.F.C. friend," the men brought a "[g]ramophone down and [they] had a great evening" (Chapman 12 November 1917/D). The gramophone did not only provide shared enjoyment; in Furlonger's case it created shared "unenjoyment." This gramophone was apparently of such poor quality that the "horrible" noise it produced caused annoyance to fellow prisoners and the music was "punctuated by groans and catcalls from the adjoining room" (Furlonger 23 June 1917/D). The men in Furlonger's bunkroom purposely antagonized neighboring rooms by playing loud, harsh music on a gramophone whose "musical properties are practically 'bunk'" (Furlonger 23 June 1917/D). Wingfield describes a similar dynamic in his bunkroom, writing that when his hut's musical instruments arrived, the room was "like a cattle market on Saturday- I am going to play something in self-defense but I have not yet decided what" (Wingfield 30 September 1916/L). Whether listening to and creating music was experienced as a pleasant form of

entertainment or as an annoyance, the music acted as a means of socializing and bonding among prisoners.

Imitation of Squadron Life

RFC airmen listening to gramophone records and singing together was not a phenomenon specific to POW camps, but was a practice reproduced from their days before capture. Music in POW camps, and the homosocial atmosphere it entailed, worked to reaffirm hegemonic masculinity and imperial frameworks in part because these practices imitated pre-capture homosocial performances of masculinity. Both during training and on the front lines, music, which often took the form of “yelling at the top of your voice” during the evening hours, played a role in producing this hegemonic masculinity because it was so essential to RFC *esprit de corps* (Hanna 98). Active duty RFC airmen wrote and manipulated songs to make lyrics specific to their own experiences as exclusive martial groups, and individual squadrons frequently developed their own particular songs and lyrics (Hanna). One active squadron, the 45th, re-wrote the lyrics to *Up from Somerset*, a 1913 parlor-turned-recruiting song, to reflect their own group identity, titling it “The Song of Forty-Six”:

Oh, we’ve come up from Forty-six,
We’re the Sopwith Pups, you know,
And wherever you beastly Huns may be,
The Sopwith Pups will go (Nettleingham).

During active duty, RFC pilot Sholto Douglas recalled that his squadron “lived in a tight little world of [their] own” and their lives “revolved around the squadron and our flying” (Douglas 87). When the tight-knit group of the squadron was lost, and their shared activity of flying taken away, captive airmen sought ways of re-capturing the squadron intimacy. During one evening “sing song” in Osnabrück POW camp, Chance and his four bunkmates, all of whom were RFC, wrote their own lyrics “to the tune of the Volga Boat Song” they had learned from their Russian neighbors (Chance 18 November 1916/D). In re-writing new lyrics to the tune of well-known songs (Chance noted that the tunes were of “rather doubtful character-- mainly

home-composed”) prisoners were imitating the camaraderie and *esprit de corps* of the RFC, and thus evoking the particular masculine identity of the soldier hero that accompanied active service (Chance 18 November 1916/D).

In her work, Eve Sedgwick emphasizes the connection between homosociality and desire, and indeed the prisoners, desirous of the intimacy of squadrons, used music to create their own groups within camps. The actions of blaring music, by means of gramophone, instrument, or voice, served as a method of recreating an intimate group identity among the prisoners who were causing the ruckus. In these instances of musical entertainment, prisoners’ desire towards one another in the form of homosocial groups and friendships actively reinforced institutionally approved forms of masculinity. Gender, according to Judith Butler, is not as an internal fixed reality, but rather a phenomenon constantly produced and reproduced by institutional and discursive practices, including, in this instance, institutionally sanctioned communal singing (Butler). Ensemble singing was seen as therapeutic during the First World War and actively encouraged by wartime authorities¹⁶, many of whom agreed with composer Henry Walford Davies that when “men do something together...you have started an *esprit de corps* among them” (Hanna 118). By “sing[ing] songs” with his bunkmates, Wingfield was reasserting the intimate *esprit de corps* of the RFC and thus re-establishing his identity as one of its heroic officers, and was reaffirming his devotion to military structures (Wingfield 30 September 1916/L). In the POW camp, the homosocial nature of music and song served as a reaffirmation and performance of hegemonic martial masculinity.

Music in Letters Home

While music provided opportunities to connect with pre-capture martial masculinities and with one another within camp boundaries, it was important for many prisoners to perform this masculinity, and perform an

¹⁶ The RFC was part of the Naval and Military Musical Union (NMMU), which was established in 1911.

appropriately masculine reaction to imprisonment for those at home in England. As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century hegemonic masculinity dictated that British “men must be produced who were tough, realistic...and stoical” with strong emotional control, and pressure to perform the image of the manly “soldier hero” sometimes came directly from the home front (Tosh *Industrializing* 193-194). While imprisoned in Osnabrück, Wingfield received a letter from his father who expressed concern about the potential effects of imprisonment. The concern is not conveyed merely for Wingfield’s emotional well-being, but as a precaution for the loss of Winfield’s masculinity and mental and emotional strength. “My dear Ernest,” began his father,

The great danger of your present life will be that you let yourself go slack... and will never be able to regain control of yourself afterwards, and that means a miserable lifetime. A man must always have sufficient control over himself...and the only anxiety I feel seriously about you is that your period of enforced idleness may weaken your strength of will (15 November 1916/L).

Wingfield’s father emphasizes the importance of “a man” being able to “control [him]self,” framing control as a masculine ability that should be maintained by discipline, just as public schools and adventure stories in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century encouraged stoicism and “endurance, assertion, control, and self-control” (Mangan 11). In Mr. Wingfield’s view, imprisonment threatened to weaken his son’s “strength of will,” and, more broadly, weaken his masculinity. Wingfield’s father was not unusual in expressing such opinions and “manliness,” as K. Boyd reminds us, in the context of late-nineteenth century Britain, was a Victorian word suggesting the “strength of characters in the face of adversity... and sometimes, just not succumbing to the pressures of life” (Boyd 45-46).

In response to such concerns, the assertion that Wingfield is was in good spirits becomes critical to the performance of his masculine emotional discipline. As Wingfield writes in a letter home, “[r]eally things are not very bad, we play bridge and sing songs” (30 September 1916/L). Assurances of

emotional vigor and good cheer for family members back home were common in letters written by POWs, often giving examples of such activities as proof of happiness and, more importantly, as evidence of the prisoner's stoic nature. For example, George Coles uses such reassurances in a letter to his "sweetheart" Bonnie: "I do hope you are not worrying about me, dearie," he writes, adding, "[l]ast night we got up quite a passable concert and passed an hour or two" (15 October 1918/L). In this way he used his participation in a concert as evidence that he was surviving prison life. Such assertions of good spirits were critical to the maintenance of masculine emotional discipline. By "play[ing] bridge and sing[ing] songs" with his bunkmates or attending concerts, Wingfield and Coles were not simply demonstrating friendships and bonding among prisoners; they were performing a form of masculinity in which they and their fellow prisoners were cheerful and busy in the face of imprisonment, and were not "succumbing to the pressures of life" (Boyd 45-46), a performance that became vital for the demonstration of maintained martial masculinity to both prisoners themselves and to their families on the home front (Wingfield 30 September 1916/L). In this way, prisoners used music and song to reestablish their devotion to and place within martial masculinity frameworks.

Even while music and song reaffirmed imperialist frameworks and hegemonic martial masculinity, its homosocial nature leaves room for elasticity of the very same masculinity. As Sedgwick argues, there is a spectrum between homosexuality and homosociality, and the desire present in both is more blurred than hegemonic masculinity allows it to be. RFC prisoners, experiencing a threat to their masculinity and isolated in captivity, turned to one another in homosocial enjoyment to find joy ("laughter and applause"), happiness, ("[a]ltogether a very happy evening"), and comfort ("our room begins to be quite comfortable"), with music and song serving as mechanisms for these emotions through which prisoners "enjoy[ed] [them]selves together" (Chance 21-26 October 1916; 9 November 1916/D).

Desirous of performing martial masculinity, prisoners needed one another to do so. As John Tosh argues, “manliness” is fundamentally “a set of values by which men judged other men,” highlighting the importance of homosociality to the performance and recognition of masculinity (Tosh *Manliness* 5). In order to perform the stoic enjoyment of life in the face of imprisonment, prisoners needed company to witness their stoic attitude, and, perhaps even more crucially, R. W. Connell argues that masculinities “come into existence as people act” using the “strategies available in a given social setting” (12). Within the POW camp, prisoner’s available resources included homosocial actions and dependence on one another, blurring the lines between where desire appears in performances of masculinity. Music, and its subsequent socializing, shaped prisoner’s emotional orientation towards a homosociality of desire even while striving for normative masculinity.

Theater

Numerous officer POW camps allowed prisoners a performance space to put on concerts and shows, which they did “every fortnight” in some camps (Greig August 1918/L). Prisoners wrote, directed, and acted in the theatrical performances, even granting one another official positions: Furlonger notes one prisoner “took on the role of producer” (Furlonger 29 September 1917/D). Imprisoned officers also worked behind the scenes creating sets, costumes, and providing live music for the productions put on in “the theaters [prisoners] made” (Bevington 20 February 1918/L; see also Emilijanow; Rachamimov). In Schweidnitz officer camp, for example, the self-named “Schweidnitz Amateur Dramatic Society” put together, performed, and attended a show of some sort nearly weekly, and a “group of mercantile marine captains,” worked as “splendid carpenters, stage hands, scene shifters and electricians but mostly [fought] shy of entering the casts” (Bevington 26 Feb 1918/L). Prisoners also made up the audience for the productions and receiving “permission to put up a stage” allowed for hours of entertainment in a camp (Furlonger 28 August 1917/D). The creation of such a space for communal enjoyment was so

important to prisoners that one of the punishments a commandant could impose on officers was to revoke access to these theater spaces (Bascomb). The commandant of Colberg, for example, “declared the stage closed until further notice” after an attempted escape (Furlonger 5 May 1918/D).

Oscar Greig attributes the motivation for such shows to nothing more than boredom, writing “[i]t helps to pass away the time” (Greig August 1918/L). However, these shows were not merely a cure for the enforced monotony of the camps, but the creation of a theater, a space shared by the entire camp population, served as a homosocial community for prisoners beyond the self-segregated units of their bunk groups. Productions were community-building projects that provided opportunities for collaboration and disagreement, typical in communities of any kind. Often passionate about the shows produced in their theaters, tensions rose among those involved from time to time: “[s]plit in the revue Company today,” Furlonger noted in a diary entry, “[e]veryone clanging everyone else!” (Furlonger 23 September 1917/D). These conflicts, however, did not seem serious, as Furlonger felt that “it will all simmer down in time” (Furlonger 23 September 1917/D).

Theatrical performances, Rachamimov argues, were a vital social “medium for exploring and expressing the pressures of captivity” and provided what was “perceived by those involved as a therapeutic diversion from the mental and physical decay” that came with imprisonment by creating a “theatrical sociability” and “theater life” (“Drag” 364). Theater, in addition to music, served as a mechanism through which prisoners “enjoy[ed] [them]selves together” in a ‘public’ homosocial community beyond their smaller domestic groupings (Chance 26 October 1916/D).

Theater and British Supremacy

The regular shows played an important function beyond homosocial bonding: they produced a connection to the home front and provided an opportunity for the performance of hegemonic masculinity on the part of prisoners.

Rachamimov argues the shows created “an elaborate quasi-bourgeois theater

life aimed at re-creating a prewar sense of comfort, power, and self-worth” and evoked imperial patriotism for the British officers (“Drag” 364). Plays put on in POW camps copied the style, and in many instances the exact scripts, of music hall productions which were a popular form of British theatrical entertainment in the second half of the nineteenth century and early-twentieth century (Emeljanow; Summerfield; Williams). By the early 1900s, music hall shows usually followed the format of the “revue,” which were early forms of a “variety show” (Summerfield 22). Early music halls had a “distinctively masculine atmosphere” and the gendered affiliation of the audiences lasted into the 1900s, and men, particularly young single men, were the primary demographic for the revue (Summerfield 24; see also Maunder; Williams). During the First World War “[h]undreds of young officers were bent on making the most of their Friday and Saturday nights” and would flock to theaters and music halls during their leave (B.W. Findon 1915, quoted in Maunder). Indeed, by 1917, revue producer Albert de Courville claimed that three-quarters of his audiences were soldiers and officers (Maunder 21). In captivity, prisoners re-created music hall performances they might have seen in London: Furlonger, for example, records a performance at Ströhen camp in 1917 in which prisoners “produced a show last night ‘Skit on an East End Music Hall’, quite a clever show” (Furlonger 29 September 1917/D). Additionally, Chance notes that during one concert, the British prisoners “put on a skit based on the music-hall turn ‘Motoring,’” referring to a famous sketch by English music hall comedian Harry Tate (Chance 9 November 1916/D). A week later, Chance notes that during one performance “[t]here were some quite good turns, among them one by Lawson...who imitated Harry Lauder and Tom Foy,” both of whom were popular music hall comedians at the time (Chance 18 November 1917/D).

POW shows were explicitly made to mimic the types of theater being performed in London, demonstrating that the men were not only attempting to “pass the time,” but were, Iris Rachamimov argues, seeking to re-create

British life and culture and the “sense of privileged normalcy” that came with it (“Drag” 364). The “public” space of the theater became a representation of British cultural superiority to their German captors. As Penny Summerfield argues, the music halls of late-Victorian London were sites of jingoistic and “orientalist” productions and propaganda for the British imperial cause. Beginning in the 1870s, music halls began performing notably patriotic musical numbers that directly engaged with contemporary international tensions (Summerfield). Continuing into the Edwardian period, British music hall performances, both before and during the war, were effectively British imperial propaganda that adapted to current events of the time, and by the First World War, imperial themes had adapted and continued to proclaim the superiority of the British.

“Orientalist” and imperialist narratives that permeated popular early-twentieth century British theater were expressed in the performances in camp theaters (Singleton; Williams). Bevington described one prisoner, Grimwood, as the man who “runs our theater,” (Bevington 26 Feb 1918/L). Grimwood had earned this distinction due to his pre-war profession, as he had been “a part in the original cast of *Kismet* in town and was understudying Oscar Asche in the leading role” (Bevington 26 Feb 1918/L). First produced in 1911, *Kismet* tells an orientalist story of a beggar who battles an evil “Wazir” and seduces his wife (Singleton). Oscar Asche, a well-known performer in Britain, produced many shows such as *Chu Chin Chow*, a re-telling of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, that consistently included “oriental characters [who] were mocked by their xenophobic representation or, conversely, pitied in their attempts at a rapprochement with the West in either manners or sexual desire” (Singleton). These lighthearted musical comedies drew on adventure stories straight out of Boys’ Own magazines and emphasized the imperial propaganda of British supremacy (Singleton). Grimwood, as an understudy to Asche himself, brought the same plots and themes into the theater of the POW camp. As Summerfield suggests, these overtly imperial themes presented

“complex issues of international politics in black and white, with Britain’s cause always just and inevitably victorious” (Summerfield 25). As a result, the imprisoned officers were able to recreate the same British superiority in the POW camp theaters, and reassert their presumed imperial and racial superiority as the British soldier hero by performing him on stage.

The theatrical shows were not always exact replicas of existing British plays, however, and just as RFC squadrons wrote their own lyrics to popular melodies, prisoners adapted the plots and words of plays to express their own situation and humor. Bevington notes that “[j]ust now there is a musical comedy running ‘The Girl from Oolong,’” a play that prisoners patched together from dialogue taken from “largely Harry Graham,” a British writer and poet, and songs that were “new words to old tune” (Bevington 26 February 1918/L)¹⁷. In the show, following the format of an Edwardian musical comedy, one prisoner portrayed the hero Jack Meadows, a British man, and his love affair with the daughter of “Bong,” the Sultan of a generic Middle Eastern nation called “Oolong” (Emeljanow). The show included extensive scenes of drinking and dancing with “Harem girls” and the finale declared, “[h]ere is everyone from Oolong, All of us with one idea, That we’ve all been sober too long, And we intend to, Make up for all the time lost” (Emeljanow). The prisoners who wrote and executed this show were, in order to fight off their feelings of emasculation, performing an institutionally sanctioned version of hegemonic white, British masculinity by acting out and reveling in their own power over women and other nations. As Rachamimov argues, for prisoners with “no ‘legitimate’ wartime activity to pursue” the POW stage “provided a way to reaffirm a sense of masculine power and upper-class superiority” (“Drag” 382). Empire, Tosh argues, was “a test of the

¹⁷ While there exists few surviving copies of POW versions of such musicals, “The Girl from Oolong” is one notable exception. Victor Emeljanow’s research reveals that the play was written by a Lieutenant and Captain imprisoned with Bevington, and was performed in October 1918 at what prisoners called the “Elysium Theater,” the stage at Schweidnitz.

nation's virility" and "The Girl from Oolong" allowed prisoners to demonstrate their sustained virility through "Jack Meadows" and his conquest of the Bong's daughter and flirtations with the orientalist "harem girls." (Tosh *Industrializing* 193).

Actors were performing this masculinity for their fellow prisoners, both those who made up the audiences of shows and those on stage. As Tosh reminds us, "masculinity is as much about homosociality as about patriarchy," and performing the traits of a "Jack Meadows" character in isolation does not reclaim imperial masculinity (Tosh *Manliness* 5). Crucial to these performances of gender were the homosocial community within which they were performed: one sketch "caused roars of laughter," another performance elicited "laughter and applause," and one show "drew howls and cheers from us all" (Chance 9 November 1916; 22 October 1916/D). Prisoners were being rewarded publicly within POW theaters with verbal encouragement, as audiences provided the "recogni[tion] by others" that Graham Dawson argues is crucial to hegemonic masculinity (Dawson 23). The mechanism by which imperial, martial masculinity was being performed and reclaimed was this homosocial setting and the "relationships and social bonds" among prisoners affirmed such gender performance as belonging to themselves (Hammarén and Johansson 3). Prisoners, using themes that declared the "righteousness of British predominance" that were in keeping with typical imperialist rhetoric of the period, performed a hegemonic masculinity that, through the mechanism of homosocial theater productions, reaffirmed for prisoners their identity as part of that hegemonic power (Summerfield 26). The performances on stage were simultaneously performances of gender that, in this way, remained within the demands of compulsory heterosexuality and martial masculinity of the RFC.

Crossdressing in Captivity

In the London music halls of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, men and women shared the stage both in starring roles and in companies, but

there is a long history in British theater of men and prepubescent boys performing as women, particularly when women were barred from the theater (Boxwell; Williams). The First World War necessitated a return to such traditions, and male cross dressing became common in troop entertainment both on the front lines and in POW camps (Boxwell; Rachamimov). An example of this cross-gender acting in officer POW camps can be seen in a photograph of a “Panto” at Trier POW camp from December 1917 (see figure 1). In the photo sixteen prisoners are arranged in two rows on a stage with an elaborate neoclassical backdrop, and each prisoner is wearing full costume. One of the men is dressed in blackface and three are dressed as women. The prisoners dressed as women wear wigs, dresses, and false breasts. Most of the performers pose stoically while a few smile sheepishly. Five additional prisoners sit in a makeshift orchestra pit with their instruments and music stands.



Figure 1.

Oscar Greig indirectly alludes to just such a cross dressing role, telling his parents “[w]e are having a show tomorrow night. The play is ‘what happened to Jones’” (Greig September 1918/L). *What Happened to Jones* was an 1897 play by George Broadhurst that starred two men and a woman, and the extended cast of the show included several more female characters, in this instance played by prisoners who dressed up to do so (Eldredge). Similarly, during one “sketch” performance at Osnabrück “[a] Russian dressed as a girl and singing in a duet drew howls and cheers from us all” (Chance 9 November 1916/D). Not only did the Russian prisoner dress and sing as a woman, Chance tells us that “‘She’ was given a bouquet and threw flowers in quite the approved style” (Chance 9 November 1916/D). Part of the performance of femininity on stage was to “lose all traces of manliness...through mimicry” (Rachamimov “Drag” 378), extending to bowing and performing femininity in “the ‘approved style’” throughout the event (Chance 9 November 1916/D). Some prisoners, Rachamimov (following Butler) points out, were “rewarded...within social hierarchies on the basis of...readable ‘inscriptions’ on the surface of their bodies” by performing femininity well, and some female impersonators became “stars” in POW camps for their talent (Rachamimov “Drag” 376). Further, Bevington’s February 1918 description of “The Girl from Oolong” reveals the prisoners themselves wrote the script in which multiple prisoners would dress up as orientalist versions of “harem girls” and “beach girls” with whom, at the end of the play, various other male characters are “dallying with...in the bathing sheds” (Emeljanow 275). Prisoners, then, actively wrote roles in which they would dress, act, and flirt with fellow prisoners on stage as women.

While POWs apparently continued the on-stage cross-dressing that had been practiced on the front lines of the war, it takes on a different significance given the “masculine disempowerment” many RFC officers felt in captivity (Rachamimov “Drag” 364; see also Feltman; Jones). Hegemonic martial masculinity, including expectations that defense of empire and war itself were

“man’s business,” was a vital part of the identity for First World War prisoners that their situation in captivity threatened to steal from them (Feltman; Jones). When the RFC airmen had, in their minds, “failed” at the “ultimate test” of war and found themselves prisoners, their masculinity and “imperialist patriotism” was, Dawson argues, called into question (Dawson 1), and many POWs “experienced capture by the enemy as...a precipitous loss of status in the social and gender hierarchy” (Rachamimov “Drag” 364). Being made to attend “roll call” and being led on walks reinforced feelings of feminization and infantilization to the officers who recently thought of themselves as “masters of the sky” (Lee “Eye”), and seem to leave little room for cross-gender acting (Midgley; Connell & Messerschmidt). However, it is important to emphasize that these instances of cross-dressing are not indicative of queer subjects nor of a crisis of masculinity via the “feminization” of prisoners. The process of prisoners’ cross-dressing as female characters furthered a homosociality that reinforced hegemonic masculinity even as it created opportunities for a more expansive understanding of masculinity, and homosociality was central to both reaffirming and transgressing that understanding.

Reaffirmation of Hegemonic Masculinity

In many ways, the homosocial space of the theater, and the cross-dressing performances themselves, reinforced hegemonic masculinity. Some scholars, such as Natalie Zemon Davis, argue that cross-dressing operates as a “safety valve...without questioning the basic order of society itself” (131). Marjorie Garber agrees with the safety valve argument, contending that cross-dressing allows “pent-up anxieties to be released in a regulated and safe manner...[t]o cross-dress on stage in an all-male context like the army or the navy is a way of asserting the common privilege of maleness” (58). As previously discussed, Tosh argues, “manliness” is fundamentally “a set of values by which men judged other men” rather than being a set of values primarily to control or contrast to women (Tosh *Manliness* 5). The homosocial

setting of the POW camp meant that the only people the cross-dressing prisoners were being judged by were fellow male, primarily British, prisoners who shared understandings of the hegemonic masculine ideal of the stoic soldier hero and thus did not threaten this ideal.

Additionally, the “harem girls” and “beach girls” who danced and flirted with the men in the show, can be seen as an embodiment of Eve Sedgwick’s homosociality triangle. Sedgwick, engaging with Rene Girard, demonstrates how in “erotic triangles” the bonds between the male rivals are “equally powerful” as their bonds with the “beloved” (Sedgwick *Between Men* 21). In such situations, often the important emotional focus is between the two men and that “women serve as the conduits through which these bonds are expressed” (Sedgwick *Between Men* 22). Thus, following Sedgwick, the cross-dressing undertaken by POWs can be seen as creating a feminine conduit through which male prisoners, both on stage and in audience, could express their masculinity to one another. In fact, the ability for the male hero in the show, Jack Meadows in this instance, to flirt, dance, and be admired by an entourage of “foreign” women further entrenches the patriarchal power RFC officers believed themselves to hold over British women and the colonies in the Empire, as evidenced by the end of the first act of “The Girl from Oolong” in which “the harem girls are all auctioned off” to the British heroes (Emeljanow). As Rachamimov argues, the creation of POW theater spaces could mimic “a prewar sense of comfort, power, and self-worth” (364) as evidenced by the male hero receiving ample amounts of feminine admiration on stage in the form of the “harem girls” and “beach girls.” The particular homosocial space of the POW camp allowed for a communal understanding that prisoners could undertake cross-dressing as women, and even flirting and dancing with fellow prisoners, without risking the masculinity of the men involved and in fact evoking a social order in which the prisoners maintained sexual and military power.

While cross-dressing does not fit the mold of the Edwardian hegemonic masculinity that dictated British men must be “tough, realistic...and stoical,” the existence of a hegemonic masculinity does not mean it is the only form of masculinity, and in fact relies on other “subordinated” masculinities (Tosh 193-194; see also Connell and Messerschmidt). A hegemonic masculinity is supported, R.W. Connell argues, by “men who received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity” (Connell 832). In this context, the cross-gender acting and dress by prisoners in music hall shows can simultaneously feminize certain men who are dressing up while not challenging the underlying hegemonic masculinity or heteronormative male supremacy. In the segregated space of the POW camp, gender boundaries could be stretched past their traditional spheres without being fully transformed. In this way theatrical performances in POW camps perpetuated hegemonic British imperial masculinity in these homosocial spaces even when crossing gender boundaries.

Elasticity and Transgression

Power to construct gender, however, is “never total or consistent” and there is simultaneously potential in the homosocial space of theater performances and such cross-gender roles to assert the elasticity of masculinity (Halberstam 88). The female impersonators of the POW theaters could, Rachamimov insists, “support normalcy and order while at the same time calling it into question” (377). As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, while drag can have “misogynist overtones,” it also “displac[es] the entire enactment of gender signification from the discourse of truth or falsity” and “complicates the distinction between readable exteriors and stable identities,” resulting in a blurred understanding of the “essence” of any one body or gender (quoted in Rachamimov “Drag” 376). Thus, drag in POW camps signifies, as J. Halberstam argues, a breakdown in dominant gender performances and reveals that “alternatives are embedded already in the

dominant” (88). This is particularly notable of the POW camp, in contrast to the on-stage cross-dressing that occurred during training and active duty, as shows put on in POW camps were not sanctioned nor supervised by military authorities and thus were not monitored by regulatory institutions (Rachamimov “Drag” 372). Prisoners themselves, without sanction, were revealing the blurred distinction between gender, and reveling in it.

The homosocial nature of the performances was potentially transgressive. Even as prisoners on stage were performing dominance over the woman characters they flirted with, they were still in fact “dallying” with male performers in “close physical contact with other men (both in and out of drag),” suggesting that in this gender segregated space, masculinity could be experienced and expressed more freely, and gender boundaries might be encroached upon (Boxwell 5). The homosocial nature of the cross-dressing thus effectively allowed, as Rachamimov argues, a level of “homoerotic intimacy” between prisoners on the stage, disrupting the boundaries of acceptable British masculinity (“Drag” 381). “A spectator’s desiring and approving gaze on a soldier in drag” was not simply a “matter of pleasure in a “surrogate” woman,” argues David Boxwell, but “his gaze was directed at a fellow man in drag, a fellow soldier in his own military organization” (Boxwell 6). The flirtations and romantic couplings of prisoners on stage thus questioned, if not transformed, heteronormative regimes and “sanctioned forms of homoerotic relations” (Rachamimov “Drag” 364). The relationships being enacted on stage, then, are no longer merely a form of “male bonding” but serve to blur Sedgwick’s continuum between homosociality and homosexuality, revealing the potential for desire between prisoners (Sedgwick). Dallying with fellow prisoners on stage constitutes a “failure to acquiesce to dominant logics” of heteronormativity and hegemonic gender hierarchies, and thus extend normative understandings of martial masculinity (Halberstam). Thus, as Rachamimov and Boxwell argue, the performances on

stage had potential to extend masculinity even as they reinforced hegemonic British dominance.

After the weeks and months spent learning to fly, engaging in aerial warfare, and taking near-death risks, these airmen of the RFC suddenly became prisoners of war. Though capture essentially guaranteed that the officers would survive the war, the fact of imprisonment brought with it shame and threatened their understanding of their own masculinity (Feltman) and identity as the British soldier hero (Dawson; Tosh). The adjustment to POW camps was fraught, with prisoners balancing the need to find emotional comfort with the need to reassure themselves and others of their continued identity both as patriotic Britons and as the masculine soldier hero. I have demonstrated that the prisoners reacted to this emasculation in part by writing and performing spontaneous songs, organized concerts, and music hall shows which provided the prisoners with opportunities to bridge their identity in captivity with the pre-capture hegemonic martial masculinity, and expand that same masculinity.

I have discussed the ways in which the homosocial performance of music and theater, while providing diversion and bonding opportunities among prisoners, were also performances of gender. These entertainment methods were within the bounds of institutionally sanctioned male homosocial bonding, and served as mechanisms for reaffirming RFC airmen's identity as British soldiers and re-creating British life and culture, a culture in which these young, white, British men were seen as representative of virile, imperial masculinity. Even while such gender hierarchies were being reinscribed, the homosocial space of the POW camp allowed for alternative performances of gender, including repeated performances of desire for fellow male prisoners that configured captive bodies in ways that made hegemonic gender logics more elastic. The homosocial male bonding within POW camps demonstrates a continuum between homosociality and homoeroticism, and that the boundary between these structures was fragile and malleable in the physical

space of captivity (Hammarén and Johansson; Sedgwick *Between Men*). These performances reaffirmed hegemonic systems of gender hierarchy within imperial frameworks and made room for an elasticity of gender, with the homosociality of the entertainment practices being crucial to both outcomes.

Chapter 6

“Give Their Captors the Slip”: Escape and Hegemonic Masculinity in the POW Camp

In April 1916, Second Lieutenant Herbert Ward of the Royal Flying Corps and a fellow prisoner were being transferred from Vöhrenbach POW camp in southwest Germany to Heidelberg further north. The two prisoners saw their opportunity, leapt from their transport train, and walked across the Swiss Frontier to freedom. When their seemingly implausible story was questioned by allied authorities, “General Trnchard [sic]... came to the rescue” because, according to Ward, the general believed the airmen’s story. “[I]t was quite reasonable to expect a couple of his young flying-men to give their captors the slip,” Ward explains, “it was entirely in keeping with the spirit of the RFC” (1916/M).

While Ward’s story seemed unlikely and even impossible to many at the time, and indeed a successful escape was rare, the escape attempt itself was not unique: “[t]here were various Camp activities” available for imprisoned airmen, Lieutenant William “Hugh” Chance wrote, including “gambling, drinking, studying and escaping” (June 1917/D). Escape attempts, more often than not unsuccessful, appear regularly in letters home, daily diaries, and in post-war narratives and testimonies. In this chapter, I explore the relationship between hegemonic martial masculinity and escape attempts from POW camps in Germany. I examine how practices of planning, executing, and cheering on escapes offered opportunities for prisoners to perform gender in ways that reasserted the hegemonic martial masculinity of the “soldier hero” for those at home and their fellow prisoners. I further delve into the ways in which the gender performances of escape were facilitated by homosocial bonding, and the ways in which escape affirmed hegemonic masculinity even as prisoners effectively expanded what it meant to be a “soldier hero” in the context of a POW camp.

Imprisonment constituted a physical and emotional severing from the soldier hero identity¹⁸ that was idealized by the RFC. Small indignities experienced at the hands of German guards, such as having their “complaints as to sanitary conditions” ignored by a “real bully” of a Commandant who was “taking advantage of his position,” were often humiliating for airmen (Blain 7 August 1916/D). Captivity, Rachamimov adds, included the “physical separation of the ranks and the removal of insignia” which “heightened what was already a vulnerable situation for the POWs” (“Drag” 364). Additionally, the “period of enforced idleness,” as Wingfield’s father described imprisonment, was generally difficult for prisoners, as Grieg notes when he tells his parents that “the last two months have dragged considerably... there being so much more time indoors” (Wingfield 15 November 1916/L; Greig c. 1917/L). The “main regret,” though, according to prisoners’ own writing about captivity, was not boredom, or even necessarily humiliation at the hands of Germans, but that airmen had “missed the... best months of the War” (Ingram c. 1918/L). Capture, argues Brian Feltman, challenged men’s “status as brave soldiers and thus their merit as men at war,” a sentiment that led several prisoners to express, like Ingram did, that while “[l]ife [was] quite passable” in POW camps, it was “too peaceful for one’s liking during War” (10 October 1918/L; Feltman 73).

Given that imprisonment, at least for officers, practically guaranteed that they would survive the war, the desire to return to battle is particularly notable. Desire for escape was not universal and scholars have argued that military men found relief in capture (Panayi; Vischer). For instance, shortly after incarceration Chapman wrote: “I realized that I might get back to home again and being very tired felt glad that I was out of this horrible war and how luck[y] I had been” (27 July 1917/D). Similarly, when captured, Coles

¹⁸ As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, the soldier hero as a form of hegemonic masculinity in Britain took hold during the second half of the nineteenth century and remained central in the years leading up to the First World War (Dawson; Frantzen). The ideal interwove ideas of masculinity, racial superiority, and maintenance of empire, and emphasized notions of bravery, courage, and self-sacrifice (Dawson; Springhall; Midgley).

reassured his “dear girlie” that she should “be glad this had happened” as his capture and injury meant he was “now certain of coming through the War alive” (22 September 1917/L). Feltman, though, dismisses this, arguing that “many prisoners could not see beyond the shame of their situation” to enjoy their lifeline, and it is true that the writings of the majority of RFC officers in this study indicate the desire, or professed desire, to escape (Feltman 73).

Scholars point to several motivations for imprisoned officers in attempting escape. As discussed, even before the First World War began, the cultural discourse about a coming conflict centered around the “role it would play in ‘making men’” (Meyer 3). While actively serving in the war, Jessica Meyer asserts, British men took on, among others things, “a heroic image associated with their role as defenders” of Great Britain and the empire (Meyer 8; see also Crouthamel). Upon capture, Feltman contends, and Graham Dawson agrees, escape “was, quite simply, the manly thing for prisoners of war to do” (Feltman 90). Similarly, S. P. MacKenzie asserts that many prisoners “felt honour-bound to try to return to the fray” (MacKenzie 4) and Ian Isherwood suggests that “prisoner escapees could be read as military heroes” through their efforts (Isherwood 1). Feltman and MacKenzie both suggest that attempted escapes also served a military purpose in that they “forc[ed] the enemy to channel personnel and other resources to the security of POW camps,” and that escaping prisoners during the First World War used this as motivation (MacKenzie 4-5). Scholars also point to treatment by individual commandants as motivation for escape: a commandant who “made life worse than necessary” for prisoners could “serve to inspire men to get out as soon as possible” (MacKenzie 5). In this chapter, I engage with these motivations, while examining specifically the ways RFC prisoners seized opportunities to perform the idealized soldier hero masculinity by attempting escape.

To understand the ways in which RFC prisoners experienced escape attempts, this chapter closely analyzes the writings of Second Lieutenant

Charles Furlonger, Lieutenant Leslie Nixon, and Lieutenant William “Hugh” Chance. Captured May 1917, Furlonger was held at Ströhen through January 1918 when he was transferred to Colberg. During his time at Ströhen, Furlonger maintained a daily diary, recording sparse details about the notable goings on in the camp, including several attempted escapes. Through this diary Furlonger provides an insightful view of escape attempts that occurred at Ströhen as an observer, as he did not attempt to escape himself but instead narrated the frequency and results of other prisoner’s plots. Nixon was captured in December 1917 and held at Holzminden POW camp. He and his mess mate, RFC pilot Lieutenant Leonard Pearson, frequently attempted to escape camp and, as mentioned, were part of a notorious escape from Holzminden in July 1918.¹⁹ Nixon provided a firsthand account, via letters and diary entries, of how escapes were planned and executed. Chance, captured September 1916, was imprisoned at Osnabrück and Clausthal and kept a diary throughout his captivity. This chapter also draws from writings of two airmen, Lieutenant William Blain and Second Lieutenant Herbert Ward, recorded after their time in POW camps. Unlike daily POW life, plans for escape were risky to document due to constant searches: Armstrong notes that when “there were searches” one morning, his diary “was concealed in [his] boot” (Furlonger 25 July 1917/D; Armstrong 14 November 1917/D). Given this logistical barrier to written documentation, this chapter includes some supplemental narratives from Blain and Ward about their own personal attempted forays out of the camps, including both those that were foiled and punished, and those that were successful.

In this chapter, I first discuss what escapes tended to entail, outlining logistical details of the numerous approaches to escaping, the tools required, how common attempts were, and how they were dealt with by German captors. Once this has been established, I explore the ways in which escape attempts were a performance of the “soldier hero” version of masculinity and

¹⁹ The 1918 escape inspired the 1938 film “Who Goes Next?” directed by Maurice Elvey.

examine how prisoners used escape to reassert military masculinity and loyalty to nation while incarcerated. Finally, I probe how the homosocial environment of the POW camp created an environment in which prisoners performed masculinity in ways that both reaffirmed and nuanced the hegemonic masculinity.

Escape

In order to be returned to their own country and squadron, prisoners needed only to reach and cross the border into Holland or Switzerland, a distance that varied constantly as they were moved from camp to camp (Messimer). It was a distance that the men were keenly aware of, according to their diaries. For example, Ströhen “held the record for number of escapes” because “[i]t was fairly close to the frontier” and “people just disappeared!” (Blain 1917/M). One prisoner “had very bad luck” as he “got to within 2 Km. of the frontier” before being captured (Furlonger 13 November 1917/D). Blain noted that Clathsual might be a fine camp in terms of its sport facilities (“[w]e should get really fit here”), but ultimately declared it poor because “it was 200 miles to the frontier” (1917/M).

While “everyone spoke of escape” in some camps, it required forethought to successfully make the journey out of captivity and prisoners needed supplies to do so (Blain 1917/M). Blain, planning an (ultimately unsuccessful) escape from Osnabrück in 1917 with a group of fellow prisoners, “made haversacks” to hold necessities and “collected meat lozenges, chocolates, biscuits, and food in any concentrated form” (1917/M). Prisoners also sought to “collect compass, maps, and wire-cutters” and “German uniform or civilian” clothes (Blain 1917/M; Nixon archive/L). Armstrong compiled a list cryptically titled “Things required” which included “Civilian Coat, Trousers, boots, German Money, Get map and Compass” and “Food for 6 days” (22 November 1917/D). False paperwork was also coveted, and prisoners developed elaborate means of acquiring “forged identity and

travel documents” that could be used to more quickly navigate Germany (Chance 1918/D). Prisoners sometimes crafted homemade items, as two British Naval officers did when they “made themselves imitation German uniforms - dyed greatcoats, blackened flying boots to resemble German field boots, with spurs made of wire and silver paper, and wooden swords” (Chance June 1917/D). Other times necessary items were, surprisingly, readily available: Blain wrote of the luck he and his fellow prisoners had when a friend “saw for sale an enormous manicure set” in the camp canteen “in which was an enormous pair of nail-clippers” which, upon purchasing, were found to “cut [wire] like butter!” (Blain 1917/M). Other tools were more difficult to come by: Blain’s group had “a compass...given to [them] by a newly arrived officer who had managed to smuggle it through from the lines” (Blain 1917/M). For a price, German guards could also be sources of assistance. Blain “got hold of a Hun and learnt a lot of German, chiefly the ordinary conversation about traveling by train,” a useful skill if the prisoners planned to disguise themselves as Germans during their escape (1917/M). Not only did the guard give valuable language lessons, he also brought Blain “a civilian suit, electric torch, a railway map, and a time-table” for his next escape attempt (Blain 1917/M).

If a prisoner did not “wish... to risk bribery” other options were available, namely family and friends on the home front. Blain and his group “set to work to teach people at home a code” using “invisible writing with milk inside the envelopes” of their letters home (1917/M). The hidden instructions were successful (“How it passed [the censors] I do not know!”) and “[i]n due course a box of chocolates arrived in the bottom of which was a map” (Blain 1917/M). One way to avoid censors and more explicitly ask for assistance was to smuggle a letter via prisoners in Switzerland or the Netherlands (Feltman).²⁰ Lieutenant Leonard John Pearson, writing from

²⁰ The Geneva Convention of 1906 laid groundwork for the possibility that sick and wounded prisoners who were too healthy for complete repatriation might be interned in by neutral power (Ross). Indeed, in a 1916 agreement between Germany, Britain, and Switzerland, the powers allowed British and

Holland, asked a friend's mother to do her "utmost to help" prisoners remaining in Germany "in every way within your power" (14 October 1918/L; Nixon archive). Given this relative freedom from censorship, the instructions could be more explicit: Pearson directs Mrs. Nixon to send "civilian clothes or German uniform" to Nixon "between the outside cloth and lining" of British khaki uniforms and "German money, very well concealed by an effect, in 20, 50, and 100 mark notes" (14 October 1918/L; Nixon archive).

Once the materials needed for escape were collected and prisoners were "fixed up for the trip" there still remained the problem of escape itself (Blain 1917/M). Furlonger describes two prisoners who "got out [disguised] as Orderlies" and another pair who "escaped from the third story of the Jug [solitary confinement] by sliding down a rope of blankets and sheets" (30 September 1917/D; 19 May 1918/D). Blain's plan to escape Osnabrück involved "[j]umping out of a window cutting through a fence and over a 12 ft wall" (1917/M). At Ströhen, "[s]ix fellows tried to get out by forcing the gate" and another "[f]ive fellows pushed out by the ditch opposite the cookhouse" (Furlonger August 26 1917/D; October 4 1917/D). On one occasion two prisoners wearing homemade German uniforms simply "walked...up to the gate, where the sentry on duty saluted and let them out!" (Chance June 1917/D). When Ward and a fellow prisoner were being transferred, they "realised that the journey offered us a ready-made solution" for escape (Ward 1916/M). All they had to do, Ward writes "was to get out of that train before it started travelling north" which they did by jumping out a train window when it was "stopped at a small station" (1916/M).

In one instance, an escape attempt from Festung Lazarette was made easier by the fact that it was Christmas day and "the sentries were drunk" allowing "an English Intelligence officer, called Breen, and a French Flying

German wounded and sick prisoners of war to be interned in Switzerland (Feltman). As early as February 1915, the Netherlands made a similar agreement and held 6,000 British and 4,500 Germans POWs over the course of the war (Ross). By 1918 this had expanded to non-injured prisoners and allowed "the longest serving prisoners" to be "shipped off to Holland" and Switzerland (Chance June 1917/D).

Corps officer named Captain Dubaudier” to temporarily escape (they were caught later the same day) (Ward December 1915/M). Other escape attempts were much more organized and involved dozens of men, particularly escapes involving tunneling out of camp. On July 23 1918, 80 British prisoners planned to escape Holzminden using the tunnel they had been collectively digging for nine months (Bascomb; Durnford; Winchester). The operation, led by 11 RFC officers and 2 RNAS officers, resulted in “29 officers escap[ing] from Holzminden... 10 of which got to Holland” in the end (Armstrong 11 September 1918; see also Winchester). Pearson and Nixon, who had the “great ambition to escape together” were a part of this communal attempt, and, as Pearson insisted, “had not a certain tunnel fallen in before our turn came, we should have succeeded almost for certain” (14 October 1918/L; Nixon archive).

While escape attempts could be frequent, they did not go unpunished. The 1907 Hague convention on wartime practices held that “escaped prisoners who are retaken...[were] liable to disciplinary punishment” (Speed 38). Britain and Germany agreed between themselves to limit the penalty for a “simple escape attempt” or a first attempted escape to 14 days of “military confinement” though in reality sentences were often much shorter (Speed 38). For officers, punishments for escape could involve a fine or time in solitary confinement, which Chance described as “[l]ights and fires and a room to oneself, however small - who can want more?” (Chance c.1917/M). These were relatively mild punishments when compared to enlisted men who, if caught, could be sent to coal or salt mines (Winchester 146). As a result of these relatively lenient punishments, when Blain and several fellow prisoners were court martialed for an attempted escape from Osnabrück, they “returned home still feeling very satisfied with [their] nights work. It was well worth it” (1917/M). Still, officers did risk their lives in attempting escape. Two days after two British prisoners, Medlicott and Walter, escaped from Holzminden, they were brought back “into the camp...at 5:15. Both [were] dead” (Furlonger

21 May 1918/D). Medlicott and Walter's deaths, while not illegal according to codified prisoner treatment regulations, were indeed seen by the British prisoners as dishonorable murders on the part of German captors.²¹

Furlonger's diary entry serves as a reminder of the deadly serious stakes of escape attempts from a POW camp during wartime, and the very real tensions that existed between prisoners and their German captors.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Escape

In this section I explore how escape attempts, and the planning that went into them, were performances of gender that worked to reaffirm hegemonic masculinity and imperial hierarchies. A key aspect of this analysis is looking at the *attempts* to escape rather than the ultimate conclusion, as the result of an escape attempt might not have mattered as much as the performance of 'manly' traits during the planning and execution of the escape. I first discuss repeated escape attempts recorded by prisoners and the ways in which rhetoric of masculinity from pre-capture affected these attempts.

The vast majority of attempted escapes resulted in recapture but prisoners were rarely deterred for long (1917/M). For example, in a five month period at Ströhen (June 1917-November 1917), Furlonger records 17 separate escape attempts by his fellow British prisoners, almost none of which resulted in return to England. When "[s]ix more fellows tried to push off via the bathroom" the result was typical: they were "caught before they could get away" (Furlonger 23 August 1917/D). Even if prisoners made it out of camp, they were usually "caught and brought back the same afternoon," and often attempted escape again (Furlonger 1 August 1917/D). As soon as Blain arrived at Clausthal, after a failed, and punished, escape attempt at Osnabrück, he and his compatriots "settled down to make fresh plans for escape"

²¹ In both Great Britain and Germany, escaping prisoners were sometimes killed while being recaptured, but honor codes dictated that prisoners should be subdued without fatalities (Feltman). As Rachamimov argues, the "realization that the knightly code of honor—perhaps the quintessential emblem of middle- and upper-class masculinity in *fin-de-siècle* Europe—was not respected and could not be defended was a nasty shock for POW officers" ("Drag" 368).

(1917/M). These “fresh plans” involved numerous attempted escapes in quick succession: they “worked...for some time” digging tunnels at the camp “but eventually got tired of them and decided to make [their] exit by another route” (1917/M). The group then made “numerous attempts” at “cutting the wire” and also used “a homemade key” to open the “gates leading out of camp” (Blain 1917/M). After those attempts failed, the party “dressed up as orderlies” but had “no luck” (Blain 1917/M). Blain does not express despair, however, instead insisting that “during all the attempts [the prisoners] were gaining experience” (1917/M).

Blain’s acknowledgement that the numerous failed flights were not in vain could indeed be attributed to “gaining experience,” but it also suggests that Blain and his fellow airmen were doing more than trying to cross the German border: these repeated escape attempts were also performances of hegemonic soldier hero masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, as described by Connell and Messerschmidt, is a “pattern of practice” and “things done” that is, as Judith Butler argues, constantly produced and reproduced (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). As discussed, the First World War was meant to be a “sphere of masculine maturation” in which men could nurture their “ability to endure” and gain “praiseworthy stoicism” (Meyer 26). In the context of the RFC, these “patterns of practice” included officers using their bravery, intelligence, and “innate ability to always know what must be done” regardless of the situation (Meyer 26; see also Tosh *Manliness*; Boyd). Michael Collins argues that “[r]ecruitment patterns, training guidelines and media coverage” of RFC airmen “idealized a normative model of aviators” as inherently “courageous and physically strong” (Collins 1). It was “entirely in keeping with the spirit of the RFC” to be enduring, stoic, and determined (Pearson 14 October 1918/L; Ward 1916/M).

However, as Butler argues, masculinities are not internal fixed realities gained by an intrinsic connection to the RFC, but are rather phenomena constantly produced and reproduced by institutional and discursive practices.

Trenchard's approval of escapees demonstrates Butler's argument that individuals are rewarded within social, or in this case military, hierarchies based on how well this type of "manliness" can be read, or "inscribed" on their bodies (Butler). "One was not manly by virtue of being gendered male," argues Boyd, but rather, during this period, one "became manly by learning to perform that role" (Boyd 45). Thus, a prisoner needed to perform RFC soldier hero "manliness" through "patterns of practice" within POW camps, including taking control over his situation and doing "his duty" by repeatedly, doggedly, trying to escape regardless of the result (Wingfield archive, 30 September 1916/L). Prisoners might be, like Blain, "[f]urious at [their] ill luck" but were expressing, through action, a "pattern of practice," that they were "determined to try again" and thus still fit the mold of the soldier hero (1917/M; Connell and Messerschmidt 832). Expressing, and performing, determination to escape served the purpose of banishing any questions about the prisoner's masculine identity as RFC, that might be indicated by "a failure of physical and moral character" or worries about an officers' "identity as an honorable combatant" upon capture (Feltman 73; see also Collins).

Performing for the Home Front

These masculine performances were often done for the benefit of those who remained on the home front. As noted in previous chapters, Wingfield received a letter from his father while imprisoned in which his father insisted that "[a] man must always have sufficient control over himself" and the ability to compel himself through "training both physical and mental" (Wingfield archive, 30 September 1916/L). With such sentiments being expressed by families, Meyer suggests that it became vital for soldiers to describe and demonstrate their "process of moral and psychological maturation" (Meyer 24). One way to do so was to demonstrate determination to escape imprisonment, as Ingram did in his first letter to his parents after being captured. Ingram insisted he "did all it was humanly possible to do to get back" across the border even though he ultimately "failed" (24 August

1918/L). Similarly, when writing home about a friend, Pearson claimed his fellow prisoners was “full of determination to escape” and thus was “as likely to win through as anybody,” explicitly connecting determination to escape as evidence of being up to the task (14 October 1918/L). Pearson expressed his own regret at not escaping, too. Two months after Pearson took part in the July 1918 Holzminden tunnel (and failed to escape), he became part of the “prisoner transfer program” to Holland. In a letter home, Pearson wrote about his earlier dashed hopes of escaping Holzminden, and his regret at not succeeding:

It is a great blow to me to be interred (Ugh!) in Holland like this, after having struggled for liberty for nearly three years...Already I have regretted not sticking it out to the last, on the chance of escaping eventually (14 October 1918/L).

Pearson’s regret does not seem to stem from a feeling of frustration that he “must just look on as a spectator” as many prisoners felt while in Germany (Ingram 24 August 1918/L). As discussed, while in Holland Pearson was able to avoid German censors, and indeed instructed his friend’s mother to send concealed items to those who remained in Germany (Pearson 14 October 1918/L). From Holland, Pearson is more able to facilitate escape, and thus further the cause of Great Britain, but he is less able to perform ‘manliness’ by attempting to escape himself. This, to him, is a “great blow” (Pearson 14 October 1918/L).

Jessica Meyer argues that during this period, “many men constructed their ability to endure discomfort as praiseworthy stoicism” that was central to their “masculine identity as soldiers” (Meyer 25). Pearson, writing to those on the home front, likely worries that expressing relief at his new, more comfortable, circumstances in Holland would undermine his masculinity as a stoic military officer. In Holland, where British prisoners stayed in “private lodgings, hotels, or special barracks,” Pearson was living in greater comfort and freedom relative to German POW camps (Ross 98). For example, Wingfield, who was sent to Holland in just such a transfer in October 1918, wrote that the “first night in a big soft bed was absolutely heavenly” and

Sanford was “hoping to go to Holland” soon (Wingfield 14 October 1918/L; Sanford c. 1918/L). Pearson’s feelings are particularly interesting because, by his own admission, “of the six camps I have been to in Germany, Holzminden is the worst, with the very very worst commandant” (14 October 1918/L). Feltman suggests that prisoners worried about how friends, family, and acquaintances would react to their capture, and that they might be perceived as deserters, traitors, and cowards (Feltman). Letters home defending one’s character and determination stemmed from prisoners’ hopes of “receiving confirmation that they remained loved or respected outside of the confines of the camp” and that there remained a chance to “redeem themselves” from the shame of capture (Feltman 74;76). As Boyd reminds us, “manliness” in the context of late-nineteenth century Britain was a Victorian word suggesting the “strength of characters in the face of adversity... and sometimes, just not succumbing to the pressures of life” (Boyd 45-46). By suggesting, even obliquely, that he was not up to the task of living in a POW camp, Pearson might call his masculinity into questions. “[T]he inability to endure could be a source of shame,” Meyer argues, and Pearson does indeed go out of his way to ensure that Nixon’s mother does not see his life in Holland as reflecting on his masculine character (Meyer 26).

When Nixon, Blain, Pearson, and others wrote to their mothers seeking assistance for their planned escapes, they were doing more than hoping for supplies; they were demonstrating their desire to continue contributing to the war effort and, by extension, demonstrating their manliness (Boyd). Letters written to mothers were not only seen by mothers’ eyes; letters were commonly circulated among family, friends, and even distant acquaintances, allowing imprisoned airmen to “perform [the] role” of “manliness” for anyone in their social circles (Boyd 45; see also Bourke). As Crouthamel argues, letters home from prisoners of war were often indicative of “fluctuating, complex” emotions as prisoners struggled to present what they thought of as acceptable, and ideal, masculine reactions rather than “‘true’

emotional expression” (10). Meyer similarly suggests that letters home were spaces in which soldiers “both presented and interrogated their claims to heroic masculinity” (26). As discussed, there was a need among RFC airmen turned POWs to actively demonstrate the strength of their own physical and moral character, and to “achieve one’s goal in the face of opposition,” whatever that opposition, in order to fit normative view of masculinity and perform the “virtues of manliness” that were tied to “patriotic love of country” (Boyd 46). When Pearson emphasizes his regret at missing the “chance of escaping,” a chance worth the emotional and physical discomfort of enduring life in Holzminden, he reveals how RFC officers were presenting their masculinity in the letters they sent home (14 October 1918/L).

Performing for the POW

While some letters home described attempted escapes, the majority of recorded attempts were in personal diaries that did not reach the home front. Who, then, were these performances for besides those people at home in England? Hegemonic masculinity, Graham Dawson argues, “enable[s] a sense of one’s self as a ‘man’ to be imagined and recognized by others” and, in particular, other men (23). Homosociality within POW camps was the crucial mechanism by which these manly performances could be undertaken.

Private recognition, or the interior recognition by one prisoner of another’s masculinity, can be seen in diary entries. In his diary, Furlonger describes how “Fitzgerald and Harding got out last night [disguised] as Orderlies” (30 September 1917/D). He goes on to judge the attempt “a very stout effort” due to the fact that “both were new prisoners” (30 September 1917/D). Furlonger describes Medlicott and Walters’ escape attempt with much the same tone: “[they] escaped from the third story of [solitary confinement] by sliding down a rope of blankets and sheets” and describes this effort with the exclamation “extraordinarily good show” (19 May 1918/D). Furlonger also received news that “Capt Grimwood and Robinson jumped the train together... and are now in Holland,” determining the escape

attempt was “exceptionally stout work,” particular for Captain Grimwood, “seeing as how old he is” (October 4th 1917/D). In each instance, the escapees are being “imagined and recognized” (Dawson 23) by Furlonger as meeting a set of values that, in the British cultural context of the period, embody manliness: “courage, endurance, assertion, control and self-control” (Mangan 11). “Manliness” itself, Tosh suggests, is “a set of values by which men judged other men,” demonstrating the importance of homosocial recognition such as that which Furlonger expresses in his diary (Tosh *Manliness* 5). Simultaneously, homosocial desire, defined by Hammerarén and Johansson as “men turning their attention to other men,” is drawing prisoners like Furlonger to particular performances of masculinity by others, thus further coalescing escape as idealized in this circumstance (Hammerarén and Johansson 3). The performance of gender, in this case the soldier hero identity, is being confirmed by the recognition of manliness and “stout work” by fellow British prisoners (Furlonger October 4th 1917/D).

Foiled escapees were also, and perhaps more crucially, rewarded publicly within POW. When Breen and Dubauduier were recaptured after their escape from Festung Lazarette on Christmas Day, “there was terrific cheering from every room” in camp (Ward 1915/M). Similarly, after a foiled escape attempt, Blain and several co-conspirators were rewarded with “terrific cheers” from the rest of the prisoners, who “booed and jeered and cheered for joy” (Blain 1917/M). Walters and Medlicott, two British prisoners mentioned by Furlonger, gained relative fame and were “remembered by all ex-prisoners” they came in contact with because “there were few camps from which they did not escape, if only for brief periods” (Winchester 122). The fact that they died in the process most likely facilitated this reputation of persistent bravery. Alongside cheering the escape attempts, prisoners were cheering the reaction escapes elicited from their German captors. While Breen and Dubauduier were caught, Ward records that “[t]he Colonel came stamping round, banging his sword on the ground, black in the face, shouting ‘We are

the masters here’,” a scene which cause “everybody” in the camp to “roar...with laughter in [the Colonel’s] face” (1915/M). Similarly, it was when Blain and others “filed out of the camp” after their failed escape that the “German Commandant shrieked at everyone-- to the terrific cheers from all his enemies” (Blain 1917/M). It was not only British prisoners cheering, but the Russians and French officers were making such a commotion that they were “hustled to their rooms by the point of a threatening bayonet” (Blain 1917/M).

The collective cheering coming from, in some instances, multiple nationalities of prisoners unified in their resentment of their German captors was a form of homosocial bonding which Sedgwick contends is “definitive” of masculinity (*Between Men* 50). Indeed, as Hammarén and Johansson argue, “homosociality is often seen as being based on and formed through... exclusion,” in this case the exclusion of German guards and officers (3). The mechanism by which the “soldier hero” was being performed and reified as hegemonic was this homosocial setting and the “relationships and social bonds” among prisoners that affirmed such gender performance as idealized (Hammarén and Johansson 3). Not only did the escape attempts themselves allow an outlet for RFC prisoners to perform martial masculinity, but the collective reaction from fellow prisoners was crucial to confirmation of such behavior and dominance (Hammarén and Johansson; Tosh *Manliness*). Masculinity, Tosh reminds us, relies on homosociality, and performing daring escapes for fellow prisoners in the face of German displeasure was part of the reaffirmation of masculinity in the face of vulnerability (Tosh *Manliness*). These public performances of dramatic escapes and blustering Germans were instances in which the prisoners were, among themselves, reconstructing the hegemonic masculinity of the soldier hero as it could be performed in a POW camp though outward social encouragement, regardless of whether they succeeded in escaping or not.

Crucially, Connell and Messerschmidt contend that hegemonic masculinity is not “normal in the statistical sense” and that only a “minority of men might enact it” (832). Indeed, even given the large number of escape attempts recorded in this study and elsewhere, it is not clear that the majority of prisoners attempted escape. However, hegemonic masculinity, and escape attempts, was normative and “required all other men to position themselves in relation to it” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). Both Furlonger’s diary entries and the public displays of cheering were prisoners’ means by which they could position themselves in relation to, and in full support of, these performances of hegemonic masculinity in the form of attempted escapes. All prisoners, in these public performances of masculinity, “received the benefits” of the hegemonic soldier hero “without enacting” it as such (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). This “complicit masculinity,” as Connell and Messerschmidt call it, was a vital part in maintaining the soldier hero as hegemonic in POW camps and can be seen in Furlonger’s private approval of the “stout work” of escapes and the public “roar[s] of laughter” after a particularly brazen attempt (Furlonger October 4th 1917/D; Ward 1915/M). Performing hegemonic masculinity by some allowed all prisoners to partake in that reaffirmation (Tosh; Connell and Messerschmidt).

Expansion of Masculine Performance

While the homosocial nature of these camps was not unique in terms of the RFC, in which hundreds of men lived, worked, and fought together for years at a time, POW camps were, nonetheless, distinct social settings formed away from the leadership of the RFC and the larger military complex. Crucially, in this instance, the officers imprisoned at Clausthal, Osnabrück, Holzminden, or any number of *offizierslager* across Germany, were without military guidance: in the First World War there was “no official direction from the BEF nor RFC on what to do if captured” (MacKenzie 3). As a result, those who chose to escape and those who did not were “operating in a de facto informational vacuum” as far as official instruction was concerned and it was

not yet common understanding, MacKenzie argues, that it was “an officer’s duty to escape” (3). Subsequently, it was left to the imprisoned RFC airmen among themselves to formulate the pattern of acceptable, masculine behavior within POW camps. The homosocial setting of the POW camp became places where officers could expand what the soldier hero gender performance looked like and collectively create a more elastic definition of “manliness” that fit their setting.

The hegemonic masculinity of the soldier hero, discussed at length in previous chapters, was constructed more by military leaders, “journalists and novels as much as by soldiers themselves” and such stories “provided the public with an image of what a soldier hero should be” (Meyer 9; see also Lee “Knights”). In this institutional conception of the soldier hero, courageous traits were not performed in isolation, but specifically as “tools of imperial command” and military success (Mangan 11). However, in the relatively isolated homosocial communities of POW camps, prisoners could no longer be in “imperial command” nor any kind of military command. Among themselves, prisoners were able to determine that the “soldier hero” masculinity did not have to be solely about successfully defending the empire, but about *the attempt* to do so. Identification as a “manly soldier hero” was no longer reserved only for the airmen who were able to successfully “give their captors the slip,” as Trenchard apparently stated, and RFC leadership undoubtedly would have preferred (Ward 1916/M). Rather, “concepts of courage, chivalry, honour” were reconfigured not as traits that needed to be proven through conquest, but as performances of attempted action in the face of repeated failure (Meyer 10; see also Mangan). Such a notion, then, *expands* the idealized masculinity to focus more on the emotions, intentions, and traits that drive men to *try* to escape even when they fail.

To be clear, this is not a contradiction of the soldier hero masculinity taught and encouraged by public schools, boys organizations, and the military. Late-nineteenth century notions of imperial manliness emphasized “qualities

of heroic masculinity” such as “endurance and adaptability,” traits that attempted escape evoked (Mangan 84; see also Meyer). Rather than contradicting this hegemonic formation, these gender performances refocus what the central components of that masculinity should be. For example, Meyer argues that First World War soldiers, within their own diaries, emphasized the “heroism of endurance” above other ‘masculine’ traits, as it most fit their experiences in war (Meyer 62). Similarly, in the German POW camp, particular traits of the soldier hero, primarily *attempted* success, were also emphasized above others by prisoners themselves. As Connell and Messerschmidt argue, gender and gender relations are “always arenas of tension” and it is patterns of “hegemonic masculinity” that “provide solutions to these tensions” by sometimes “reconstituting [hegemony] in new conditions (853). Capture itself was a moment of tension in gender relations, and the version of soldier hero masculinity performed in escape attempts provided a “solution to these tensions” that both “stabilized patriarchal power” and “reconstitute[d] it in slightly new conditions” (Connell and Messerschmidt 853). The homosocial environment of the POW camp allowed prisoners the power to assert their own contextual version of manliness, expanding the notion of masculinity even as they reinscribed hegemonic understandings of gender.

In this chapter, I have explored various ways in which the physical and emotional space of the POW camp affected the expressions and performances of masculinity on the part of the British RFC prisoners. The practice of planning and executing escape, and the act of cheering escapes on, were performances of the masculine soldier hero identity that reaffirmed hegemonic manliness sanctioned by the RFC and British culture in general. However, even as the escapes reaffirmed this version of masculinity, the homosocial space of the POW camp, separated from the leadership of the RFC, allowed captive airmen control over their own version of that same masculinity. ‘Manliness,’ sustained by the judgement of other men, is not stagnant but

rather can be “reconstitute[d]... in slightly new conditions” (Connell and Messerschmidt 853). The manliness of the soldier hero was performed by prisoners for family members at home and, more crucially, for other prisoners, who subsequently, both privately and publicly, reaffirmed their own version of the soldier hero that operated within the POW space.

Conclusion

My focus here has centered on the performances of masculinity of RFC prisoners of war. Established in 1912, the flying corps drew primarily from young men raised in the elite class of Edwardian Britain to fill its ranks of pilots, observers, and bombers. These airmen were raised within the cultural conceptions of early-twentieth century Britain, particularly the ideals of muscular Christian manliness which “rationalized imperial rule” by equating an “aggressive, muscular, chivalric model of manliness” with “racial, national, cultural, and moral superiority” (Krishnaswamy 292). Given this context, the transition from an officer of the glamorized RFC, a “knight of the air,” to a prisoner of war was dramatic for most airmen in that it questioned their identification with the “soldier hero” version of masculinity. I have examined three common instances of gender performances within POW camps: domesticity, entertainment, and escape. This work has demonstrated that through these practices, imprisoned airmen both nurtured alternative gender performances and reaffirmed hegemonic masculinity.

In each chapter I emphasized the vital role the homosocial space of the POW camp plays in creating an environment in which gender boundaries might be encroached upon and, simultaneously, reiterated. The study of these homosocial environments is vital because of the importance of the homosocial group to the formation of masculinities. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues, men’s relationships imply “an ultimate bonding between men” that, “if successfully achieved, [are] not detrimental to ‘masculinity’ but definitive of it” (Sedgwick *Between Men* 50). Similarly, Graham Dawson’s argument that hegemonic masculinity “enable[s] a sense of one’s self as a ‘man’ to be imagined and recognized by others,” particularly other men, demonstrates how homosocial communities with POW camps serve as a crucial mechanism by which manly performances might be undertaken (23).

Throughout this work, I approached instances of gender performance as practices which both maintained and resisted ideologies of gender and empire. In these POW camps, hegemonic gender boundaries are troubled and questioned, if not transformed. Domesticity, entertainment, and escape represent instances of prisoners' actions creating opportunities to transgress and call into question norms of gender and sexual relationships. Crucially, however, these three practices also highlight hegemonic masculinity's ability to adapt to circumstance and "provide solutions" to tensions in gender formations by "reconstituting [hegemony] in new conditions," representing hegemonic masculinity's elasticity and ability to support "normalcy" in varied circumstances (Connell and Messerschmidt 853). Even in the isolated social and physical location of the POW camp, the elasticity of hegemonic gender is not complete, and prisoners, faced with feelings of emasculation when captured, performed the soldier hero identity in ways that reaffirmed its power and hegemonic status.

Chapter four explores prisoners' collective desires to develop and maintain "homes" and nuclear families through home-making, dining, and hosting. The chapter examines how these domestic practices, meaning both actions and interpersonal relationships related to the running of a home and maintenance of nuclear family life, offered opportunities for prisoners to perform various, and sometimes seemingly contradictory, versions of masculinity. Domestic practices, and the homosocial group intimacies they encouraged, were systematically sanctioned by the British military and thus were a means by which prisoners could comfort one another by institutionally recognized means (Frantzen; Kühne; Meyer). Simultaneously, though, the vulnerability inherent in imprisonment, particularly the loss of masculine agency, gives more nuanced meaning to the domestic "soft havens" prisoners created, havens compounded by the affective significance traditionally associated with them, and re-works the way in which masculinity was performed (Rachamimov "Camp" 299).

Chapter five examines the ways in which POWs responded to capture and imprisonment by reasserting the familiar homosocial entertainment practices of RFC squadron life, in particular music and theater. The practices of making music and producing theatrical shows together offered opportunities for prisoners to take advantage of their homosocial communities to reassure themselves about their identity as members of the RFC, their elite place within British life, and subsequent assumptions of the “righteousness of British predominance” that came with this status (Summerfield 26). However, though an analysis of group desire and dependency, crossdressing, and romantic stage pairings, the chapter demonstrates the way in which these entertainment practices signify a breakdown in dominant gender performances and reveal that “alternatives are embedded already in the dominant” (Halberstam 88).

Chapter six delves into how practices of planning, executing, and cheering on escapes from POW camps offered opportunities for prisoners to perform gender. These practices allowed prisoners to reassert the hegemonic martial masculinity of the “soldier hero” both for those on the home front and for their fellow prisoners by demonstrating their ability to persevere “in the face of opposition” and perform the “virtues of manliness” that were tied to “patriotic love of country” (Boyd 46). The analysis also examines the ways in which the gender performances of escape were facilitated by homosocial bonding, and how the homosocial environment of the POW camp allowed prisoners the power to assert their own contextual version of ‘manliness.’ Ultimately, the chapter reveals the ways in which ‘manliness,’ a concept and identity sustained by the judgement of other men, is not stagnant but rather can be “reconstitute[d]... in slightly new conditions” based on circumstance (Connell and Messerschmidt 853; see also Tosh *Manliness*). Throughout these chapters, I highlight the ways in which prisoners expanded the hegemonic notion of “soldier hero” masculinity even as their performances reinscribed and adhered to normative understandings of gender.

As discussed in chapter three of this thesis, there are three broad limitations of this project. First, there are limitations stemming from both the sources I have and those I do not have. A collection of sixteen individuals' writings is not fully representative of the wider population of RFC airmen in POW camps during the First World War. Further, not only am I studying a limited number of airmen's writings, but due to the nature of archival work I cannot know if some of these sixteen prisoners' letters or additional diaries have been lost or destroyed in the 100 years since they were written. In addition to these limitations, I do not study the writings of people who experienced the RFC from outside its ranks, such as family members, mechanics, and orderlies, who could provide alternative perspectives or insight into how the airmen of the RFC affected and were interpreted by a larger population.

Second, I study the lives of privileged, white men, who gained their status and power from British imperialism and colonial atrocities. By focusing my time and energy on the writings of these men, I offer yet another study that does not examine emotional realities of systematically oppressed groups throughout history of whom the larger academic world knows less. The writings of white women, people of color, and the working classes who experienced and were affected by these hegemonic forms of masculinity and gender performances would expand the depth of knowledge on this topic. However, I maintain that studying the structures and maintenance of power is vitally important to doing social justice feminist work and intend this project to be a part of a larger examination of the workings of hegemonic power from the top down.

Lastly, this project is limited by an ethical question inherent in the work. The subjects of this study, as with all historical research, are not granted the opportunity to correct my analysis. Additionally, I read letters meant for familiar, intimate eyes, and diaries that were potentially meant for no one's eyes at all. As a historian I am reading these men's deepest thoughts and fears

at a trying time in their lives and necessarily am interpreting their lives through my own assumptions. While I do not have satisfactory answers to this situation, I seek to continually acknowledge the humanity of the subjects of this study as I analyze their written words.

While this project has limitations, they point to areas for further study into the ways in which gender was performed and understood by individuals in the early-twentieth century. One such area is an examination of the writings of POWs from other belligerent countries in order to understand how they conceptualize and perform masculinity. This would illuminate the effect a particular national culture has on the performance of cultural masculinity. Some such work has already been done; for example, Iris Rachamimov explores gender performance among German soldiers held in Russian POW camps and Jason Crouthamel centers the masculinity of German soldiers generally. A study that compares masculine performances across multiple nations, particularly between Imperial nations to those without colonies, would give great insight into the effect of Imperial masculinity on soldiers and prisoners.

Finally, this thesis points to further scholarship on the performance of masculinity by men of color, both from various British colonies and independent nations. Such a study could explore the ways in which the Imperial masculinity of Britain did or did not affect these men's performances of masculinity and ask questions about their own conceptions of masculinity. I recognize that the racism and patriarchy of the Victorian and Edwardian era, both domestically and outside of Britain, is not separated from contemporary systemic racism, sexism, and homophobia. The people of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, both the colonizers and the colonized, were witnesses to (and in some instances the very people who created) systems of oppression that are still in place. A critical analysis of the ways in which these systems were produced and maintained in the early-twentieth century remains vital to dismantling these systems today.

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