At 5 a.m. (French time) on the morning of 11 November 1918 the Germans signed the Armistice which ended the First World War. The tenth clause, which came into effect at 11 a.m., demanded the immediate repatriation without reciprocity of all allied POWs. German prisoners, meanwhile, would be retained by the allies, the terms stipulating that their fate would be part of the agreed peace treaty. It would therefore seem that while the conflict had changed much in terms of POW experiences and policy, POWs were still conceived of, and being used as, pawns of war in diplomatic negotiations. Moreover, as will be considered below, allied POWs would similarly be mobilised by the victors in the immediate post-war period in the battles to apportion blame and seek recriminations. Initially, however, attention focused on the ‘detailed conditions’ that were necessary to repatriate over 2.5 million allied POWs held in Germany, the process gearing up with reasonable speed and efficiency. Within four days the first train loads of British

2 On the post-Armistice and post-Peace Treaty retention of German POWs by the British see Feltman, The Stigma of Surrender, pp. 138–64.
3 Doegen, Kriegsgefangene Völker, Table G, pp. 28–9; Speed III, Prisoners, pp. 1–2. Repatriation was not so quick in the case of other belligerents due to impacting political and military factors. See Nachtigal, ‘The Repatriation and Reception of Returning Prisoners of War’, pp. 157–84.
prisoners had reached Calais on their way home.\textsuperscript{4} A week later, almost 6,000 British POWs had been repatriated,\textsuperscript{5} and by the end of the year only 14,000 British POWs still remained in Germany.\textsuperscript{6}

The situation in the occupied war zones, where at least 56,000 British OR POW workers were still being held in November 1918,\textsuperscript{7} muddied the repatriation process. Here many prisoners were liberated by the advancing allies. In other cases, especially for those men held in France, Belgium or the Rhineland, captives were simply turned loose and left to walk towards the allied lines.\textsuperscript{8} The British press seized upon such instances as final acts of German cruelty.\textsuperscript{9} The Times ran an article reporting how ill and desperately hungry prisoners had been forced to suffer the final ordeal of an exhausting ‘death march’ to reach the salvation of allied custody.\textsuperscript{10} Such accounts capped the atrocity discourse in which the POWs had been located since the earliest months of the war and set the tone for post-war calls for recriminations. Indeed, the poor physical condition in which men arrived undoubtedly had credence, reflecting the harsh physical challenges these men had faced. However, despite press spin, it should not be thought that there was any systematic cruelty or malice in the German actions. ‘Opening the gates’, as it might be termed, was driven by practical conditions. The war was over, the Germans were retreating and, crucially, they lacked essential supplies. In fact it was clear by October 1918 that the Germans could not feed the prisoners attached to their armies in these occupied zones.\textsuperscript{11} It is therefore unsurprising that German guards, such as the ones holding British POWs at Namur, Belgium, should tell their charges that: ‘As the Armistice has been signed, you can do as you like as we have no food for you. You are free. We are going back to Germany.’\textsuperscript{12} It made no sense to take POWs back to Germany with them and, moreover, Germany itself was in no better state to provide for any additional mouths.\textsuperscript{13}

The majority of those POWs already in Germany, however, could not make their own way home. Instead, men from the Arbeitslager and Arbeitskommandos were concentrated in the Stammlager, bringing acute pressure on the resources therein. Once there, although the camp regulations, routines and controls were relaxed, men had to be contented to

\textsuperscript{4} Van Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 151. \textsuperscript{5} The Times, 21/11/18, p. 8, col. B.
\textsuperscript{6} Van Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{7} Jones, *Violence*, p. 219.
\textsuperscript{8} Van Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, pp. 150 and 166.
\textsuperscript{9} See for example The Times, 14/11/18, p. 6, col. F; The Times, 28/11/18, p. 7, col. E; The Times, 27/12/18, p. 7, col. C.
\textsuperscript{10} The Times, 19/11/18, p. 6, col. B; Yarnall, *Barbed Wire Disease*, pp. 175–6.
\textsuperscript{11} Jones, *Violence*, pp. 208–9.
\textsuperscript{12} Walter Humphrys cited in Van Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{13} Yarnall, *Barbed Wire Disease*, p. 175.
wait. Location influenced the length of that wait along with the eventual route of repatriation. A POW sub-commission of the Permanent International Armistice Commission was formed, which split Germany into four geographical zones for administrative purposes. Prisoners held in the northern and central zones were sent by train to Baltic or North Sea ports, such as Danzig, Hamburg, Rotterdam or Antwerp, some men being shuttled to Scandinavian ports such as Helsingborg or Copenhagen from where they then set sail for Britain. Those in the southern zone entrained to Switzerland, before being sent to French ports. Those in the western zone, meanwhile, went directly to French ports such as Calais and Boulogne. Commissions of Reception of Prisoners of War were established in each departure port, taking charge of the final arrangements of getting POWs home.¹⁴ When their time came, and regardless of their point of embarkation, returning British POWs arrived at one of three British ports: Dover, Hull or Leith.¹⁵ The final large batches of British POWs had arrived home by 28 January 1919,¹⁶ with all British military POWs having been repatriated by 1 February 1919.¹⁷

Homecomings

Learning of the Armistice and of their imminent repatriation brought out powerful emotions amongst British POWs. The news filtered to them via a mix of official information, rumour and speculation. This could be as subtle as a change in the captors’ appearance, a relaxation of regulations or a softening of the mood.¹⁸ At Holzminden camp, for example, Hauptmann Niemeyer’s aggressive behaviour took a complete U-turn before the commandant disappeared altogether. This indicated to the British officers that the end was nigh.¹⁹ Once they knew the war was over some celebrations erupted. One prisoner remembered the scene at Langensalza: ‘The English and French vowing eternal friendships, hands were shaken, one another’s health drunk, the singing of ‘Tipperary’, ‘La Marseillaise’, and war time songs’.²⁰ Therein nationalist feelings clearly bubbled to the surface, allied POWs sharing in the wider sense of victory through the singing of these patriotic songs. Other POWs thought less about the general victory and more about their personal triumph. The news revealed the long-anticipated end of their ordeal and, with the

¹⁴ Speed III, Prisoners, p. 176.    ¹⁵ Yarnall, Barbed Wire Disease, p. 178.
¹⁸ IWMSA, 315, Thomas Mitchell-Fox, Reel 3 [Recorded: 1974].
¹⁹ Morton, Silent Battle, p. 134; Hanson, Escape from Germany, pp. 243–5.
²⁰ IWM, 11574, H. Gore, Memoirs, pp. 100–1.
finishing line now in sight, it reassured men that they could, and would, prevail. This is how Joe Armstrong remembered the moment. At the time of the Armistice he was suffering from dysentery and was wondering if he would survive. Upon hearing the news he recalled jumping out of his hospital bed and shouting: ‘Stick-it Joe boy, stick it a bit longer, thou stuck it for over four years.’ Ernie Stevens similarly remembered receiving the news with relief, ‘knowing that it would not be long before we would be home, thankful that I had got to the end of this horrible experience’. In some cases men had anticipated that moment for years and they were overwhelmed when it finally arrived. Not all, however, received the news with jubilation or with relief. Some remained subdued, no doubt still apprehensive about an ongoing uncertainty for the future. At Soltau Sergeant Fitzpatrick reported that the prisoners took the news in their stride. There were no celebrations since there was no information as to if, or when, prisoners would be allowed to leave. These men were perhaps right not to get ahead of themselves. While the majority of captured British servicemen were repatriated within two and a half months, those final weeks of waiting could feel like an eternity.

Once men started to journey back to Britain, however, the realisation of their homecoming registered. As Rifleman Gore recollected upon boarding the S.S. Huntsend, ‘we felt at last that we were not dreaming but [were] really homeward bound’. At this stage, some prisoners report deeply symbolic occurrences which reveal how they psychologically reconnected with their nation in anticipation of their physical repatriation. The Union Flag, which had been a powerful symbol of ‘Britain’, ‘Britishness’ and continued national allegiance for some men while incarcerated, took on a particularly powerful meaning. When Private Wilkinson arrived at Danzig in December 1918, for example, he recorded looking at the Danish Hospital Ship, the S.S. Russ, flanked by two British destroyers, and picking out the insignia on the ships: ‘The Flag [Union Jack] when I gaze upon it I realise it is the Emblem of my liberty as I am no longer a prisoner’. Private Fenn, a fellow prisoner boarding the S.S. Russ, also commented on the deep impression that those ships and their Union Jacks had on the prisoners. He says that the men cheered and cried in equal measure.

21 IWMSA, 10920, Joe Armstrong, Reel 7 [Recorded: 1989].
23 Jack Rogers cited in ibid., p. 155.
24 IWMSA, 10767, Joe Fitzpatrick, Reel 17 [Recorded: 1989].
26 Author’s collection, Diary of Private William Wilkinson, 9/12/18.
27 IWM, 5034, Account of Experiences by W.H. Fenn, p. 4.
When the boats carrying returning POWs arrived in Britain, further powerful public displays took place. In fact, the first returnees were received with much fanfare and public euphoria in scenes which directly paralleled, and allowed returning POWs to share in, the homecomings as experienced by returning front-line soldiers. As Jack Rogers’s ship, S.S. Kronstadt, entered the Humber towards Hull, ‘all the sirens of the ships were sounded, bells were ringing, bangers going off and hooters blowing. There were great crowds of people’. Rogers may well have been amongst 1,700 returning prisoners who disembarked at Hull in November to be greeted by huge crowds, a flypast, an address by a major-general who read a message from the king and a performance by the police band who played, amongst other patriotic songs, ‘See the Conquering Hero Comes’. That song, as part of the wider display, sent a powerful message about the value the nation attached to these returning POWs as military men. The message was reinforced as the returning British POWs received a royal welcome either in person or by proxy. Every returning POW was given a written message from the king and queen, the printed but handwritten text giving it a personal quality (Figure 9.1). The message invoked the trials the POWs had faced but stressed the stoic and courageous manner in which they were seen to have borne that fate. It sent a powerful public message that prisoners were valued as men who had fought and suffered for their country. These public displays provided important psychological reassurances to prisoners at the moment of their physical reconnection to their nation, reassuring their military, male and ‘British’ identities. As such, their homecoming stood in marked contrast to capture itself, which had presented significant psychological challenges and led many men to question such identities.

In fact, returning to the bosom of the nation was further reflected in material terms as food, clothing and medical care were heaped upon the men. Hence the material experience of coming home was similarly juxtaposed with the deficiencies that had marked captivity. Upon boarding the boats to bring them home or at disembarkation, every prisoner received a comforts parcel containing ¼ lb of toffee, ¼ lb of chocolate, 20 cigarettes, 2 oz of tobacco and a pipe. While aboard men were well fed, sometimes too well, the rich food giving POWs accustomed to a watery

28 Note the opposite experience, and resulting challenges, for German POWs. Feltman, The Stigma of Surrender, p. 138.
30 The Times, 18/11/18, p. 5, col. A.
31 Daily Mirror, 7/12/18, p. 11; Daily Mirror, 11/12/18, p. 4.
32 The Times, 18/11/18, p. 5, col. A.  33 The Times, 21/11/18, p. 8, col. B.
diet stomach upsets. At Hull, Leith and Dover men had yet more tea, sweets and cigarettes thrust upon them. Just as basic necessities had had important psychological consequences in captivity, so too did they in the prisoners’ homecomings. Tea in particular, as the British national

34 IWMSA, 10767, Joe Fitzpatrick, Reel 17 [Recorded: 1989].
beverage, made men sensorially aware that they were home, that drink contrasting with the gallons of bitter ersatz coffee that POWs had been forced to drink in captivity. ‘The taste of a brew of real tea with carnation milk and sugar and also the taste of old plum or apple jam was lovely.’

Clothing was equally important. The Commissions of Reception of Prisoners of War, established at each embarkation port, made sure that prisoners’ worn-out and lousy uniforms were replaced with crisp, clean ones. As a result, returning British POWs arrived back in Britain looking and, importantly, feeling, like servicemen. Sergeant Fitzpatrick, for example, was kitted out with a fresh uniform at Rotterdam and, as the boat carried him across the Channel, he blacked his boots and altered his trousers. It was not, therefore, just having clean and comfortable clothes that mattered to Fitzpatrick. He also wanted to look like a proper soldier, complete with bulled boots, when he stepped off that boat. Hence, just like those prisoners who had expressed their military identities in the camps via the maintenance of good military discipline, Fitzpatrick performed an internalised ethic of ‘soldierly-ness’ as he sailed home.

Psychological and symbolic elements were clearly at play in these homecomings.

Once landed POWs were sent to reception camps to be medically examined, to draw additional kit and to collect their back pay. Such camps existed at Dover, which had a capacity of 10,000, and Ripon, which could accommodate 21,000 men. Men not in need of additional medical care remained in these camps for 24 to 48 hours, after which they were granted two months’ leave and sent home. Their final, often much anticipated homecoming was often an emotional affair. Corporal Ashby, for example, was met with joy and celebrations from his siblings. Likewise, Joe Armstrong had a tearful reunion with his mother and grandmother, both of whom were shocked by his physical appearance. The overwhelming feeling was one of relief: prisoners were relieved to be home, loved ones were relieved to have them back. Relief was heightened when a serviceman’s fate had been unknown. For some families, loved ones even came back to life due to POW repatriation. William Shipway’s mother, for example, had been told that her son was missing believed killed. Hearing no news from him, she took hope from a dream in which her son appeared and reassured her that he was on his way home via

36 *The Times*, 21/11/18, p. 8, col. B.
37 IWMSA, 10767, Joe Fitzpatrick, Reel 17 [Recorded: 1989].
40 IWMSA, 9481 John Ashby, Reel 9 [Recorded: 1986].
41 IWMSA, 10920, Joe Armstrong, Reel 7 [Recorded: 1989].
Holland. Her dreams came true when Shipway arrived via Rotterdam just as the apparition foretold.\textsuperscript{42}

Not all stories had such happy endings. Missing POWs became a particularly emotive subject. Captain Lugard, secretary to the Commissioner of the British Red Cross Society in France, was one voice calling for the creation of an Allied Commission to search for missing British POWs in Germany.\textsuperscript{43} In February 1919, parliament demanded to know how many British POWs were still unaccounted for and what moves were being made to trace them. A figure of 2,900 was cited. While the government regretfully conceded that it was doubtful that any of these men were still alive, assurances were made that the Germans would have to account for every missing man.\textsuperscript{44} It was in light of such pressure that obligations to locate missing men in Germany were included in the Treaty of Versailles.\textsuperscript{45} The press covered these debates, linking the issue to wider concerns over the 64,000 British servicemen still unaccounted for after the war, thereby locating the dead and missing POWs in the same space as the battlefield dead and missing.\textsuperscript{46} Families, however, continued to hold out hope. They canvassed those who had returned in the hope that they might possess news of a loved one. Hence, as POWs congregated at Hull railway station in November 1918, women were seen walking up and down the platform, carrying photographs of missing sons and husbands, and asking returned prisoners ‘Did you know him? Have you seen him? Was he in your regiment?’ Returning POWs could rarely offer any comfort.\textsuperscript{47} The same desperation is reflected in classified advertisements seeking information which regularly appeared in the post-war national press.\textsuperscript{48}

Even those men registered as POWs, indeed some men known to be alive when the Armistice was signed, did not always return. The period between the Armistice and repatriation was a dangerous one. Many men were starving, many were desperately ill, and the new enemy of influenza was ravishing Europe. Even as the boats pulled into British ports some returning POWs succumbed to illness or starvation.\textsuperscript{49} Others died shortly

\textsuperscript{42} IWMSA, 10118, William George Shipway, Reel 6 [Recorded: 1988].
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{The Times}, 14/12/18, p. 12, col. F.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{The Times}, 15/2/19, p. 5, col. E.
after their return. Their deaths were often attributed to the ill effects of captivity. One high-profile case was that of the lauded air ace Captain Leefe-Robinson, the first man to have shot down a Zeppelin. He was later shot down himself, landing behind enemy lines and taken prisoner. He died on 31 December 1918, having been repatriated from Germany on 14 December. The cause of death was influenza. In the press, however, this was attributed to his low resistance as a result of ill treatment suffered at the hands of Captain Niemeyer.\footnote{Daily Express, 2/1/19, p. 1; Daily Express, 30/4/19, p. 5; Daily Express, 9/7/19, p. 1.} Given that some men did not return from Germany, and that other others died shortly afterwards, the words of Jack Rogers, reflecting upon his own homecoming, seem pertinent: ‘I can only say I, after the very many things I had been through, I was very lucky to be there.’\footnote{IWMSA, 19072, Henry John Rogers, Reel 5 [Recorded: 1999].}

**Good-bye to All That!**

British servicemen taken prisoner by the Germans during the First World War had indeed been through ‘very many things’. It has been my aim to illuminate such things in this book, tracing the fluxes of power visible across British captivity experiences, exploring the physical and psychological manifestations of empowerment and disempowerment, the myriad challenges that captured British servicemen faced and perceived and the range of strategies they adopted in response. Therein a number of important themes have emerged.

The first has been the centrality of identity. This was marked by the threats that capture presented to many British servicemen’s perceptions of self during the conflict. Similarly, in their responses, it has been seen how many captives were able to initiate strategies that allowed them to reassure themselves and others of their identities as British men, and, significantly, as military men, despite having been caught. In this way many British prisoners responded to the challenges of capture and captivity by smoothing the tensions, recreating reassuring continuities with their pre-captive selves rather than dwelling on the problematic discontinuities and contestations which evidently resulted because of capture. Where POWs were forced to make readjustments they did so, the evidence in their letters, for example, showing how they reflected upon, contained and, where necessary, reconstructed elements of their *personae* in their attempts to create workable conceptions of self behind the wire with which they could feel comfortable. This can be summarised in the ongoing quest amongst these captured servicemen to maintain
composure. Clearly many British POWs, notably those within the camps of interior Germany, seem to have been able to maintain a stable sense of self despite the ongoing challenges posed by captivity.

A second key theme has been the ability of captured servicemen to remobilise the apparently controlling strategies and technologies of the camps for their own ends. Elements which had the potential to challenge could become resources for POW re-empowerment. This insight has emerged as a result of the methodology employed. By changing the perspective between Part I and Part II from the captors and the so-called ‘omnipresent systems of power’ operating in the camps, to the prisoners who lived under those systems, strategies which were at first analysed as tools for control could be reinterpreted as resources that enabled some POWs to respond. The idea draws on Michel Foucault’s notion that power has no fixed loci, coupled with the theoretical insights offered by Anthony Giddens and Michel De Certeau. Discipline is a good example. It was clearly a concept mobilised by the captors, echoing its operation in both the German and British militaries, to exert authority and control over their captives, especially within the formalised controls of a main prison camp in Germany. The regimes therein ‘disciplined’ the POW’s bodies and attempted to maintain the prisoners as a disciplined body of men, who were then easier to administer, easier to control and, in the case of workers, easier to exploit. Cases of ill-discipline were met with ‘corrective’ punishments, such as keeping men on parade, the ‘silly stand’ or quasi-field punishments (e.g. shackling to a fixed object). These attempts to discipline resulted in physical and psychological challenges to British prisoners. Yet, by the same token, and at the same time, discipline was evidently also used by the captured. Some British POWs adopted a disciplined mentality when faced with physical challenges behind the wire. Equally, some British POWs used military discipline to self-express and maintain a stable conception of self in spite of capture. Many men took pride in an internalised faith in British discipline, instilled most recently from their military training and service but which was itself a continuation of a disciplined ethic taught in schools, youth organisations and in many British workplaces. Many prisoners therefore used the concept to help them cope behind the wire, the concept allowing them to continue to think and act like disciplined British servicemen despite captivity. They displayed their internalised ethic in their bearing, appearance, actions (such as continuing to salute superiors) and movements (such as drilling in the camp or marching to and from work details). These displays were about the men’s self-preservation. They reveal how

52 Jones, Violence, p. 3.
internalised discipline could liberate and empower as much as imposed discipline could constrain and disempower.

Third, by contextualising the British captivity experience, it has emerged that some aspects of captivity were not alien to British servicemen. In fact, some challenges faced by captured British servicemen were markedly similar to those that they had faced during their military training and service and to those that some civilians had experience in pre-war school, work and home life. The lack of privacy, overcrowding, institutional entry procedures, a herded existence, even the specific control strategies and technologies that structured the ‘captivity landscape’, all parallel what British men had experienced in training barracks, in trenches, in schools, in factories, even in pre-war civilian households. A British infantryman who was captured and forced to work behind the lines in 1918, for example, experienced a life that mirrored, in many key respects, his pre-captivity wartime experience. He often remained in roughly the same physical location, i.e. on the Western Front, where he continued to face the dangers of small arms and artillery fire. He continued to suffer familiar enemies, including the weather, the mud, the rats, even the lice. His jobs also paralleled those undertaken by the frontline soldier, including trench upkeep, filling sand bags and loading shells.

Contextualising the captivity experience is essential because not only does it place captivity in perspective but, importantly, it reveals that, having already faced parallel challenges, British servicemen had learnt some adaptive strategies. ‘Dodging the column’ in order to resist labour demands is a characteristic example. This can be located as central to the military subculture into which all British recruits had been socialised at least to some extent. The same can be said of comradeship, the very structures of support visible in the camps such as the ‘pair bonds’, messes and mucking-in schools, reflecting those found in British training camps and in the front line. Such ‘mutuality’ is further attributable to contemporary British working-class culture. Hence, as John Bourne has similarly claimed by contextualising the military experiences of the British working-class recruits, ‘urban working class-volunteers and conscripts of the First World War did not enter the alien authority system of the Regular Army naked and without tried and tested survival strategies’. He locates the development of those ‘tried and tested survival strategies’ to the workplace.\(^{53}\) It would be equally misleading to think of captured British servicemen as ‘naked’ and defenceless against the challenges of captivity. Instead they must be understood as clad with the armour of their pre-captive military and civilian experiences.

Equally clear, however, is that the specific challenges endured by British POWs, along with men’s capacities to respond, varied, and here arise some of the limits of the study offered. Different prisoners faced different conditions in different camps at different periods during the war. The place and location of incarceration, as well as the date of capture and duration of captivity, mattered as they impacted on the nature of the challenges men were confronted with and set the extent and limits of their capacities to respond. Many of the responses evidenced in Part II, for example, worked for those men held within the formalised settings of the permanent POW camps of interior Germany and, to some extent, also for those within the working camps in Germany itself. Indeed, it was here that my study concentrated to evidence these strategies. Yet, as has consistently emerged, their scope to assist men held within the harsher, less formalised, environment behind the lines was reduced, limited or eliminated. That reinforces the idea of a dual POW system experienced by British POWs in Germany, delineated between camps on the home-front and those camps and detachments on the battle-front.\textsuperscript{54} The degrees of disempowerment, and capacity for re-empowerment, varied markedly between those two spaces. The different ‘dialectics of control’, informed by context, need still further exploration.

Moreover, each prisoner had unique pre-captive experiences informing their perceptions, reactions and responses to captivity. Within the scope of this study only some of those nuances could be assessed, albeit an effort has been made to alert the reader to ongoing fault lines. Differences based on rank have been highlighted and used to assess the varying challenges and responses amongst those referred to throughout as ‘British POWs’. Officers and ORs were treated differently; they faced different physical conditions and challenges; they felt differently about captivity. As a result, they responded differently with varying effects. Myriad other impacting factors, including age, social background, ethnicity, terms of service (e.g. Regular, Volunteer, Conscript), military branch, pre-capture war experience, pre-war occupational status and, for the British POWs, composite nationality (English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh), doubtlessly also conditioned men’s perceptions of, and reactions to, their captivity.\textsuperscript{55} The pre-war career soldier Major Collins, for example, felt the curtailment of his fighting role far more than the conscripted Private William Wilkinson, a cotton tackler before the war. Collins spent three years in captivity in a series of Offiziersgefangenenlager (Halle, Augustabad, Heidelberg and


\textsuperscript{55} Michael Roper similarly suggest how social and economic backgrounds conditioned British soldiers’ emotional responses to front-line service during the First World War, The Secret Battle, p. 30.
Crefeld), before being exchanged to Switzerland; Wilkinson endured only seven months’ incarceration, four of which were spent working behind the lines in France and Belgium, leading to his hospitalisation at Charleville and transfer to the Kriegsgefangenenlager at Krossen. The two men had two different physical and psychological experiences, they had different backgrounds and they would respond accordingly.

It is more analysis around these kinds of nuances where new research should be concentrated. There remains, for example, scope to conduct further research into distinct ‘Irish’ captivity experiences based on a study of those Irish POWs sent to the propaganda camp at Limburg. Similarly, the impact of other conditioning factors would allow British experiences of captivity to be mined in further depth. It would be possible to achieve such a study by focusing attention on the different individual experiences of British prisoners within a single camp or sample of camps, such as those located within a specific Army Corps district. Such research would face source constraints, yet a successful study of this nature would further understanding of the British captivity experience, or rather of captivity experiences, during the First World War. Likewise, it would be useful to compare and contrast the challenges and responses amongst prisoners of different nationalities under the control of the same captor power or, equally revealingly, under different captor powers, following the excellent comparative inroads already offered by Jones in relation to prisoners’ experiences of violence. The obvious continuation of the study I have offered here would be to compare the experiences of German POWs held by the British, identifying commonalities and differences in both the challenges faced and the responses adopted. Brian K. Feltman’s recently published work on German POWs in the United Kingdom provides a mirror study by which such a comparison can begin, with many of his research findings, especially in terms of challenged masculinity, paralleling those reached above. A comparative academic study of British and German captivity experiences is, however, still lacking in current captivity historiography.

Yet while more work needs to be done, this book has offered for the first time a comprehensive assessment of British experiences of captivity in Germany during the First World War. Therein it has, importantly,
provided in-depth analysis of a range of challenges and responses displayed amongst those British servicemen who underwent captivity. In order to do so I have drawn upon common conditioning factors existing amongst the POWs assessed, including their overarching ‘British’ identity, their common military identity and the fact that they were all men. Certain generalisations have also been made about the British rank and file, a large portion being drawn from the working classes. By doing so I have offered my own challenges to the existing scholarship and understandings of captivity. My main agenda was, however, to write the forgotten British captive back into the history of the First World War. Yet this study has also sought to challenge the exclusion and the separateness with which the POW experience has traditionally been viewed. His capture, and with it his dislocation from the battlefield and apparent displacement from a fighting role, has resulted in the prisoner of war being dislocated from the history of war.61 In the First World War context the POW experience has traditionally been marginalised as a sideshow to the Western Front experience. This was not the case. POW experiences were not so distinct, and indeed there are many parallels between British experiences on the Western Front and those in captivity. What is more, the reactions and responses of British servicemen to captivity were bound up with the war and with men’s understandings of their roles within it.

As a result, a new way of understanding captivity experiences has been offered, one which moves away from the mythologised officer-centric escape view that has come to dominate popular perceptions. Indeed, escape must be recognised as a minority response. What is more, escape has been shown as only one of a number of resistive responses available to prisoners, resistance itself being only one of a range of broader reactions available to captured servicemen. This re-conceptualisation is vital to a nuanced understanding of experiences of captivity. Indeed, without such a rethinking certain evidence uncovered in this study would not make sense. Why, for example, would Lance-Corporal Armstrong, caught at the end of October 1914, decide to break away from the farm where he was working in November 1917 and, rather than make for the frontier, head for Altona, Hamburg, and present himself to his previous German employer?62 Why would Sapper Cass and a group of friends cut through the wire and evade the sentries at Mannheim camp, which was

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62 IWMSA, 10920, Joe Armstrong, Reel 3 [Recorded: 1989].
perfectly located for a strike out to either the Swiss or Dutch border, only to head to the local Gasthaus, get blind drunk using the contents of their aid parcels as currency, before breaking back into the camp? Through the prism of the escape genre these incidents do not make sense. Yet they are easy to comprehend in the context of the responses highlighted in this book. Armstrong’s actions, for example, were spurred by comradeship. He had formed strong friendships with fellow Russian and Belgian POWs at the farm he had worked at for six months, these bonds having helped to sustain him physically, through the sharing of food, and psychologically. His ‘break out’ was motivated by a desire to return to his friends rather than a desire to return to the fight. Similarly, Cass’s actions should be seen as an extension of the ‘removal activities’ explored in Chapter 7. His action also constituted an empowering resistance in that he successfully managed to outwit his captors not only by getting out but, more importantly, by getting back into the camp undetected. British captivity experiences in Germany during the First World War, indeed captivity experiences in toto, must be reconceptualised, moving beyond popular conceptions of escape that were born after the First World War.

Finally, the themes analysed above have wider applications. POW conceptions of identity, specifically how their wartime experiences affected conceptions of military masculinity, provide fresh insights into how masculinities are challenged and preserved by wartime experiences. In addition, many of the interpretations offered draw upon studies of parallel contexts, including research conducted on civil prisons, mental hospitals and military barracks. The findings raise questions and offer some answers relative to such settings. This is particularly so in the case of the insights offered into the influence of the ‘presenting culture’ and background of inmates in ‘Total Institutions’. It has emerged that these cultures are rarely, if ever, completely ‘stripped’ upon entry to such institutions and their persistence affects inmate experiences. First World War captivity, in the case of some British servicemen, marked a third or even fourth ‘entry’ to a ‘Total Institution’. Joe Armstrong, for example, had spent five years in the workhouse as a child, worked in a factory, trained in the special reserve at Fulwood barracks in 1913, undertook refresher training at the outbreak of war and then found himself in a POW camp. His ‘presenting culture’, informed by all these experiences, and the learnt adaptive strategies he had acquired along the way, undoubtedly impacted upon his captivity experiences. Greater attention needs to be paid to such elements in any assessment

63 IWM, 8295, Thomas Cass, Reel 3 [Recorded: 1984].
64 IWM, 10920, Joe Armstrong [Recorded: 1989].
of Total Institutions; none can be considered as self-contained ‘islands’. Goffman’s model, while insightful, fails to explore the nuances resulting from multiple ‘presenting cultures’. More broadly still, this book contributes to power theories, revealing how control strategies operate and, importantly, showing how apparently disempowered groups and individuals always have some means to respond, re-negotiate and rebalance power relations. That offers further insight into the history of repression and resistance, important themes in the history of the twentieth century.

**But it Still Goes On?**

For British POWs, the story did not end with their repatriation. In the post-war context, ex-British POWs continued to face challenges as a result of their war experiences and, accordingly, they had to continue to find ways to respond.

The physical legacy, born from the acute physical challenges POWs had faced, left long-term health problems for many. The effects of malnutrition, oedema, dysentery and pneumonia, along with the consequences of violence and exhaustion suffered by some POWs, had lasting effects, resulting in gastro-intestinal problems, bronchitis, recurring rashes and weakened immune systems. In some cases, the physical legacy led to premature death.\(^65\) Equally, captivity left a deep psychological toll. Dr Vischer in fact predicted that between four and five million ex-POWs ‘of abnormal psychical tendencies’ would return to inhabit Europe at the end of the war as a result of their war captivity experiences.\(^66\) The psychological legacy of captivity evidenced amongst the British provides some corroboration. In some cases, their ‘abnormal psychical tendencies’ resulted in extreme reactions, such as self-harm or psychotic acts. In the latter cases, the legacy of brutal captivity experiences were even cited as mitigating factors.\(^67\) More usual were bouts of violence, mood swings, introversion, nervousness, depression and insomnia endured by returned POWs.\(^68\) Such behaviour echoed the ‘cyclothymia’ that had characterised life in the POW camps.\(^69\) On a more mundane level the legacy of captivity manifested itself in a man’s distaste for certain foods or his inability to tolerate waste, both attitudes attributable to the material deficiencies suffered behind the wire. These effects would now be explained in terms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), born from physical suffering and the emotional traumas that men had endured because of

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\(^66\) Vischer, *Barbed Wire Disease*, p. 25.
\(^67\) Daily Mirror, 24/7/22, p. 2; Daily Mirror, 2/3/32, p. 4.
\(^68\) Morton, *Silent Battle*, pp. 144 and 150.
their war experiences. Ex-POWs were, of course, far from being the only British men to return from the war suffering from PTSD.  

In the case of ex-prisoners, however, some of the ongoing challenges can be attributed to the specific problems associated with war captivity. In particular, perceptions of shame, guilt, ignominy and doubts about perceived ‘worth’ attached to the fate continued to feature as men tried to readjust to post-war life. Some men could not overcome these feelings. For them, repatriation only served to increase their distress for it exposed ex-prisoners to an environment in which most men had not been caught and to a society and culture which was increasingly lauding the sacrifice of ‘The Fallen’. In March 1919, for example, Major P.M. White, Distinguished Service Order (DSO), committed suicide, leaving a note which proclaimed: ‘Why should I live? I managed to stick it [the war] for two years, and then what became of me? A miserable prisoner! How could I possibly walk about in the future and meet people who had given their husbands, sons, or brothers, whilst I escape?’ Survivor guilt was not uncommon amongst those who returned from the war. What was different for ex-prisoners was that they also had to reconcile the negative connotations attached to their specific war experiences against a context which lauded a very different war narrative. Accordingly, a captured British serviceman’s quest for psychological security would continue long after his release.

That quest was further complicated as POWs entered a post-war Britain of shifting public discourses about the war and about war captivity. In the short term, the prisoners found their experiences at the forefront of the agenda in relation to calls for German recriminations. In the run up to the Armistice, British politicians had been demanding clauses to bring the perpetrators of alleged POW cruelty to justice. That clamour intensified in November, with popular pressure also being exerted on the government. On 13 November the Daily Mirror printed a list of the alleged German war criminals, which included the ‘Niemeyer brothers and General von Hähnish’ and the ‘Wittenberg Camp chiefs’. The New Year brought still further calls, Colonel Burn asking the prime minister in February 1919 what steps were being taken ‘to bring to justice the commandants of those camps where British prisoners of war were brutally treated?’ The Treaty of Versailles included provisions for the

72 HC Deb, 29/10/18, Vol. 110, Cols. 1296–390.
73 The Times, 18/11/18, p. 5, col. F.
74 Daily Mirror, 13/11/18, p. 3.
allies to bring before military tribunals any persons accused of committing acts in violation of the laws and customs of war or those who had committed criminal acts. The Germans were bound by the terms of the peace treaty to hand over the accused, together with any evidence, to facilitate trials against them.\textsuperscript{76} The eventual legal process, however, took the form of forty-five exemplary cases brought by the allies but tried before a German Court, \textit{Reichsgericht}, held in Leipzig. Therein the ill treatment of POWs constituted a key theme, with three of the seven exemplary cases brought by the British relating to abuses against POWs.\textsuperscript{77} Karl Heynen\textsuperscript{78} was accused of violence perpetrated against British POW workers at the Friedrich der Grosse Mine at Herne, Westphalia;\textsuperscript{79} Robert Neumann was charged with the ill treatment of British POW workers at Pommerensdorf Chemical works in Germany;\textsuperscript{80} while Emil Müller was accused of acts of ill treatment and brutality against British POW workers held in the occupied war zone near Flavy-le-Martel.\textsuperscript{81} The trials, conducted between 23 May and 16 July 1921, concluded with sentences of ten months’ imprisonment for Heynen, and six months’ each for Neumann and Müller.\textsuperscript{82}

In one sense, these trials fixed public attention on British OR experiences of captivity as enforced labourers to the Germans, including consideration of their employment in occupied territories behind the front line. Therein they emphasised some of the physical challenges of captive life, including lack of food, clothing and medical care; over-crowding; poor sanitary conditions; exhausting working routines; and acts of German brutality.\textsuperscript{83} The trials similarly indicated some of the psychological anguish endured by captured British ORs, highlighting, in the Heynen case, the dilemma of enforced labour, the resistance mounted by POWs in response and the harsh German punishments that were sometimes enacted.\textsuperscript{84} In these regards, the trials flagged to the public important aspects of British captivity experiences as assessed in this book. Moreover, that view centred on OR experiences, a narrative which subsequently lost weight in favour of officers’ experiences. What was more,
reports of the trials presented a view of POW suffering, reminiscent of the ways in which POW mis-treatment had been reported in the press since the opening months of the war. On the Heynen case, *The Times* reported how he had knocked British POWs ‘about, with a bayonet . . . he battered a man who was ill in bed . . . [then] compelled this sick man to work; he struck a prisoner several blows with the butt of a rifle; he tortured another man under hot and cold water, and the man seems to have gone mad’. The trials thus went some distance in focusing public attention on the very real disempowerments suffered by thousands of British OR captives forced to work behind the Western Front or in harsh labour duties, such as in mining and industry, in Germany itself. It thus placed POW experiences as part of the initial memory of the conflict.

Yet attention on these cases resulted in the British POW being represented in a hugely disempowering manner. They were victims both in the representations and to the representations, a view which mirrored the ways in which they had been constructed in the atrocity discourse in 1914. Moreover, in the same way that political and military agendas had informed representations in 1914 as part of the creation of a ‘war culture’, the POW victim in the 1921 Leipzig Trials was similarly being used as a pawn in the broader post-war political and legal games which were playing out. These trials were ‘test cases’ in the sense that they were used to assess German suitability to dispense justice to German war criminals. Therein, however, the legal process was calculated to have a broader impact on German social and military attitudes as well as providing pioneering examples in the treatment of crimes against humanity. The Leipzig Trials were thus aimed at far more than the specific cases heard; they were about changing German attitudes; they were about informing international legal processes; and they were about establishing ‘civilised’, humane principles to be followed in the conduct of warfare. The POW victim was just an expedient figure in these aims.

What is more, by the time the trials vocalised British prisoners’ experiences of mistreatment, it seems that few in Britain were interested in listening, nullifying what could otherwise have been a crucial outlet for the articulation of First World War British POW experiences. Indeed, as Jones has shown, the trials coincided with a shift in the popular mood from a cacophony of accusations for recriminations characteristic of 1919 and 1920 to a mood of disillusionment, disinterest and, increasingly, a desire to forget. In fact, by 1921, some voices were claiming the atrocity discourse as a wartime fabrication, others were criticising the

severity of the Treaty of Versailles. The wider mood of disillusionment and disinterest is marked by an overall lack of popular attention regarding the Leipzig Trials. Between the end of the war and the end of 1922, only forty-three articles in *The Times* refer to the trials. Moreover, the coverage that did appear in the press was limited, negative and pessimistic. For example, Heynen’s sentence, and the indifference shown by Müller at his trial, received only five lines’ coverage in the *Daily Express*. Prior to any of the accused even taking the stand there was a feeling that the trials were feeble and farcical. That mood was reinforced when the verdicts were reached. Alongside such negative press coverage was a striking lack of British agitation, save a few voices in parliament, to mobilise against the farce. The press certainly did not mount any campaign in the way it had generated a culture of blame in 1918 and 1919. Nor did POWs mobilise to vocalise their experiences. By the mid-1920s and early 1930s, the mood had completely shifted, moving towards European reconciliation. Therein, combatants on either side were increasingly seen as ‘victims’ of the First World War, and there was no appetite for ongoing accusations of the atrocities perpetrated against POWs. Hence, the view of the British POW as a heroic victim in the face of German frightfulness lost the stock it had carried during and immediately after the conflict. Simultaneously, popular memory of the war in Britain was dominated by the war dead. Within that dominant discourse, as anticipated by White’s suicide note cited above, returned POWs found it difficult to integrate. They were not among the heroic dead; and, as captured servicemen, they did not appear as successful warriors either.

It was against these shifting sands, legal, political and cultural, that ex-POWs had to find ways to re-compose their specific war experiences if, indeed, they were to re-compose their experiences at all. In any public retelling of captivity, whether that was in memoirs or in oral testimonies, those POWs needed to find representations which were acceptable to external audiences, which could satisfy cultural understandings about the war and, crucially, which allowed the ex-prisoners to maintain personal composure. What is striking is that many British servicemen who had been POWs evidently could not do this and instead chose to remain silent, initiating a process of amnesia in Britain about First World War

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89 Based on a search of the term ‘Leipzig Trials’ between these dates.
91 See the reaction to Heynen’s sentence in HC Deb, 30/5/21, Vol. 142, Cols. 571–2; *The Times*, 31/5/21, p. 15, col. A.
captive experiences. In fact some, like General Rees, had apparently resolved to skip over their captivity experiences while they were still incarcerated: ‘I have no wish to be remembered as the man who was a prisoner in Germany, therefore least said the better’. Jack Rogers similarly embraced a position of amnesia, avoiding to speak or read about the war at all. Individual’s silences were reinforced by the collective failure by ex-prisoners in Britain to mobilise as a body of ex-servicemen in order to publicise their distinct war experiences. While the British Association of Ex-Prisoners existed from 1926 onwards, it only ever attracted a small membership. Some officer dining clubs were formed, the most active being the one formed by those officers at the famous escape camp, Holzminden. In the main, ex-prisoners, when they did join organisations, were subsumed into Regimental Associations or encompassed by the British Legion. The majority of British POWs, publicly at least, seemed to want to forget, explaining their failure to develop a distinct veteran identity. As one former POW, Lieutenant Birkinshaw, related when interviewed in 1977, prisoners preferred to keep themselves to themselves. Birkinshaw felt that having been captured was something of a disgrace and explained how his shame was heightened ‘when I mixed with the people who had been in the war and come out of it and had not been captured’. The silence from the majority of British ex-POWs helps to explain why the memory of captivity has been marginalised in the history of the Great War.

Yet, while marginalised, First World War captivity was not completely forgotten in inter-war Britain. A minority of prisoners did find composure by locating themselves in an emerging, mythologised and soon to be dominant captivity narrative: the escape narrative. Focused on extreme resistance, some ex-POWs, almost universally officers, bolstered this genre, creating a mythologised view of captivity and a stereotype of the British prisoner as a glamorised military male: young, heroic, brave, manly, stoic and successful. It was this view that was mobilised during

96 IWM, 7166, Brigadier-General H.C. Rees, Rees to father, 22/10/18 (Bad Colberg).
102 Rachamimov, POWs and The Great War, p. 227.
103 This reflects a wider mythologisation of the Great War by which a series of enduring popular images, stereotypes and clichés have been used and re-used in depictions of the conflict. See Mosse, Fallen Soldiers, p. 7; Fussell, The Great War, p. ix; Brian Bond, The Unquiet Western Front. Britain's Role in Literature and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 48–9; Pierre Sorlin, ‘Cinema and the Memory of the Great War’, in Michael Paris (ed.), The First World War and Popular Cinema 1914 to Present (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 18–22.
the Second World War and was cemented in its aftermath. Accordingly, following the Leipzig Trials the view of harsh, brutal, treatment endured by ORs in dominating workspaces, including deployment near the front line, disappeared, to be replaced with a social narrative based on the hijinks of an officer camp. By their silence, those ex-prisoners whose experiences did not align with that view, unwittingly endorsed it, and subsequently all POWs have been subsumed by it in the popular imagination. The prisoner as synonymous with the escaper became, and has remained, ingrained on the British public consciousness.

The reader of this study will question that view. The realities of life in captivity for British servicemen centred on a series of challenges, physical and psychological, which captured men had to face. Granted, some servicemen, and not just the escapers, did succeed in adopting ingenious and empowering responses in the ways implied by the escape view. However, some, especially those POWs behind the lines, could not and did not respond in such terms. Moreover, escape was only an extreme response used by a minority of specifically motivated men. Yet there is no doubt that the experiences of these men as represented in their memoirs, in radio programmes and in films came to dominate perceptions of captivity for the inter-war generation. When Captain Evans’s book *The Escaping Club* was discussed in the gossip column in the *Daily Mirror* in 1921, it was described as ‘the true story of daring adventures by a jolly band of young British prisoners of war, who escaped about once a week’. What is more, it is that view that has survived to this day.

And this seems hugely ironic when weighed against the material offered in this book. An unrepresentative representation, created by a minority of former POWs, who found and fed an appetite for adventure narratives amongst a post-war British public, has led the experience of British captivity in toto to be seen in monolithic and mythologised terms. And

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107 *Daily Mirror*, 20/9/21, p. 5.
108 For recent examples see David Jason’s *Great Escapes*, (2011), ITV1, 28 Aug, 1hr; *Digging the Great Escape*, (2011), Channel 4, 28 Nov, 1 hr. 35 mins; *The First Great Escape* (2014), Channel 5, 23 March, 1hr.
that myth is one that empowers the POW agent, painting him as a resolutely patriotic and masculine figure. He is seen as a man in total control who uses his personal faculties, determination and ingenuity to outwit the Germans at every turn, ultimately returning to his nation and the bosom of war. He masters captivity, escaping the physical challenges. By doing so, the prisoner re-emerges in the image of the combatant, confirming his credentials as a military man, indeed as a military hero, and imbued with what have subsequently been represented as distinctly British characteristics: pluck, resolve, strength of character, resourcefulness and humour.

This cultural coup, achieved by a handful of British officer escapers, seems like a fitting place to end. From the disempowered and defeated figure, forced to drop his weapon, raise his hands and enter into an experience marred by physical and psychological distress, the POW was transformed. He became associated instead with the image of the patriot, the brave, the heroic, the manly. He also became seen as a vessel of ‘Britishness’. In short, the escape view placed the POW as synonymous with the very things challenged by captivity and which, as this study has shown, POWs had had to try to resolve, with varying success, during their experiences behind the wire.