

Grady, Tim: *The German-Jewish Soldiers of the First World War in History and Memory*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2011. ISBN: 978-1-846-31660-9; 260 S.

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Despite the ever-proliferating body of literature on World War One and the Holocaust, surprisingly little has been written on the experience of the German-Jewish servicemen who fought for Germany in the First World War. Although a number of works on Jewish military service have appeared in Germany, these studies are largely devoted to the emergence of pre-Nazi antisemitism or tend to situate veterans within the broader context of the Holocaust. This is the first comprehensive work to examine the fate of Germany's Jewish war veterans from 1914 to their place in the Federal Republic's early engagement with the legacy of Nazism after 1945.

In this highly original study, Tim Grady challenges the existing historiography that has traditionally portrayed Jews as a self-confined group, distinct from mainstream society in Germany, whose strive for emancipation and social acceptance ended in failure during World War One. 1918 is often regarded as the end point, the so-called „crisis of the German-Jewish symbiosis,” in a long trajectory of failed assimilation.¹ Instead, Grady argues that relations between Jews and other Germans did not end abruptly after 1918, that they persisted throughout the Weimar era, even into the early years of the Third Reich. Through the rubric of remembrance of the German-Jewish war dead, he throws light on how Jews and other Germans created a shared memory culture of the First World War, which endured well beyond 1918. By way of memorial construction, local rituals of mourning and commemoration, and conservative narratives of national sacrifice, Grady examines how these agents of the remembrance process carried with them long-term implications for German-Jewish relations.

Grady devotes the first three chapters of his book to World War One and the interwar period. Through use of diaries and contem-

porary correspondence from Jewish servicemen, he confirms that most Jewish soldiers had been well integrated amongst other Germans in the military, that they overwhelmingly viewed themselves as Germans, as comrades, inseparable from their gentile compatriots alongside whom they fought. Antisemitism was not the driving force behind German-Jewish relations at the front; rather the trauma of mass death and the horrors of trench warfare far more shaped the war experience of both Jews and non-Jews involved in the fighting. The „Juden-zählung“, or „Jew Count“, the infamous census of Jewish soldiers conducted by the army in 1916, was not a watershed. Although antisemitism was a visible feature of German-Jewish life during the war, the controversy surrounding the census did not lead to a breakdown in relations between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. Grady does not discuss the extent to which the census promoted anti-Jewish sentiments amongst non-Jews after the war, yet his arguments are well supported and coincide with Thomas Weber's findings, which also uncovered little evidence of a pervasive antisemitism amongst the rank-and-file of the „List“ Regiment.²

On the home front, gentile and Jewish Germans came together to form small communities of mourning in an attempt to cope with the upheaval and personal losses inflicted by the war. Mourning and remembrance of the war dead predominantly occurred on a local level, in small towns and communities throughout Germany. They especially involved veterans and the families of fallen soldiers, and from the beginning constituted a shared space for Jews and non-Jews alike. In the wave of memorial construction that occurred immediately after 1918, war monuments were typically erected by local regimental associations, and included the names of all members killed at the front. As permanent sites of remembrance they proved crucial to sustaining the memory of Jewish sacrifice in World War One, especially during the Nazi

¹ Jacob Rosenthal, *Die Ehre des jüdischen Soldaten. Die Juden-zählung im Ersten Weltkrieg und ihre Folgen*, Frankfurt am Main 2007, S. 193.

² Thomas Weber, *Hitler's First War: Adolf Hitler, the Men of the List Regiment, and the First World War*, Oxford 2010.

era. Together with conservative narratives of wartime sacrifice, which glorified the deaths of those individuals who had willingly given their lives for the fatherland, they became part of a more permanent commemorative process that lasted throughout the Weimar era and into the early years of the Third Reich. These agents of remembrance functioned as mechanisms of inclusion; they ensured that Jews remained actively engaged in Germany's interwar memory culture. „The deep entanglements of Germany's wartime mourning process," Grady asserts, „helped to construct relations between Jews and non-Jews at a time when rising antisemitism was also forcing them apart" (p. 48-49).

In the fourth chapter devoted to Nazi Germany, Grady examines how this remembrance process worked to preserve the memory of Jewish soldiers under Hitler. Although by the mid-1930s Jews had been excluded from public commemorations of the war, the presence of war memorials throughout Germany prevented the Nazis from extinguishing the memory of Jewish war service. Only in a few isolated cases were they successful in removing the names of Jews from these monuments. In fact, on several occasions Aryan veterans blocked attempts by the local NSDAP to exclude the names of their Jewish comrades from war memorials still under construction. It is known that Jewish veterans were exempted from early Nazi legislation such as the Aryan Paragraphs of 1933, and that during the April Boycott the sight of war veterans, standing in front of their shops wearing medals from 1914, often elicited sympathy, even outrage, amongst ordinary Germans. Also true is that a handful of higher-level officials in the Nazi regime voiced reservations about murdering Jews who had distinguished themselves in frontline combat. If we believe Grady, this suggests that „the continuing power of more inclusive, conservative narratives of national sacrifice," persisted during the Third Reich (p. 134).

Grady's conclusions point to the ambivalence amongst many Germans towards the regime's anti-Jewish policies, in particular over the persecution of former soldiers. Yet, with remarkably few exceptions, the only war veterans to survive the twelve years of Nazi

rule did so not on the merits of their war service, but because they were in mixed marriages, in hiding, or fortunate enough to have emigrated prior to 1941. Many questions are left unanswered, specifically why prevailing conservative attitudes failed to mobilize broader support, especially within the military and veterans' community, as Jewish former soldiers were publicly humiliated and later deported by the Nazis.

In the final two chapters on the post-1945 period, Grady breaks new ground by exploring how the memory of Jewish soldiers killed in the First World War influenced West German memory of the Holocaust. In the first decades after Hitler's defeat, the genocide of the Jews rarely entered public discourse as West Germans remained fixated on their own suffering as victims of Allied aerial bombing. As they mourned the deaths of millions of soldiers killed fighting in Hitler's Wehrmacht, Germans turned to older rituals of remembrance to grieve for the fallen. Local war memorials once again became the focal point of the mourning and commemoration process, and here Germans were confronted by the names of the Jewish war dead from World War One. The survival of these monuments not only ensured that Jewish veterans remained embedded in the Federal Republic's early memory culture, but prompted many West Germans to reflect on the broader fate of German Jewry under National Socialism. Grady's assessment is convincing as it pertains to official and intellectual discourses on the Nazi past, less clear, however, is whether the memory of Jewish soldiers shaped public opinion on a local level. For in the numerous towns throughout Germany that had been rendered „Judenfrei" by the Nazis, forgetting often proved to be an effective coping mechanism. Many Jews who did return to their hometowns after 1945, even those with medals for bravery from the First World War, found that they were unwelcome.

Tim Grady has written a compelling book, exceptional both in its interpretations and the importance of its subject matter. His research is a major contribution to our knowledge of both German attitudes towards Jews between World War One and the early years of the Federal Republic, and of Jewish perceptions

of their place in German society. The minor criticisms do not distract from the main purpose of the book. If anything, they provide the groundwork for further studies on the experience of Germany's Jewish war veterans.

HistLit 2012-1-108 / Michael Geheran über Grady, Tim: *The German-Jewish Soldiers of the First World War in History and Memory*. Liverpool 2011, in: H-Soz-Kult 16.02.2012.