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Laura Root
University of North Florida

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"Temporary Gentlemen" on the Western Front: Class Consciousness and the British Army Officer, 1914-1918

Laura Root
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Faculty Advisor: Dr. J. Michael Francis, Associate Professor of History

Abstract

A careful evaluation of diaries and memoirs of British temporary officers in World War I suggests that the class consciousness and Regular Army ideals inculcated during training had little bearing on officers' actual experiences on the front lines. Their accounts confirm previous scholars' conclusions about the presence of class feelings among officers, but the value they place on military effectiveness in the trenches is much more significant. After 1914, high casualty rates among junior officers forced the British army to seek candidates for commissions from social classes that, before the war, would not have been considered officer material. Accounts from both the traditional officer class and from the working class reveal new officers' conscious attempts, encouraged by their superiors, to conform to the pre-war Regular Army ideal of the "officer and gentleman." These attempts, as well as the very existence of the term "temporary gentleman," demonstrate the new officers' consciousness of their artificial elevation to the status of gentlemen. But the diaries and memoirs reveal that, on the front lines, an "efficient" officer was highly valued, whatever his social background.

Heavy casualty rates among junior officers during the first year of World War I forced the British army to seek officer candidates from social classes not previously thought to be officer material. Most of these new officers were commissioned from the ranks, for the duration only, and the term "Temporary Gentleman" was born. The origins of the term are unclear, but it was in use in Britain by 1916, when a book of letters was published by the War Department under the title *A 'Temporary Gentleman' in France: home letters from an officer at the front.*[1] It is an interesting term – traditionally, if one was a gentleman, one was born and died a gentleman. The status was conferred by birth and education. But status as an officer in the British Army also indicated gentlemanly status, the "officer and gentleman," and the connection continued despite lower-class men being offered temporary and artificial elevation to this status. This research in part explores personal accounts from both traditional officer classes, with regular commissions, and non-traditional officers commissioned from the ranks, in order to assess officers' consciousness of being or serving with "Temporary Gentlemen" during the war.[2]

The officers' accounts record either their own or others' efforts to conform to ideals and behavior of Regular officers. These attempts, as well as the very existence of the term "Temporary Gentleman," demonstrate the new officers' consciousness of their artificial elevation to the status of gentlemen. But the diaries and memoirs reveal that, on the front lines, an "efficient" officer was highly valued, whatever his social background. A close examination of these officers' accounts, in conjunction with contemporary accounts of officer training,

reveals an important distinction between the practical and the pretentious. New officers should conform to practical Regular Army ideals of bravery, leadership and efficiency, but should not pretend to be people they were not by feigning interest in horsemanship or emulating "public school behavior" like manners and accent, traditional markers of gentlemanly status. Edwin Campion Vaughan's diary, particularly, indicates that there was little time or patience at the front for arrogance or pretension. Attempts to pretend in such a manner generally resulted in snobbish insults, even from fellow lower-class officers.

The memoirs and diaries demonstrate that social evaluation among junior officers, on the front lines at least, had become based on individual merit and practicality, not on educational, occupational, or family background. Likewise, snobbishness tended to be directed towards "inefficient" officers rather than lowborn ones. That this change did not persist after the war, and did not even completely penetrate the upper ranks during the war, illustrates its basis in practicality and its origin in extraordinary circumstances not found at home or in peacetime military experience.[3] As the phrase "Temporary Gentleman" indicates, these officers' elevation to the status of gentlemen was as temporary and separate an experience as life in the trenches, and when their particular brand of military effectiveness was no longer needed, their elevation was no longer practical or valid. Whether these officers were aware of the coming devaluation of their status is uncertain, and it is more useful and appropriate to concentrate on what they do reveal about their front-line experiences. A definition of Regular Army ideals, an evaluation of secondary scholarship, as well as an examination of propagandistic documents published during the war, all augment the information mined from the officers' accounts to paint a more complete picture of the "Temporary Gentleman's" experience, origins, and class-consciousness. It is important to understand pre-war Regular Army tradition and conceptions of gentlemanliness before analyzing how these traditions and conceptions changed on the front lines. In the Regular army, standards of dress, speech and behavior differentiated officers from men in the ranks. There was a belief in the army that soldiers preferred to be officered by gentlemen rather than by those from their own class.[4] Young men from gentry and upper middle-class families with public school and possibly university education were considered officer material. These men were typically "not used to much brain work."[5] A background in hunting was also highly valued, and competent riding was an essential part of an officer's life. An independent income was essential, since Army pay was not sufficient to provide living expenses, let alone support necessary equipment and expenses for polo, hunting, and fine dining, and an officer was evaluated by his peers based on his ability to maintain the sporting and gentlemanly lifestyle.[6] Financial restrictions alone excluded lower-class men from seeking commissions, but, had there not been monetary barriers, the social and educational gaps were enough to discourage the types of men who were commissioned during World War I from aspiring to commissions before the war. There were three routes to permanent commission in the Regular army that existed both before and during the war – Sandhurst (the Royal Military College), Woolwich (the Royal Military Academy) and the Special Reserve.[7] Public schools and universities had Officer Training Corps to prepare their students for the military academies, so by the time young officers were commissioned, some had been training for assuming military leadership roles since the age of

thirteen. Family background was also important – most officers before the war were sons of either gentlemen or military professionals, and many were from families well established in producing officers from the young men of every generation.[8] World War I trench warfare and its command style relied heavily on junior officers as platoon and section leaders on the front lines. As a result, casualty rates among officers were proportionally much higher than rates among the men. Most of the permanently commissioned Regular officers died in the first year of the war. These officers had to be replaced, but Sandhurst and Woolwich were not producing enough officers quickly enough.[9] Temporary commissions were issued to men from the ranks, but in the beginning of the process, before the system was reformed in the summer of 1916, many of the officers were middle-class ex-schoolboys and white-collar workers commissioned directly from civilian life who had no experience in the Army.[10] Their ideas and examples of proper behavior as an officer came not from experience under officers on the front lines, but from popular literature and largely romanticized historical knowledge about British officers. After the middle of 1916, orders were given that all new temporary officers were to be commissioned from the ranks, and the candidates must be recommended by their commanding officer.[11] The order resulted in increasing numbers of officers from working-class backgrounds, with no familiarity with upper levels of army social hierarchy.

In 1917 Captain Basil Williams wrote a propagandistic work explaining the methods used in raising and training the New Armies.[12] This account of training sought to reassure British readers and refute attitudes that the quality of the New Army and its temporary officers was deteriorating as the war went on. These attitudes stemmed from the connection that was still in place at home in Britain, and among senior officers who did not serve much on the front lines, that ability to be an officer and a gentleman was tied to social and educational background.[13] Experiences with training and serving with "Temporary Gentlemen" changed this perception. It was a meeting of "two nations," forcing interaction between class groups who would have been highly unlikely to socialize in peacetime.[14] A pre-war Regular officer compared training of new officers from the ranks with this dictum: "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but you can make a good leather one."[15] He acknowledged that the new officers were somewhat uncouth, and although there is a degree of snobbishness in calling them "sow's ears," their social background did not prevent them from being fully functional, strong officers on the front lines. Silk (that is, horsemanship, manners and breeding) would be nice, and had its place in the Mess and regimental polo field, but leather (bravery and effectiveness) proved more practical and praiseworthy in the trenches.

Robert Graves's account of his war experiences, found in his autobiography, *Goodbye to All That*, illustrates quite powerfully and humorously the conflict between Regular army tradition and front-line effectiveness.[16] The conflict, for Graves, stemmed from a certain amount of Regular army "childishness," including strict Mess rules and required riding lessons and polo matches.[17] At the same time, even though certain aspects of this tradition were ridiculous to him, he still would rather be with this battalion than with any other. Traditions of discipline and trustworthiness were a part of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, even though Graves humorously observed that, regarding the war, "the Royal Welch don't recognize it socially."[18] Graves acknowledges that adherence to certain

aspects of traditional officer life was silly and unnecessary given the current style of trench warfare, but other aspects, practical and useful ones like strict discipline and a reliable command structure, made a unit much more effective and safe on the front lines.

Graves was a Special Reservist with the rank of captain with the Royal Welch Fusiliers. His commission was a permanent one – typically, officers commissioned from the Special Reserves were carefully selected and tended to be from the traditional officer classes.[19] Graves was educated at Charterhouse, a public school, and came from a reputable family, although several close relatives were German, a fact Graves attempted to hide when it seemed to put him at a disadvantage (like in the war.) He was not, then, a "Temporary Gentleman." From that position, his impression of the New Army was unfavorable; he wrote, " the general impression here is that the New Army divisions can't be of much military use."[20] He did admit, though, that their clean, fresh appearance made his own battalion feel like scarecrows – the New Army units were inexperienced and untried, and still looked polished and nice, but more important to Graves was their military effectiveness.[21] He also had great scorn for the Public School Battalions, filled with men who were his social equals, but who were incompetent at reading maps and patrolling. He called the battalion and its officers a "constant embarrassment" to the Brigade.[22] "It is not fair," he records one of his colonels having said, "putting brave men like ours alongside that crowd."[23] Graves's sentiments of snobbery are directed at incompetence.

As the war continued, Graves was struck with changes in his battalion – the riding school for officers was abolished, there were no Regular officers except for a few "newly arrived Sandhurst boys," and manners were much more relaxed.[24] He was assigned an instructor job at an Officer Cadet Battalion, one of many created in the middle of 1916 to train recommended men from the ranks and boys freshly out of the public schools. Basil Williams argues in his training account that the officer candidates were treated equally, despite differences in social background. This equality placed everyone on equal footing and produced effective leaders.[25] Graves's experiences as an instructor convinced him that, though the officers had deteriorated from the "regimental point of view, [that is, from the strict social standards of the Royal Welch,] their greater efficiency in action amply compensated for their deficiency in manners."[26] The test he and the other instructors administered to judge passage or failure of the course was a soccer or rugby game, and those who "played rough but not dirty" and had quick reactions passed and were commissioned. These standards of officer material are quite different from, and distinctly more practical than, pre-war standards of birth and education. [27]

Siegfried Sassoon, like Graves, held a permanent commission from the Special Reserves and served in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, although usually in a different battalion from Graves. Their backgrounds are similar in many ways, although Sassoon was a practiced rider and huntsman from the country, a crucial requisite for commission before the war, while Graves was not. They were friends and fellow poets, and both shared the burden of German names in an anti-German war – Graves's surname technically included "von Runicke." Sassoon left both memoirs and a published diary describing his war experiences. In his memoirs, written in the late 1920s, Sassoon calls the term "Temporary Gentleman" a "disgusting phrase."[28] Yet, while many of his sentiments toward new temporary officers mirrored Graves's, Sassoon is

distinctly more socially snobbish than Graves in his account of his fellow officers. Perhaps his awareness of belonging to the hunting-man elite and his upbringing completely separate from lower class people were factors. One entry, describing his February 1918 trip over to France after leave in Palestine, states that there were "very few intelligent, sensitive faces" about, and calls his fellow officers "riff-raff," complaining that they are always playing poker in the Mess.[29] A similar passage appears two years earlier, in May of 1916:

> Of all the officers having dinner, I saw no face with any touch of distinction in it. They were either utterly commonplace or self-satisfied, or else tired-looking, feeble, goggle-eyed, or otherwise deficient. Why does one see so few proper-looking officers?[30]

He disapproves of self-satisfied, pretentious behavior. But, despite this disdain for other officers' manners, it is crucial to note that, right after he deplores their "feeble" or "deficient" appearance, he states, "Yet, our army does all right." While the admission is in this case somewhat grudging, Sassoon makes the distinction between evaluating soldiers based on doing "all right," and evaluating based on manners and appearance. While both bases may have been valid to him, practicality won out in the trenches. In his diary, Sassoon recorded a story about a former lance corporal in his battalion who had recently been commissioned. This officer arrived on parade drunk. Sassoon found him to be a bad officer, "quite irresponsible and not trustworthy," and disdained his habit of swaggering about, making vulgar comments.[31] Not only are this officer's manners offensive to Sassoon, but his lack of military discipline and effectiveness as leader disgust him as well.

Another illustration of this habit of Sassoon's to actually couple social snobbery with more practical evaluations can be found in his memoirs, in his reactions to several fellow officers. G. Vivian-Simpson was a volunteer temporary officer, formerly a bank clerk, who was irritatingly keen to "air his social eligibility," yet was potentially a competent officer. Sassoon points out that he later proved greedy and unreliable, and he was shot at Ypres on his way to a second breakfast.[32] Another officer, Mansfield, had style and fire in his word of command, although he was not from a hunting background like Sassoon, whose "view halloa" was passable but whose word of command was initially unconvincing.[33] He later compared two other fellow officers, Rees (a short, uncouth Welshman) and Shirley (a former public school boy). Rees got on Sassoon's and Shirley's nerves with his table manners, but Sassoon found that social incompatibilities merged on the front lines into "communal discomfort." In the trenches, Rees was the better of the two, making jokes and talking incessantly to keep up his courage, while Shirley, "true to the traditions of his class," simulated a nonchalance that he could not get into his eyes.[34]

Samuel Hynes has argued that an upper middle-class background and public school education were actually a liability on the front lines, just as Sassoon points out in the case of Shirley. At these schools, boys are trained to repress outward signs of emotion, if not to suppress the entire emotion itself.[35] Contemporary research into shell shock and war-induced breakdown indicated that suppression of emotion eroded an officer's mental defenses over time, and could cause psychological problems bad enough to warrant leaving the lines and going to a hospital.[36] There is a particularly descriptive account of this in Charles Carrington's memoir, in which he narrates

his close brush with mental breakdown during a night and day of heavy shell fire, brought about by his frantic efforts to repress his fear and appear nonchalant.[37] This incident indicates that he is probably from a public school background. His educational and social background before the war is not given to the reader. He attended Oxford University soon after the war ended, where he wrote a large part of his memoirs, although they were not published until 1930.

Carrington appears in his memoirs as Charles Edmonds, much in the same way that Sassoon appears in his own as George Sherston. He was originally a private in a volunteer regiment, evidently with no previous military background, but his anxiety to get to France was frustrated by his regiment's quartering in Britain. He "got [his] uncle to pull some strings" and was given a commission in another regiment.[38] Carrington's perspective on "Temporary Gentlemen" is interesting, then, because it is uncertain whether he was considered one himself. He does not directly admit to being one (in fact, none of the writers directly use the phrase "Temporary Gentleman" in their accounts, besides Sassoon, in his memoir written much later) and he cheerfully states that, "if it was fun to be a Tommy, it was ten times more fun to be a subaltern in Kitchener's Army. There was scope…."[39] The memoirs are largely unconcerned with other officers or Carrington's perceptions of them. Much more than Graves or Sassoon, Carrington was concerned with how his men and noncommissioned officers judged his own leadership. In fact, he was happiest when he was isolated with his men in situations where distinctions of rank broke down.[40] He frequently deferred to his sergeants and veteran privates when he was uncertain about what orders he should give, and often mentions his efforts to "keep up appearances" in front of his men and fellow officers.[41] From context these "appearances" equate with bravery. "Windiness," or fright, was a sign of weakness for him, which he sometimes applied to himself but never to his fellow officers.

It would be an oversight not to point out that Carrington's work is full of pride in traditional military discipline and regimental enthusiasm. One interesting episode in his memoirs is the appearance of a colonel in the trenches with Carrington and his men. Carrington admired the colonel – in fact, he calls him his hero. It is important to note what precisely Carrington admired – the colonel's clothes, horsemanship, "incisive" speech, and his adventurous past in the Boer War.[42] The romantic image of the Regular officer was still very powerful in the minds of soldiers and temporary officers, and Carrington assigns to the colonel's attributes the power of restoring calm in the line at a time of particular panic and trouble. He compares the colonel to a Caesar who "snatched up a shield and stood in the ranks of the Tenth Legion."[43] Even in this somewhat romantic account of the colonel's appearance, Carrington attributes great importance to his ability to calm the soldiers in the trenches. His social status as an officer and a gentleman was clearly acknowledged and admired, but it was admired for its tangible effects on discipline and morale. This episode is similar to Graves's account of his first impressions of the Welch Fusilier officers, although Graves was antagonized, while Carrington was uplifted.[44] Regular army traditions that resulted in good front-line discipline and morale were traditions highly sought after and properly emulated by new junior officers.

Carrington's account is interesting and challenging to analyze for evidence of class-consciousness because snobbery is nearly absent in this work, as are descriptions of people's social background.

Instead, during training (and afterward, although he does not admit this) he "paid blind hero worship to *any* soldier who would teach [him] his trade."[45] A useful conclusion can be drawn from that. "Any soldier" includes working-class privates and noncommissioned officers just as much as it includes colonels. Carrington is exclusively concerned with narrating his own development as an effective leader. During his initial training, he and the other new officers "carried [them]selves with no end of swagger, each trying to be the devil of a fellow."[46] Later, during a successful maneuver for which he was later decorated, Carrington's pride derives from functional military discipline. "All the messages which I had proudly composed in such careful military form [had] gone astray," he writes.[47] His shift to the use of bravery, experience and efficiency as bases of judgment, rather than conformation to Regular army social standards, illustrates his conviction that effectiveness in the trenches made a line officer good, just as it made an enlisted soldier good.

Edwin Campion Vaughan's diary is similar to Carrington's account in its focus on practicality, although it is far more critical in tone. Vaughan was commissioned at age 19 into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in late 1916. From an introduction to his published diary, one learns that he was the son of an Irish Catholic customs officer, and was educated in a Jesuit school.[48] He would not have been considered officer material before the war both for his religious conviction and for his inferior parentage. He was commissioned from the ranks, as all new officers were after 1916, but his diary begins with his first days as an officer on the way to France, where he seemed to be going for the first time. Most likely, then, his time as a private was spent exclusively in England.

Given Vaughan's inexperience with army life on the Western Front and his general inexperience with army traditions as a result of his lower middle-class background, he was forced to develop his own standards of judging himself and others in leadership positions in a way that Sassoon and Graves were not. Additionally, unlike Carrington, who was similarly inexperienced, there was little difference between the social class of Vaughan and that of many of his men. Therefore, it is useful to trace both Vaughan's reaction to other officers and other officers' reactions to him. Vaughan had a difficult time getting along with his fellow officers in France. On one occasion, after marching his men several miles through a storm, he reached headquarters only to be ignored by the officers inside after he came in to ask for directions. Vaughan became "cross," and informed the Staff Lieutenant that he was entitled to more courtesy than he had been shown, and that his troops were out in the cold. After what he considered to be an inadequate response, Vaughan called the officers "inefficient" for failing to organize proper quarters for his men and told them to go to hell.[49] Vaughan's anger in this situation is in part due to the lack of respect shown to him, but he lays more importance on the officers' lack of concern for his men. He is distinctly arrogant here, and the arrogance derives from his disdain for inefficiency. Vaughan's account of another officer, this time "Second Loot," further illustrates Vaughan's scorn for officers who fail to act responsibly. The new officer, upon arrival, performed a "long, slow stage salute" to the commanding officer and addressed everyone in stilted, pretentious tones:

> *Sir*. I am pleased and proud to have the honour of meeting you in the scene of operations. *And* I can assure you that I will

do my best to serve you, and my king, at a top rate. I've crossed over to *make good* and to help the old country all ends up.[50]

Vaughan saw this behavior as ridiculous and impractical. The new arrival was originally a commercial traveler from Birmingham (one of the few direct references to people's backgrounds in Vaughan's diary) and later "ran off" after receiving a slight wound. Vaughan wished this pretentious but unsubstantial officer "good riddance."[51] He views a Captain Taylor with similar scorn, and for similar reasons. Captain Taylor (whom Vaughan calls, "the poor thing"), intentionally spoke to "no one below his own rank" and took a condescending tone with young officers.[52] Vaughan views these figures, both attempting to distinguish themselves by emulating what they think are proper Regular army codes of behavior for officers, as pitiable and intolerable men whose pretensions did not contribute usefully to front-line effectiveness.

Vaughan's diary indicates that he initially felt a certain pressure to conform to his superiors' ideals of officer behavior. When asked to join a ride to a nearby town, he states, "… although I had never been on a horse before, I did not like to refuse."[53] There was still a significant connection between being an officer and being a competent horseman. Robert Graves also experienced this during his time with the Royal Welch, when, since he didn't "ride like an angel," he participated in a riding school every afternoon in billets.[54] Later in the war, his battalion stopped the riding school, which occurrence Graves explains as one of many losses of pre-war tradition due to the dearth of Regular officers who actually cared that these traditions were kept. Riding was a tradition that had practical use during marches and transport, but no use at all in actual trench warfare. In Vaughan's regiment, riding lessons were still required. His ineptitude at riding became evident after that first day's ride, and Vaughan frequently mentions being forced to attend lessons, which often provided humor. During one lesson, "the whole village was startled by a cavalcade of shaggy horses clattering through the main street with purple-faced young officers clinging to their saddles. We had no more riding instruction."[55]

Evaluating other officers' assessments of Vaughan is equally as important as evaluating Vaughan's assessments of his colleagues. Vaughan chose to record several situations in his diary that embarrassed him or enraged his sense of self-respect. One account is of a mistake he made and a resulting lecture ten days later from Pepper, a senior officer. Vaughan was short on wiring supplies, and telephoned to Headquarters to ask for more. He gave his unit's exact location (which was forbidden in case the Germans had gotten access to the telephone lines) and was immediately hung up on. Later he was summoned to Headquarters, and he thought perhaps he was up for a promotion for his diligence in wiring. Instead, he encountered a group of staff officers who deliberately embarrassed him by asking, "who on earth is this?" when he arrived, although they clearly knew. An officer named Hoskins then began lecturing him about not being stupid enough to give secrets to the Germans. Vaughan's reaction to this situation is revealing. "Now, Hoskins," he wrote, "is only a 2nd Lieutenant acting Captain, and *he's never done any service in the line*. So I wasn't inclined to take a choke off from him." Vaughan interrupted Hoskins, saluted the commanding officer, and walked off.[56] He was lectured again ten days later. Pepper told him that the other officers despised his "arrogant unsociableness" and saw him as an "inefficient young officer." This was

because he, Vaughan, was still an "inexperienced young urchin" and did not show proper respect for others who had been out for months or years.[57] When reading this lecture, one is reminded of his first encounter at headquarters, where he called the officers inefficient and told them to go to hell. Vaughan, of course, records that the lecture was unwarranted, and that his mistake was due to ignorance.

Snobbishness played an important role in Vaughan's army experience. He was sometimes on the receiving end, as in the subjection to riding lessons and his treatment at Headquarters, but when he was the one belittling others, his feelings of self-importance derived from his disdain of irresponsibility or effectiveness. The problem was, in most instances, including the lecture after his telephone blunder, he saw his own efforts at leadership to be far superior to the other officers'. That Pepper lectured him for not showing enough respect to those more experienced than him illustrates Vaughan's initial inability to conform to a new sort of social hierarchy that developed in the trenches, where deference was given to seasoned veterans and those with practical and effective leadership skills. Charles Carrington notes this deference in his account, recording that he was quite willing to consult his veteran noncommissioned officers when there were no other officers around to issue orders. With a new social hierarchy based on experience and practicality, there was a new form of snobbishness. Vaughan's arrogant attitude was seen as ridiculous early in his service in France because he lacked the experience to justify it – he was pretentious, although seemingly not intentionally so. And, as has been seen in the other officers' accounts, no pretentiousness of any kind was appreciated on the front lines.

If class-consciousness is nearly absent in Edwin Campion Vaughan's diary, it is glaringly present in *A "Temporary Gentleman" in France: home letters from an officer at the front.* This account was published by the War Department in Britain in 1916, and reprinted in 1918 for American audiences. It is presented in the form of narrative letters from an officer who even signs himself "Your 'Temporary Gentleman,'" collected and published by Captain A. J. Dawson. If one analyzed this document in the same way as the four others, without knowledge of its origins or intent, one would draw quite a different conclusion about class-consciousness among officers. But this document is properly analyzed as a propaganda piece proposing the War Department's official stance on "Temporary Gentlemen" and showing the government's attempt to glorify these officers and reassure the public. A detailed account of the officer's background and upbringing (including his widowed mother's noble sacrifices for his education and his own job as an auctioneer's clerk) precedes an account of his patriotic enlistment in the army. With a nod to the new system of commissioning from the ranks, this work points out that, like the protagonist, there were many hundreds of men in the ranks who had the makings of a good officer.[58] The "Temporary Gentleman" has a jolly time in France, bravely doing his duty, cheerfully reminding his readers that the New Army is perfectly competent, happy to be considered an officer and a gentleman, and in the end returning safely to England with a wound. The existence of this account confirms the existence of the term "Temporary Gentleman" by 1916. It is surprising, given the term's existence at the time, that the officers' accounts do not mention it more often. Perhaps they all found the term as "disgusting" as Siegfried Sassoon did in his memoirs.

"Temporary Gentlemen" knew that their status as gentlemen, like their

commissions, ended when the war was over. Martin Petter has traced significant social problems after the war to the fact that when these "Temporary Gentlemen" were demobilized, they were "de-officered" as well, and returned to their civilian lives and jobs (if the jobs were still available, and many were not) as working-class men who took orders, not gave them.[59] An understanding of the nature of the problem faced by soon-to-be former officers cannot be gained without an understanding of how these temporary officers came to be commissioned and how they saw themselves. They were elevated to officer status out of necessity, because the British army had no other choice. Their evaluations of themselves and other officers were based on battle experience and effectiveness as leaders, and more traditional officers like Sassoon and Graves admitted that their lack of social graces was compensated by their effectiveness in the field. Likewise, an inefficient officer was useless, whatever his background. Robert Graves retained his position at the Officer Cadet Battalion after the war was ended, since training of men from the ranks did not stop right away. He notes that the post-war arrivals were "a constant cause of shame," with ghastly table manners and drunkenness on parade.[60] Graves has reverted to pre-war evaluations of officers, since wartime evaluations were no longer practicable. These particular candidates were not given any chance to improve and show their effectiveness in the trenches. The new standards of evaluation that developed as the war went on, which are so obvious in accounts like Graves's and Vaughan's, ended with the Armistice.

World War I created a new social hierarchy in the trenches – in a sense, instead of taking one's birth and upbringing into account, the new standards took into account one's record of service in the trenches. An officer's "birth" was his first tour of duty on the front lines. In that sense, the war was a social leveler. Siegfried Sassoon wrote, "things were being said and done which would have been considered madness before the war. The effects of the War had been the reverse of ennobling, it seemed. Social historians can decide whether I am wrong about it."[61] Social historians have concluded that the experience of the British "Temporary Gentleman" was one tinged with social snobbery, and yet they also argue that these new officers were seen as good leaders and refute the claim that officer quality deteriorated as the war went on.[62] Recognition of the new standards of evaluating officers, based on practical skills and leadership, is part of the solution to this seemingly self-contradictory and thus incomplete conclusion. The pre-war traditions of officer behavior operated in parallel, but with a distinct disadvantage, to these new, more practical traditions, creating a complex system of snobbery based in both systems. These sets of traditions were largely mutually exclusive, except in instances where, as in Graves's and Carrington's accounts, pre-war traditions of discipline and command structure prove useful in the trenches. Thus, consulting these officers' accounts in order to answer the question of whether "Temporary Gentlemen" were conscious of their own inferior social class and whether it affected their performance on the front proved to be too simplistic an approach. Temporarily, in the trenches, social class had ceased to be the measure of an officer.

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[1] Capt. A. J. Dawson, *A 'Temporary Gentleman' in France: home letters from an officer at the front*, 2nd (American) edition. New York and London: Putnam, 1918 [First published in Britain, 1916].

[2] Specific references to officers' training, social and educational backgrounds, manners of dress and speech, instances of snobbery or prejudice, and reactions to other officers were traced in the entirety of these four accounts.

[3] Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson, eds. *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War.* Dover, NH: Manchester University Press, 1985. 91-92.
[4] Beckett and Simpson, 65.
[5] Samuel Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War.* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997) 43.
[3] Ibid.
[7] Beckett and Simpson, 69.
[8] C. B. Otley, "The Social Origins of British Army Officers," *Sociological Review* 18, no. 2 (1970): 213-239. 224-5. Hynes, 43-5.
[9] There was a significant change in social backgrounds of men receiving permanent commissions as well, but that is not within the scope of this paper. See Otley.
[10] Capt. Basil Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies* (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1917 [1918]) 96, 98.
[11] Hynes, 43-4, 105-6.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Beckett and Simpson, 83.
[14] G. D. Sheffield, "The Effect of the Great War on Class Relations in Britain: The Career of Major Christopher Stone DSO MC," *War & Society* 7, no. 1 (1989): 87-105; 91.
[15] A. A. Hansbury-Sparrow, quoted in Beckett and Simpson, 84.
[16] Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That.* Anchor Books, 1929 (This edition 1998).
[17] Graves, 126.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Beckett and Simpson, 76.
[20] Graves, 111.
[21] Ibid., 119.
[22] Ibid., 214-5.
[23] Ibid., 223.
[24] Ibid., 238.
[25] Williams, 103.
[26] Graves, 246.
[27] Ibid., 247.
[28] Siegfried Sassoon, *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston.* London: Faber and Faber, 1980. 236.
[29] Siegfried Sassoon, *Diaries 1915-1918.* London: Faber and Faber, 1983. 216**.**
[30] Ibid., 62.
[31] Ibid., 62, 251.
[32] Ibid., 238-9.
[33] Ibid., 239.
[34] Ibid., 426.
[35] Hynes, 64.
[36] W. H. R. Rivers, "An Address on the Repression of War Experience," [Online] URL http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/comment/rivers.htm. (Page maintained by Brigham Young University Library). Accessed Nov. 20, 2004. This article originally appeared in *The Lancet* February 2, 1918.
[37] Charles Carrington, *A Subaltern's War, being a memoir of the Great War from the point of view of a romantic young man.* New York: Arno Press, 1972. His brush with breakdown is described from 161-5.
[38] Ibid., 18.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Beckett and Simpson, 85.
[41] Carrington, 74, 126, 137, 164-5
[42] Ibid., 93-94.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Graves, 126.
[45] Carrington, 18. Emphasis mine.
[46] Ibid., 19. Note also Sassoon's disdain for "swagger" mentioned earlier, from Sassoon, *Diaries*, 251.
[47] Carrington, 153.
[48] Edwin Campion Vaughan, *Some Desperate Glory: The World War I Diary of a British Officer, 1917.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.
[49] Vaughan, 25-6.
[50] Ibid., 79-80. Vaughan's emphasis.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 158-9.
[53] Ibid., 11.
[54] Graves, 126.
[55] Vaughan, 157-8, 178.
[56] Vaughan, 143-4. Emphasis mine.
[57] Ibid.,152-3.
[58] Dawson, xxiii.
[59] Martin Petter, "'Temporary Gentlemen' in the Aftermath of the Great War: Rank, Status, and the Ex-Officer Problem." *The Historical Journal* 37, no. 1 (1994): 127-152
[60] Graves, 282.
[61] Sassoon, *Memoirs*, 646.
[62] Beckett and Simpson, 76, 88-9.