



Absolute War and The People's War Pack

Mark Hewitson

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Wars have played a fundamental part in modern German history. Although infrequent, conflicts involving German states have usually been extensive and often catastrophic, constituting turning-points for Europe as a whole. Composed of the first two volumes of Mark Hewitson's three volumes series on German conflict, this pack explores how such conflicts were experienced by soldiers and civilians during wartime, and how they were subsequently imagined and understood during peacetime, from Clausewitz and Kleist to Junger and Adorno. Without such an understanding, it is difficult to make sense of the dramatic shifts characterising the politics of Germany and Europe over the past two centuries. The studies argue that the ease - or reluctance - with which Germans went to war, and the far-reaching consequences of such wars on domestic politics, were related to soldiers' and civilians' attitudes to violence and death, as well as to long-term transformations in contemporaries' conceptualisation of conflict.

Absolute War reassesses the meaning of military conflict for the millions of German subjects who were directly implicated in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Based on a re-reading of contemporary diaries, letters, memoirs, official correspondence, press reports, pamphlets, treatises, plays, and cartoons, this volume refocuses attention on combat and conscription as the central components of new forms of mass warfare. It concentrates, in particular, on the impact of violence, killing, and death on many soldiers' and some civilians' experiences and subsequent memories of conflict. War has often been conceived of as 'an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds', as Clausewitz put it, but the relationship between military conflicts and violent acts remains a problematic one.

The People's War investigates the complex relationship between military conflicts and the violent acts of individual soldiers. In particular, it considers the contradictory impact of 'pacification' in civilian life and exposure to increasingly destructive technologies of killing during war-time. This contradiction reached its nineteenth-century apogee during the 'wars of unification', leaving an ambiguous imprint on post-war discussions of military conflict. This study makes sense of contemporaries' memories and histories of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic campaigns within a much wider context of press reportage of wars elsewhere in Europe and overseas, debates about military service and the reform of Germany's armies, revolution and counter-revolution, and individuals' experiences of violence and death in their everyday lives. For the majority of the populations of the German states, wars during an era of conscription were not merely a matter of history and memory; rather, they concerned subjects' hopes, fears, and expectations of the future.

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